

Are They “American” Enough to Teach Social Studies?:  
Korean American Teachers’ Social Studies Teaching Experiences in American Public Schools

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## **ABSTRACT**

Are They “American” Enough to Teach Social Studies?:

Korean American Teachers’ Social Studies Teaching Experiences in American Public Schools

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This study explores three Korean American social studies teachers’ experiences of teaching social studies, focusing on their curricular and pedagogical perceptions and practices. Framed by sociocultural theory, this study aims to shed light on the heterogeneous stories and socially and culturally contextualized teaching experiences of Korean American social studies teachers, which have been largely undocumented in the social studies scholarship. The major research question for this study is: How do three Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of their classrooms? Subsidiary questions are: (a) What are these Korean American social studies teachers’ perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?; (b) How do these Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of classrooms?; and (c) How do sociocultural experiences of these teachers influence their curricular and pedagogical practices?

This qualitative multicase study investigates three Korean American teachers who taught global history in urban public high schools in the Northeast. Data sources include a semester-long classroom observation, interviews, and artifacts.

Findings indicate these three Korean American teachers exhibited diverse, complex, and contextualized experiences of teaching profession, and particularly teaching social studies. The racial minority teachers' experiences of racism and academic struggles during K-12 schooling, cross-cultural/international experiences, and familial immigration backgrounds served as a springboard for them to have better understandings of their culturally and linguistically diverse students and to teach for global/multicultural perspectives. Powerful teacher education infused with social justice perspectives and supportive, autonomous, and cooperative school atmosphere aided them to implement student-centered, inquiry-based pedagogies which improved academic engagement of their students. Meanwhile, misguided curricular beliefs and philosophical stance, rigid school culture, bureaucratic school personnel, pressure from high-stakes tests, test-driven contexts, and racism pervasive in school culture became barriers for the teachers to practice culturally relevant and meaningful pedagogy in their classrooms.

This study provides insights into the scholarship of teachers of color and their professional identity and practical implications for teacher preparation.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my beloved father, Yoon Oh Choi  
and the dreams that we have dreamed together

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the increase of national demographic diversity, Asian American population has been growing dramatically. Asian American population grew 48 percent from 1990 to 2000 and 45.6 percent from 2000 to 2010, and currently makes up about 4.7 percent of the U.S. population (Lee, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Accordingly, Asian American and Asian immigrant student population has also been growing rapidly, making up about 4.1 percent of public school enrollment in 2007 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

Despite the rapidly growing Asian American student population, teachers having Asian descent have been disproportionately underrepresented. Nationally, only 1.4% of teachers are people of Asian descent (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2010). Moreover, studies indicate that there has been a decrease of Asian American teachers and Asian American students entering the teaching profession (Kang, 2009; Moore, 2003).

The juxtaposition of the burgeoning students of Asian descent and the low number of Asian American teachers has brought the issue of Asian American teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention to the foreground of teacher preparation and practice (Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Ramanathan, 2006). However, we know very little about why Asian American teachers choose teaching as a career, how they experience the profession, and in what ways they make meaning of the school curriculum (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). In particular, stories and voices of Asian American social studies teachers and their teaching experiences in American classrooms have largely been undocumented (Chen, 2009; Gay, 2004).

This study explores three Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching social studies and their curricular and pedagogical decision making. The major research

question for this study is: How do three Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of their classrooms?

This chapter defines problems in existing research on teachers of color, Asian American teachers, and social studies teachers of color, provides the major and subsidiary questions, explains theoretical framework, and discusses significance of the study.

[Figure 1] Overview of Chapter I

INTRODUCTION	
Statement of Problem	
Purpose of the Study	
Research Questions	
Theoretical Framework	
Sociocultural Theory	
The Role of Personal History and Sociocultural Experiences on Teacher Practice	
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### **Statement of Problem**

With the increase of national demographic diversity, the Asian American population has been growing dramatically. The Asian American population grew 48 percent from 1990 to 2000 and 45.6 percent from 2000 to 2010, and currently makes up about 4.7% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Composing 10.6% of the total Asian American population, Korean Americans are one of the largest and fastest growing Asian immigrant groups in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The Korean American population grew 134% from 1980 to 1990 and 34% from 1991 to 2000 (Le, 2010). Accordingly, the Asian American student population has also been growing rapidly, making up about 4.8 percent of public school enrollment in 2007 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Korean Americans who are enrolled in K-12



schools has been growing fast, reaching approximately 331,937 in 2006 according to U.S. Census Bureau (2006) while Korean communities in the U.S. assume that the number is overly underestimated and should be more than doubled (Lee, 2010).

Despite the rapidly growing Asian American student population, teachers of Asian descent have been disproportionately underrepresented. Nationally, 17% of public school teachers are people of color while only 1.4% of teachers are people of Asian descent (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2010). There is no official data showing the number of Korean American teachers in the U.S. while there are approximately 100 Korean American teachers in the New York and New Jersey (The Korea Times, 2010 April 27).

The juxtaposition of the burgeoning students of Asian descent and the lack of Asian American teachers has brought the issue of Asian American teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention to the foreground of teacher preparation and practice (Quirocho & Rios, 2000; Ramanathan, 2006). The paucity of Asian American teachers is troublesome in many ways because the White, middle-class, and female dominant teaching force in American schools has been too monocultural in this increasingly multicultural and multiethnic society and poorly served the complex needs and diverse interests of students of color (Pang, 2009). Scholars and educators have argued that minority students need teachers who can relate to their backgrounds and build links between those backgrounds and school curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2000). Although being a teacher of color does not guarantee the effectiveness in educating students of color (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008), Asian American teachers have been considered to have great potential to related and engage their students of color and be good role models based on their cross-cultural experiences and bi/multilingual abilities (Chong, 2003; Park, 2009).

Some policy makers and educators argue that more Asian American teachers should be recruited to diversify American teaching force and to better serve increasingly diverse student population in American schools (Chong, 2003; Park, 2009).

However, we know very little about why Asian Americans do or do not choose teaching as a career, how they experience the profession, and in what ways they make meaning of the school curriculum (Ng et al., 2007). A growing body of research has examined racialized experiences of Asian American student teachers (Newton, 2003; Nguyen, 2008), marginalization of Asian American teachers and their strategies to survive (Chen, 2009; Subedi, 2008; Yee, 2009), and their practices of culturally relevant teaching and curriculum reform (Arun, 2009; Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, & Woo, 1997). Yet, Asian American teachers have frequently been stereotyped as "model minorities" or "forever foreigners," people who cannot speak about diversity, and are not considered members of underrepresented groups like African American or Latino communities (Pang, 2009). Their diverse racial, ethnic, social and cultural identifications have been interpreted in an undifferentiated manner and homogenized under the category of Asian American (Nguyen, 2008; Subedi, 2007).

Particularly, the legitimacy and authority of social studies teachers of Asian descent has been contested due to proliferated racial biases toward Asian American teachers and the subject's goal of citizenship education and curricular focus on American history and society (Branch, 2004; Subedi, 2002, 2008). An Asian American social studies teacher in Subedi's (2002) study was considered as "not American enough to teach social studies" (p. 288). Social studies teachers of Asian descent have often felt racially and ethnically alienated, marginalized,

and unsecured and not found places to discuss their cultural perspectives in either school classrooms or teacher education programs (Branch, 2004).

Nevertheless, experiences of social studies teachers of Asian descent and their social studies curricular and pedagogical meaning making and positioning have been largely undocumented in the field of social studies education research (Salinas & Castro, 2010). Studies show that teaching experiences of social studies teachers of color and their curriculum decision making and enactment are strongly connected to their personal backgrounds and sociocultural experiences (Branch, 2004; Evans, 1989; Fickel, 2000; Grant, 2003; Pang & Gibson, 2001; Subedi, 2002). Social studies teachers of color foster cross-cultural dialogues, challenge racism and stereotypes, and promote culturally relevant pedagogy drawing upon their cultural and ethnic heritage, family values, and personal biographies (Pang, 2010; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Salinas & Sullivan, 2007). However, what multicultural experiences and bi/multilingual abilities Asian American social studies teachers bring into their classrooms and how they utilize them for building blocks of multicultural education and teaching for social justice have been overshadowed (Chen, 2009; Gay, 2004). More research is needed to gain deeper insight into the experiences of Asian American social studies teachers, their curricular and pedagogical decision making, and the influence of sociocultural backgrounds and contexts for their experiences (Pang, 2010; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Subedi, 2002). In the following sections, I will discuss the purpose of this study and its research questions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explores three Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching social studies, focusing on their social studies curricular and pedagogical perceptions

and practices, and the influences of sociocultural experiences on their curricular and pedagogical decision making. Addressing the need for more research on teachers of specific Asian group and intragroup diversity (Quicho & Rios, 2000; Ramanathan, 2006), this study focuses on Korean Americans, one of the fastest growing Asian ethnic groups in the U.S., but whose voices have been marginalized in educational scholarship (Park, 2009).

This study describes Korean American social studies teachers' teaching experiences, explore their positioning of curricular and pedagogical choices, and investigate the influences of their personal, social, and cultural experiences and contexts on their positioning. Drawing upon research on social studies teachers of color's socially and culturally contextualized positioning of curricular and pedagogical choices, this study assumes that Korean American social studies teachers' curriculum decision making and pedagogical practices are strongly connected to their sociocultural contexts and experiences (Pang, 2010; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Salinas & Sullivan, 2007). The investigation of Korean American teachers' perceptions about social studies curriculum and pedagogical practices presents their unique voices and concerns of teaching social studies and shed light on intragroup diversity within Asian American teachers (Pang, 2010). Also, the exploration of Korean American social studies teachers' practices in American schools can provide their diverse interactions with students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and unique curricular and pedagogical practices in multicultural school contexts (Quicho & Rios, 2000). In the next section, I will describe what research questions this study seeks to answer given the purpose of the study.

## **Research Questions**

The major research question for this study is: How do three Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of their classrooms? Subsidiary research questions are: (a) What are these Korean American social studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?; (b) How do these Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of classrooms?; and (c) How do sociocultural experiences of these teachers influence their curricular and pedagogical practices?

The research questions seek to shed light on Korean American social studies teachers' unique experiences of being Korean American teachers in American public schools, teaching social studies, and positioning of the social studies curriculum and pedagogy which have not been dealt with in previous literature. In addition, those questions seek to unpack what sociocultural experiences and contexts of Korean American social studies teachers have impact on their teaching practices of social studies. The following section will describe sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) which serves as a theoretical framework of this study and how it frames the research questions and assumptions that this study presents.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In order to understand Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching social studies, it is significant to examine the broader research contexts and conceptual frameworks in which Korean American social studies teachers' positioning of curricular and pedagogical choices are situated. In this section, I discuss sociocultural theory as a theoretical lense framing this study and the role of personal, sociocultural experiences on teacher practice.

## **Sociocultural Theory**

This study employs sociocultural theory, drawing upon the idea of the social and cultural nature of experiences (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theory claims that the role of culture and the sociocultural contexts are central to human development and experiences. Sociocultural theorists believe that individuals are socially, culturally, and historically situated, and these contexts influence their understandings, beliefs, and actions (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertch, 1993). From a sociocultural perspective, experiences and learning do not occur in a fixed, static circumstance. Instead, they are shaped by dynamic sociocultural contexts and human interactions (Jones, Pang, & Rodríguez, 2001). Sociocultural theory explains that social contexts and cultural tools shape human beliefs, values, and action (Lasky, 2005; Wertch, 1993).

Achinstein and Aguirre (2008) highlight the significance of minority teachers' sociocultural conceptions that include sociocultural identifications and personal and educational histories influencing their teaching experiences in the context of American school setting. Adopting Achinstein and Aguirre's (2008) frame of sociocultural conceptions, this study defines sociocultural experiences as the ways in which people continually experience, negotiate, and define themselves in relationship to social and cultural communities, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and language, and historical, political, and institutional contexts that surround those communities. Such sociocultural experiences inform how people make meaning and take action. In this study, sociocultural experiences of Korean American social studies teachers include their experiences and/or understandings of personal biographies, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic identifications, school contexts, and other social and cultural communities.

The notion of socially and culturally situated experience resonates with this study's inquiry in social studies teachers of color and their positioning of social studies curricular and pedagogical choices. Literature notes that teachers' prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, ethnoracial identities, and personal beliefs are critical to the way they come to regard their role as teachers, are influential to their teaching practices, and thus are manifested in their classroom practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Kanpol, 1992; Quiocho & Rios, 2002; Rhee, 2008). Jones, Pang, & Rodríguez (2001) argue that teachers are "cultural selves" (p. 37): the products of their voluntary and involuntary associations with sociocultural contexts.

Particularly drawing upon multicultural family/childhood experiences, discrimination due to minority status, interactive/extended cultural immersion experiences, initiative from job situations, influence of mentor, and the context of education and training, teachers of color recollect and reflect on their experiences to construct an argument about teaching, learning, and schooling (Rhee, 2008). Empirical and self-studies on teachers' sociocultural experiences and perceptions of teaching reveal that their previous knowledge, family/cultural values, and frame of reference help teachers of color construct their commitment to multicultural education, teaching for social justice, and global education, and develop culturally relevant pedagogy (Su, 1997; Shin, 2001; Zong, 2010).

Studies on social studies teachers of color also illustrate that their curriculum decision making and enactment are strongly connected to their personal backgrounds and sociocultural experiences (Branch, 2004; Evans, 1989; Fickel, 2000; Grant, 2003; Pang & Gibson, 2001; Subedi, 2002). Social studies teachers of color foster cross-cultural dialogues, challenge racism and stereotypes, and promote culturally relevant pedagogy drawing upon their cultural and ethnic

heritage, family values, and personal biographies (Pang, 2009; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Salinas & Sullivan, 2007).

Adopting a sociocultural lens, this study starts from the assumption that Korean American social studies teachers bring sociocultural experiences which would be important building blocks for understanding those teachers' perceptions and enactment of social studies curriculum and pedagogy (Branch, 2004; Evans, 1989; Fickel, 2000; Grant, 2003; Pang & Gibson, 2001; Subedi, 2002). It also assumes that Korean American teachers' curriculum meaning making is not influenced by a single cultural factor but shaped by their complex and fluid social, historical, cultural, political, and institutional experiences and contexts (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertch, 1993). Based on the assumptions framed by sociocultural theory, this study will investigate the socially and culturally contextualized phenomenon of Korean American social studies teachers' perceptions of social studies curriculum and implementation of pedagogies.

### **The Role of Personal History and Sociocultural Experiences on Teacher Practice**

Scholars suggest that teachers' personal and sociocultural backgrounds and experiences interact with their respective teaching contexts and play a significant role in their curriculum and pedagogical decision making (Shulman, 1987; Thornton, 1991; Salinas & Castro, 2010). It starts with the sociocultural theoretical frame that human beings influence their own lives and environments while they are also shaped by personal, historical, social, and cultural factors (Lasky, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). Research in the area of teachers' beliefs and experiences reveals that a multiplicity of life experiences of teachers, including personal history, family backgrounds, schooling experiences, socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic identification, and cultural heritage they bring into their classroom influences their practice (Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003;



Ladson-Billings, 1994; Santora, 2001). Those personal and sociocultural experiences impact how teachers conceptualize the field, how they think about their own practices, how they interact with students, and how they interpret curriculum and pedagogy (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Agee, 2004; Chandler, 2007; Kanpol, 1992). Therefore, scholars emphasize the significance of teachers' sociocultural experiences, personal histories, and educational experiences to understand their teaching practices, world views, and connections with students (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Quiocho & Rios, 2000).

Particularly, some studies pay attention to personal theories and sociocultural experiences of teachers of color and their contribution to teaching for social justice and culturally relevant teaching (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Gay, 2004; Nguyen, 2008; Pang, 2009). Quiocho and Rios (2000) argue that ethnic minority teachers bring sociocultural experiences “that make them more aware of the elements of racism embedded within schooling, more willing to name them, and more willing to enact a socially just agenda (generally) and schooling (specifically)” (p. 487). Their extensive review of research on teachers of color contends that social and cultural experiences of teachers having diverse backgrounds, including their experiences in families, communities, and schools, construct their frames of references, and those contextualized experiences are instrumental in teachers' conceptions of school curriculum, students, and diversity. In her study of successful Asian American Pacific Islander teachers, Pang (2009) also emphasizes that cultural values and belief systems of Asian American teachers result in high self as well as professional efficacy, leadership roles, effective instructional strategies, and long-term stability of the school. Scholars argue that teachers of color having experiences of racism and minority status can be cognizant of the complexities of race, ethnicity, gender, and class issues

and present multicultural, socially just perspectives in their classroom (Burant, Quioco, & Rios, 2002; Carr & Klassen, 1997; Gay, 2004; Ng et al., 2007).

Teachers' role of curricular and instructional decision making has also been emphasized in the social studies education scholarship. Teachers are conceptualized as gatekeepers in their classroom through their choice of curriculum and their instructional decision-making (Adler, 2008; Thornton, 1991). Highlighting teachers' personal experiences, previous knowledge, and sociocultural contexts and their influences on social studies curriculum and pedagogy, Costigan, Crocco, and Zumwalt (2004) view social studies teaching as "a situated autobiographical act" (p. 7). Research on social studies teachers' decision making and curriculum meaning making shows that teachers' personal theories, cultural frame of references, and sociocultural experiences play a central role in determining the content, instructional experiences, and knowledge to which students are exposed (Evans, 1989; Grant, 1996).

However, literature on how teachers of color interpret social studies curriculum and pedagogy and to what extent their personal theories and sociocultural backgrounds influence their positioning of the curriculum and pedagogy is scant (Fickel, 2000). Although a growing body of research has been exploring the curricular standpoints and pedagogical practices of African American (Pang & Gibson, 2001), Latino (Salinas & Castro, 2010; Salinas, Franquíz, & Guberman, 2006; Salinas & Sullivan, 2007), Asian American (Branch, 2004; Subedi, 2002, 2008), Native American (Fickel, 2000) teachers, how teachers' personal history, cultural experiences, and socioeconomic backgrounds influence their social studies teaching practice has largely been undocumented (Chandler, 2007). More research is needed to gain deeper insight into the experiences of social studies teachers of color, their curricular and pedagogical decision

making, and the influence of sociocultural backgrounds and contexts on their experiences (Salinas & Castro, 2010; Subedi, 2002).

Situated in the research on the role of personal history and sociocultural experiences on teacher practice, this study seeks to address the need for more research on social studies teachers of specific ethnic groups and investigate how Korean American social studies teachers conceptualize the social studies curriculum and practice pedagogies by utilizing their sociocultural experiences.

### **Significance of the Study**

Despite its small sample size and limitation of generalizability, this proposed study has potential significance for research on teachers of color and Asian descent and social studies teacher education. Given the lack of research on teachers of color, their voices, and their experiences of teaching (Mabokela & Madsen, 2007; Quiocho & Rios, 2000), this study will add to the discourse which focuses on sociocultural backgrounds of teachers of color and their curricular and pedagogical practices. In addition, literature shows that even though teachers of color might have greater chances and resources to relate to and engage their students of color, teachers' effectiveness with minority students is not always in the ethnicity of teachers but in the use of pedagogy (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Achinstein et al., 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This study seeks to focus on Korean American teachers' positioning of social studies curricular and pedagogical choices in the realities of their classrooms.

Addressing the need for more research on teachers of specific Asian group and intragroup diversity (Nguyen, 2008; Quicho & Rios, 2000; Subedi, 2007), this study seeks to explore Korean Americans, one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in U.S., but whose voices have been

marginalized in educational scholarship. Considering Korean Americans' sociocultural identities revealed in literature, including strong ethnic solidarity and rejection of the pan-ethnic identity as Asian (Lee, 2009; Pang, Kiang, & Pak, 2004), exploration of Korean American teachers' experiences will provide their unique voices and stories and shed light on the heterogeneous identities of the teachers as well as the specific context in which they teach (Park, 2009).

Social studies scholars argue that researchers have yet to explore deeply the curriculum stances of social studies teachers of color (Salinas & Castro, 2010). This study has the potential to contribute to understandings about social studies teachers of color, their curricular and pedagogical practices, and a variety of influences on their curriculum decision making. Moreover, this study may contribute to understandings about how social studies professors, teacher education programs, and professional developments better prepare and retain effective social studies teachers of color.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began by defining statement of problem and describing the purpose of this study and research questions. This study explores three Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching social studies, focusing on their social studies curricular and pedagogical perceptions and practices. Framed by sociocultural theory, this study aims to shed light on the heterogeneous stories and socially and culturally contextualized experiences of Korean American social studies teachers, which have been largely undocumented in the social studies scholarship. The major research question for this study is: How do three Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of their classrooms? Subsidiary research questions are: (a) What are these Korean American social

studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?; (b) How do these Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of classrooms?; and (c) How do sociocultural experiences of these teachers influence their curricular and pedagogical practices? This proposed study has potential significance for research on teachers of color and Asian descent and social studies teacher education.

In the next chapter, I review the literature guiding the inquiries of this study.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature framing the research questions of this study. It begins with a review of research on teachers of color. It continues with a review of literature on Asian American teachers. Specifically, this chapter investigates Korean American teachers' experiences in the teaching professions in the U.S. based on a review of research on Korean American immigration history and ethnic group characteristics. Finally, this chapter examines social studies teachers of color and their perceptions and practices of social studies curriculum and pedagogy.

[Figure 2] Overview of Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW
Teachers of Color: Their Promises and Challenge
Asian American Teachers
The Model Minority Myth
Racialized Experiences of Asian American Teachers
Possibilities and Potentials of Asian American Teachers
Korean American Teachers
Korean Americans in the U.S.
Korean Americans in the Teaching Profession
Social Studies Teachers of Color
Chapter Summary

### Teachers of Color: Their Promises and Challenges

This section explores how previous research addresses the experiences of teachers of color in the U.S. schools in order to situate Korean American teachers' pedagogical and curricular practices within. Specifically, it focuses on why American schools need teachers of color and what their promises and challenges are.

Teachers of color have been disproportionately underrepresented in the U.S. schools (Goodwin, 1995; Subedi, 2002; Moore, 2003). People of color represent 40 percent of the

student population in U.S. public schools whereas only 17 percent of public school teachers are people of color (Achinstein et al., 2010). Specifically, public school teachers of color are 7.9 percent African American, 6.2 percent Hispanic, and 1.3 percent Asians (Achinstein et al., 2010). Moreover, studies indicate that there has been a national trend regarding the decrease of people of color's interest in teaching careers. Minority interest in a teaching career declined from 19.3 percent during the 1970s to 6.2 percent during the 1980s, and it continued to decline in the 1990s (Torres et al., 2004). Also, turnover rates of teachers of color are higher than those of White teachers. Turnover rates of teachers of color (19.4%), especially African American teachers (20.7%) are higher than turnover rates of White teachers (16.4%) (Achinstein et al., 2010). The juxtaposition of the large number of minority students and the lack of teachers of color has brought the issue of teachers of color recruitment, preparation, and retention to the foreground of teacher preparation and practice (Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Sheets, 2004; Sheets & Chew, 2002). A growing body of research has examined why teachers of color are needed for the large number of students of color as well as mainstream students, to what extent they can be effective teachers for minority students, and what limitations and barriers are witnessed in their actual teaching practices.

Studies show that students of color tend to have higher academic, personal, and social performance when they are taught by teachers from their own ethnic groups (Gay et al., 2003; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Sheets, 2004). The investigators argue that students of color working with teacher who share the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds with them show greater attendance records, lower disciplinary referrals, fewer drop-outs, higher satisfaction with schools, stronger self-concepts and cultural competence (Gay et al., 2003, Gay, 2004). Teachers

of color reportedly have higher performance expectations for students of color from their respective ethnic groups (Pang, 2009). For example, African American male teachers demonstrate effectiveness in teaching minority students and promoting social justice perspectives in their classrooms (Lynn, 2002). The eight African American male teachers working in California were cognizant of the complexities of race, ethnicity, gender, and class issues and viewed teaching as an opportunity to correct social, political, and economic wrongdoings of society and to improve the lives of working class and poor African American students. They believed that their cultural heritage can be assets rather than liabilities when they pursue liberatory pedagogy and curriculum reform practices in diverse, urban cultural settings. They hope to be change agents of culturally relevant as well as meaningful pedagogy and role models of knowledgeable and responsible African American young students. Unlike White teachers in many other research on teaching, those African American male teachers demonstrated clear commitments to improve African American community and ideas of minority students' racial uplifts.

Research shows that teachers of color can also be effective teachers for not only racial minority students but also mainstream classrooms by acting as "critical pedagogues" (Ozbalas, 2008, p. 301). Two teachers minority teachers, one with African American backgrounds and the other having Turkish ethnic background, acted as a role model and provide academic, motivational, and cultural support to their students. They sought to understand each student's cultural knowledge and educational needs and provide instructional strategies that can introduce critical thinking. Drawing upon their past experiences of minority status and constant self-reflection on their own cultural and ethnic identities, those teachers continuously asked



themselves how best to support their students. Therefore, Ozbalas argues that the pervasive perception on minorities as social problems or challenges should be revisited and that those minority teachers' exemplary practices and effectiveness with minority students should justify their existence and contributions to the larger society.

Compared to White mainstream teachers, teachers of color often presented better understandings of racial equalities and greater commitment to antiracist education (Carr & Klassen, 1997). The quantitative and qualitative investigation of 117 teachers in Canada indicate that racial minority teachers are more cognizant of racial equality issues including teacher employment and discrimination and supportive of antiracist education whereas White teachers did not have particularly strong feelings about antiracist education and understood that both minority teachers and students are treated equally in the school system.

Taken together, many previous studies demonstrate that teachers of color can play a significant role in assisting minority students' academic achievements and creating socially just as well as critical school curriculum for all students regardless of their racial background. However, just being a teacher of color does not guarantee high quality teaching. Considering unique cultural and ethnic backgrounds and experiences of minority status, it is true that teachers of color have a good chance to work for minority students' academic success, understand complex needs and interests of students having diverse backgrounds, and show commitments to socially just and multicultural education and curriculum reform (Gay et al., 2003). However, those teachers of color sometimes maintain highly assimilationist views, lose their passion for culturally relevant teaching due to institutionalized racism or test-driven school contexts, or resist representing their own ethnic groups (Amabisca, 2006; Mabokela & Madsen, 2007;

Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Moreover, they are not always able to access their cultural resources and experiences in teaching practices and interactions with students (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Agee, 2004; Gordon, 2002; Moore, 2003).

Some studies indicate that classrooms are sites of many cultural conflicts, not just match or harmony where students and teachers negotiate their sociocultural identifications. Teachers of color occasionally experienced, so called “sociocultural practice shock” (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008, p. 1525). Achinstein and Aguirre’s (2008) study on fifteen novice teachers of color reveal that African American teachers in their study were challenged by students with whom they are supposedly culturally match by being asked “You don’t act Black, but you don’t look white; what are you?” (p. 1516) or “Your words are so white” (p. 1517). Although some teachers used the practice shocks as teachable moments and utilized their experiences and conversations in order to help student broaden tolerance and multicultural understandings, other teachers of color often bear burden of automatic, symbolic visibility of their color and representing their race (Maboleka & Madsen, 2007). They complained that their European American colleagues expected them to take ownership for issues that are dominantly related to racial minority children. The teachers disliked their narrowly defined expertise and limited role as the minority representative. Particularly, female racial minority teachers were frustrated with the cultural differences that revealed between them and their White colleagues and had difficulties to adjust their school cultures. Taken together, it is logical to say that the complexities of teacher-student cultural match that would be mediated through class, language, race, ethnicity, educational backgrounds, or cultural capitals should be considered further in order to discuss the roles and perceptions of teachers of color and their interactions with students.

Cultural resources among teachers of color should not be easily assumed or taken-for-granted as well. Studies reveal that despite their diverse cross-cultural experiences, bi/multilingual abilities, and family backgrounds, many teachers of color struggled with how to consciously utilize those resources and integrate culturally responsive content into their curriculum and instruction due to many different outer factors (Moore, 2003; Pang, 2009; Yee, 2009). For example, teachers of color feel that there is a significant gap between teacher education program and realities of classrooms, thus that they are inadequately prepared to interact with diverse student population and to utilize effective pedagogy for them by their teacher training programs which often focus on concept learning and standardized teaching methods (Agee, 2004; Moore, 2003). Particularly, novice teachers who desire to teach multicultural literature using constructive, experienced-based pedagogies, often became depressed and deskilled due to mandated high-stakes tests, racial stereotypes, and rigid school policies (Agee, 2004). As a result, they decided to follow the demands of standards and opted for general, “traditional and Western” (Moore, 2003; p. 163) approaches and instructional strategies which would be effective for all students as the expense of teaching multicultural perspectives or employing differentiated learning.

Pang’s (2009) study on successful Asian American teachers generated similar findings. Although those exemplary Asian American teachers possessed various multicultural experiential resources and abilities and expressed their commitment to assisting marginalized students, they failed to incorporate their cultural resources into pedagogical practices. Due to the lack of preparation and education during teacher education program, those teachers struggled with how to utilize those resources meaningfully as well as effectively. Therefore, teachers of color’s

multicultural abilities or minority student empowerment should not be easily assumed or taken for granted. Their personal history, sociocultural experiences, working environments, and inter/external barriers that they might face should be considered to understand the practices and experiences of teachers of color.

In sum, teachers' effectiveness with minority students is not always based on the ethnicity or country of origin of teachers but in the quality of pedagogical practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay et al., 2003). As Ladson-Billings (1994) articulates, successful teachers for minority students, regardless of their ethnicity, have high self-esteem and regard for others, believe that all students can succeed, and work for minority students' and their communities' empowerment. Even though teachers of color are committed to multicultural and socially just education, visible/invisible racism in school culture, lack of support for teachers of color, inadequate teacher education programs, and other contextual factors may make those teachers deskilled and helpless. When teachers of color are faced with cultural, linguistic, and economic conflicts and challenges by their students who have similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they often resist building close relations with those students or serving role models for them. Therefore, multicultural resources and abilities of teachers of color should not be easily taken for granted. Rather, they should be valued and encouraged to develop through teacher education programs, professional developments, and other support systems (Agee, 2004; Sheets & Chew, 2004; Yee, 2009). In order to understand teachers of color's experiences of teaching, their personal backgrounds, teacher education, and other contextual aspects should be explored. This study will focus on how the intersectionality of those diverse backgrounds, conceptualized as

sociocultural experiences in this study, influence Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching and positioning of the social studies curriculum and pedagogy.

### **Asian American Teachers**

This section investigates the experiences of Asian American teachers in U.S. school system. Drawing upon model minority myths and pervasive racial stereotyping against Asians in U.S. society, this section describes a review of literature on unique racialized experiences of Asian American preservice and inservice teachers and their possibilities and contributions to multicultural education.

### **The Model Minority Myth**

This section investigates what the model minority myth is and how this racial stereotype shapes Asian Americans' lives, particularly Asian American teachers' experiences of teaching and learning, in American society.

Asian American teachers have frequently been stereotyped as "model minority" or "forever foreigners" (Goodwin et al., 1997; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Subedi, 2002). The image of Asian Americans as the model minority has become a shibboleth that posits Asians as hard-working, self-sufficient, and successful minorities/immigrants who have reached the American dreams of economic and academic success without complaining or depending on the government (Lee, 2009; Lew, 2001). During the era of racial unrest in the 1960s, in an effort to counterpoint African Americans' demands for racial equality, media reports represented an image of Asian Americans as a successful minority who works hard despite past discrimination and serves as a model for other minorities (Woo, 1999). Asian Americans and immigrants who had been blamed for the yellow peril (Takaki, 1989) initially welcomed this positive image (Woo, 1999). Indeed,

many Asian Americans have showed their desire to adjust and fit into American mainstream culture. They value education as a formal as well as serious process and work hard to achieve middle class socioeconomic positions and to acculturate to the mainstream society (Chen, 2009; Lee, 2009, Pang, 1998).

However, this seemingly positive stereotype often silences Asian Americans who may not fit these stereotypical images (An, 2009b; Goodwin et al., 1997; Kibria, 2002; Lew, 2004). Stereotypical high-achieving Asian Americans who are good at math and science and study computer science or engineering in college are seen as ideal in the model minority dialogue (Lee, 2009). People who choose to pursue other careers, including teaching, are viewed less desirable (Gordon, 2000; Nguyen, 2008; Park, 2009; Park, Endo, & Rong, 2009). Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans are often considered as successful minorities who demonstrate academic and financial success, achieve American dreams, and adapt well to mainstream society (Yee, 2009). They are often viewed as people who are doing well, thus do not need help (Pang et al., 2004). On the other hand, Asian immigrants from Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, Vietnam, or Laos, who struggle economically as well as academically, are viewed less desirable as well as more problematic (Lee, 2005, 2009). Due to the pervasive model minority stereotypes against the whole Asian Americans, those people who are in need and struggling have not received proper social, educational, and institutional help and support (An, 2009b; Pang et al., 2004)

Another serious outcome of racializing Asian Americans is the image of perpetual/forever foreigners or aliens (Kibria, 2004; Lew, 2001). Asian Americans have been viewed as unable or unwilling to assimilate into American culture and society, thus never accepted as authentic American citizens (Okiihiro, 1999; Pak, 2002; Tuan, 1998). Studies show

that Asian Americans have frequently been regarded as “others”, “aliens”, or “strangers from a different shore” (Takaki, 1989). Not only Asian immigrant but also American born second generation Asian American have often been questioned with statements such as “where are you really from?” and considered as “not really qualified Americans” (An, 2009b). Asian Americans have found their patriotism and loyalty to American in question (Lee, 2009; Takaki, 1989). Cast as foreigners, Asian Americans are not incorporated into the collective memory. Their stories, experiences, and views which do not fit neatly with official U.S. history have been largely marginalized in school curriculum (An, 2009a).

Too often, teachers of Asian descents are considered as model minorities or perpetual foreigners and are not represented as people who can speak about diversity (Subedi, 2007). Moreover, Asian American teachers have not been considered members of underrepresented groups like African Americans (Goodwin et al., 1997; Pang, 2009), thus their voices and experiences have been largely underrepresented in the teaching profession as well as educational scholarship.

### **Racialized Experiences of Asian American Teachers**

This section discusses how existing literature describes Asian American teachers’ experiences in American schools given the pervasive racial stereotypes against Asians. I focus on how their cultural heritage, family values, and pervasive model minority perceptions influence their curricular and pedagogical positions, interactions with colleagues and students, and perceptions about their careers, working environments, and American society.

A growing body of research has been dealing with why Asian American youth and college students do (not) choose teaching as a career, how Asian American preservice teachers

experience teacher education programs, and what Asian American inservice teachers' experiences of curricular and pedagogical practices are.

Few Asian Americans choose teaching as a career (Gordon, 2000; Ng et al., 2007; Rong & Preissle, 1997). The national pool of public school teachers consists of only 17% of minority teachers, and 1.3% are Asians (Achinstein et al., 2010). Moreover, studies indicate that there has been a national trend regarding the decrease of Asian American teachers and Asian American students entering the teaching profession (Kang, 2009; Moore, 2003). Given the reality of Asian American students' academic success in American schools, Gordon (2000) argues that it is a paradox that Asian Americans have the lowest participation in the teaching force of American public schools while they have demonstrated their success within American education system.

Scholars explored the mechanisms that make Asian Americans not choose teaching as a career and pointed out the influence of community values, cultural tradition, and experiences of racism and discrimination on Asian American college students' resistance to selecting teaching as a career (Gordon, 2002; Kang, 2009; Ng et al., 2007; Rong & Preissle, 1997). First, intense pressure from parents to strive for positions perceived as having higher status, greater financial rewards, and stability was the number one factor in Asian students not choosing teaching (Goodwin et al., 1997; Gordon, 2000). People who choose to do teaching, social work, counseling, or arts which require diverse social and cultural interactions with others instead of engineering, hard science, and computer science which they can present more objective skills have been perceived as anomalies and deviants in their Asian communities (Lee, 2009).

Second, based on Chinese traditional values and perceptions, Asian Americans often believe that people who think of themselves as a great person and become a perfect role model



can be a teacher (Ng et al., 2007; Rong & Preissle, 1997). They are afraid to tell people that “I want to be a teacher” in case they fail, thus do not take risky step into the field of teaching (Gordon, 2000).

Third, Asian American youngsters have a fear of working outside of a comfort zone. Due to lack of English proficiency and the presence of accent, Asian Americans are discouraged to consider teaching as a career (Gordon, 2000). Moreover, based on their tight-knit Asian communities and limited exposure to Latino or Black culture, Asian Americans perceive themselves as unable to understand diverse students’ backgrounds and thoughts and vice versa if they become teacher (Lee, 2009).

In order to help large numbers of academically successful Asian American students contribute to the supply of capable, caring, and committed teachers who are needed for diverse American students population, scholars suggest that school curriculum should more present richer Asian cultural materials and help students explore and discuss them. Teacher education programs should provide more information about teaching in American schools, help them reflect their personal and cultural values, and introduce them to the American school settings (Gordon, 2000; Nguyen, 2008; Ramanathan, 2006).

Despite those challenges, some Asian American choose teaching as a career with their commitment to making a difference in American schooling and engaging in a meaningful work and love for children and young people (Goodwin et al., 1997). However, teacher education programs do not seem to be doing a good job to recruit racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse preservice teachers and to nurture effective teachers of color. Asian American preservice teachers are often surrounded by professors, classmates, and cooperating teachers who are

predominantly Euroamerican middle-class people, many of whom have had little contact with people of color (Newton, 2003; Nguyen, 2008). Teacher education programs are doing little to research the experiences of students of color when they arrive in their programs and to recruit and retain more teachers of color, which cause preservice teachers of color being faced with racial biases against Asians in schools and teacher education classrooms and struggle to negotiate their personal and professional identities (Newton, 2003; Sheets & Chew, 2002). Accordingly those Asian American teacher candidates felt that teacher education program in general are designed for the mainstream group of preservice teachers which significantly marginalizes curricular contents related to Asia (Sheets & Chew, 2002).

In this regard, Nguyen's (2008) study on Vietnamese teacher candidates demonstrates that Vietnamese cultural frames of reference that those teacher candidates bring to the profession are not well understood or valued in American school culture, thus their personal and professional identities have been contested. Vietnamese preservice teachers in this study perceived respect and morality as essence of teaching and struggled with how to play them out in U.S. school contexts. However, their seemingly non traditional Vietnamese cultural frames of reference and conceptions about teaching had not been extensively discussed in their teacher education courses. These research findings indicate that preservice teacher education curricular should be more broadened in breadth and depth in facilitating critical discourses to examine current institutional practices and the role of teachers of color.

Asian American teachers' experience of marginalization and isolation and the lack of recognition and inclusion of diverse cultural values and frames of references in the educational environments that they are working within have also been witnessed in their inservice teaching

experiences. A growing body of research has dealt with marginalization, discrimination, and isolation that Asian American inservice teachers experience in diverse school settings.

Based on the model minority stereotypes, Asian American teachers are often viewed as silent, incapable, and uncomplaining Oriental subjects in American school settings (Goodwin et al, 1997). Goodwin and her colleagues (1997) investigated that pervasive racism toward Asian Americans and racialized practices of American schools cause Asian American teachers' negative, racialized teaching experiences. Asian American teachers are often perceived as "not speaking English well or qualified enough to teach" by school administrators, colleagues, or parents, which cause them to feel doubted themselves, silenced, and isolated. Colleagues do not value or accept diverse Asian cultural heritages and rather treat Asian Americans as faceless, monolithic foreigners. Meanwhile, Asian American teachers are frequently trapped as the "Asian expert" on traditions, cultures, and language and experience uncomfortable racial name callings and jokes.

Especially, the stereotypes and biases on Muslim South Asian women made those teachers look exotic, inferior, and less legitimate educators (Subedi, 2008). Those Asian American teachers had difficulties to collaborate with white teachers who may narrow or selective interpretations of what counts as cultural diversity and to openly negotiate their ethnicities and identities in the schools. While being viewed as exotic outsiders because of their Muslim backgrounds within dominant Christian traditions in school programs and curriculum, those South Asian teachers came to the realization that many teachers were either uncomfortable or reluctant to take diverse religious knowledge seriously. Findings of this study indicate that

along with racial, ethnic, and gender identities, teachers' religious and linguistic identifications and intersectional approach must be considered further to understand their experiences.

Likewise, studies suggest that multiple aspects of barriers that Asian American teachers experience should receive more attention. Asian American teachers face dual barriers in the school contexts (Yee, 2009). On one hand, they experience internal barriers including language issues and cultural difference which consequently cause lack of confidence and mental health. These teachers reported that barriers associated with culture were the most difficult to overcome when they pursued and worked for their teaching position. On the other hand, they are faced with external barriers including lack of finance, recruitment program, staff/professional development, encouragement, role models, and support network. Racial stereotyping and discrimination are other types of barriers that they have to deal with externally. In particular, teachers who are from developing countries like Cambodia reported that lack of finance and racial stereotyping are the two most critical issues that they should deal with (Yee, 2009). In order to overcome the dual barriers, those teachers utilized strategies to survive. However, those survival strategies are mostly in area of personal and ethnic group support instead of institutional reform and support.

Meanwhile, several studies found that Asian American teachers feel that they are well accepted into mainstream school system and culture and have positive teaching experiences and interactions with students and school personnel (Pang, 2009; Ramanathan, 2006). Some Asian American teachers believed that they are well integrated into the school systems and were not really concerned with being underrepresented in their schools. They felt that other teachers and administrators well support them and help them implement desired changes and reform. In Pang's (2009) study on successful Asian American teachers, these teachers also believed that

they are well accepted as well as appreciated in their schools. However, they failed to recognize their isolation and marginalization. Even though they were not involved in curriculum development, underrepresented in the school curriculum and culture, and given chances to discuss their cultural identities and perspectives in the school, they failed to understand that there is hidden marginalization and believed that they are well accepted in the school systems.

### **Possibilities and Potentials of Asian American Teachers**

Although Asian American teachers' experiences of racism, marginalization, and isolation have been acknowledged and examined, their multicultural competencies, bi/multilingual abilities, and diverse frames of references that Asian American teachers possess and their commitment to culturally relevant teaching have not received much attention in educational scholarship (Arun, 2009; Ng et al., 2007). Some scholars argue that Asian American professionals and teachers and their possibilities, opportunities, and potentials should be more explored and emphasized instead of their helpless images and victimized experiences (Chen, 2009). That is, how they interpret curriculum and implement pedagogy, what personal beliefs and sociocultural experiences influence their practices, and to what extent they engage in culturally relevant teaching should be critical questions that need to be examined further in order to understand Asian American teachers' possibilities, potentials, and contributions (Pang, 2009). Addressing these arguments and suggestions, this section discusses what possibilities and potentials Asian American teachers have and how Asian American teachers' personal and cultural experiences influence their teaching practices.

Goodwin et al., (1997) articulate that Asian American teachers have opportunities (a) to change the status quo curriculum, (b) to be a role model, and (c) to speak out on behalf of the

need for many voices. Based on their family tradition, cultural heritage, bi/multilingual abilities, and cross-cultural experiences, Asian American teachers themselves are the primary sources for multicultural themes in their curricular. They can pull on a lot of cultural resources and bring those ideas, including family history or trips to home country, into their classroom and share those experiences with students. Secondly, Asian American teachers show their possibilities to be a role model for minority students. Asian American teachers, experiencing minority status themselves, demonstrate their commitment to being relatable teachers or ethnic minority students and being a role model who can provide positive influences on students' lives. Thirdly, Asian American teachers who have been faced with racial stereotypes and biases in American society, they well understand how minority students experiences schooling and what difficulties they might have. Asian American teachers in this study demonstrate their commitment to curriculum reform which represents powerful voices of social justice, thus can possibly affect students positively.

Some studies focused on Asian American teachers' cultural and religious heritage, particularly Confucianism and Buddhism, and how these perspectives can shape their world views and enrich the teachers' curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms (Chen, 2009; Pang, 2009). As a Taiwanese/Asian American teacher in New York City, Chen (2009) reflected her own experiences of studying Confucianism and teaching experiences in both Taiwan and U.S. and narrated how Confucianism has been influenced on her own as well as other Asian American teachers' beliefs and practices of education. According to Chen, framed by Confucianism, East Asians view teachers as professionals with high authority, value formal education highly, and consider children's schooling as directly related to the family's integrity and honor. Their high-

contextual communication style does not require clear, explicit verbal articulation and avoids spontaneous as well as critical remarks, while American communication involves intensively elaborate, clear expressions. These different conceptions of teaching and teachers and communication styles between teachers and students sometimes bring confusions and frustrations to Asian American teachers, but they can also understand how personal, historical, social, and cultural contexts influence teachers' experiences and appreciate diverse experiences at the same time.

Like Chen (2009) discussed, Confucianism and Buddhism are powerful and complex influences in the lives of Asian Americans as they related to education and students' achievements (Pang, 2009). Confucian values which encourage hard work, high educational achievement, family honor, and filial piety help Asian American teachers develop ethical commitment to students' academic achievements and community support and respect for self and students. Moreover, Asian American teachers believe that hard work rather than abilities is key to educational success and maintain high student expectation. Buddhist philosophies on self control, life with strong ethic, compassion toward others, and collective working for positive goals, also help Asian American teachers be responsible for their own practice and nurture moral commitment to meaningful education. Based on those cultural influences, Asian American teachers in Pang's study reveal high personal and collective efficacy, formal as well as informal leadership abilities, commitment to education for multicultural, global citizenship and social justice, pedagogical caring, and beliefs on student-centered, experience-based learning. One weakness of their practices that this study found was that many Asian American teachers did not know how to consciously utilized their multicultural experiences and perspectives and integrate

culturally relevant content into their instruction. This result supports Achinstein et al., (2010)'s argument that although teachers of color bring multiple cultural resources and cross-cultural perspectives based on their own cultural beliefs and experiences, their cultural resources and assets should not be easily assumed but encouraged to develop.

Although a growing number of research explore Asian American teachers' complex as well as diverse experiences, their diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural identities have been interpreted in an undifferentiated manner and homogenized under the category of Asian Americans (Nguyen, 2008; Subedi, 2008). The rapid expansion of Asian American and Asian immigrant populations in recent years brought ethnic diversities and cultural differences within the group (Chen, 2009; Pang et al., 2004). Asian Americans as a group possess more diversity and fewer commonalities compared to African Americans and Latino Americans (Chen, 2009). While the majority of Latinos have Catholic religion and Spanish language backgrounds, Asian Americans do not have common language or religion. Many Asian ethnic groups and nations have developed their own language system as well as dominant religion (Min, 2005). According to Chen (2009), there are four major geographical groups of Asian Americans: (a) East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean); (b) Southeast Asians (mostly Indochinese from Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos and Filipinos); (c) South Asians (mostly Indians and Pakistani); and (d) Pacific Islanders (mostly Hawaiians, Samoans, and Guamanians). Because of a remarkable ethnic diversity within Asian Americans, scholars suggest that more research on teachers of specific Asian groups and intragroup diversity should be conducted (Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Sheets & Chew, 2003). The heterogeneous identities of Asian American teachers and their teaching experience and specific contexts that they are interact with should be examined



extensively so that their experiences and practices are not easily as well as narrowly defined (Subedi, 2008). Addressing the suggestion, this study focuses on Korean American teachers and explores their diverse and complex experiences of social studies education. In the following section, social, cultural, and historical backgrounds of Korean Americans in the U.S. and the experiences and perspectives of Korean American teachers in American teaching professions will be discussed.

### **Korean American Teachers**

In order to understand Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching social studies in American public schools, it is significant to examine the broader social and culturally contexts in which Korean Americans and their experiences are situated. In this section, I describe a brief historical, social, and cultural background of Korean Americans in U.S. today. Based on those backgrounds, this section continues with a description of Korean American teachers in the teaching profession.

#### **Korean Americans in the U.S.**

**A brief history of Korean immigration to the U.S.** According to Huh (2004), the history of Korean immigration to the U.S. can be classified into three periods: (a) old immigration (1903-1949); (b) intermediate period following the Korean War (1950-1965); and (c) new immigration (1965-present). Official Korean immigration to the U.S. started with the beginning of the twentieth century when approximately 7, 200 Koreans were brought to work in Hawaiian sugar plantations (Kibria, 2002; Pang, 1998). They were brought in to meet the labor demand on the Hawaiian plantations after the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 (Takaki, 1989). From the 1903 to the early 1920s, brides for Koreans residing in the U.S., so called picture brides,

and political exiles and students who escape from Japanese colonial control of Korea comprised the early Korean immigration to the U.S. (An, 2009b). However, the 1924 Immigration Act banned all immigrants ineligible for citizenship from entering the U.S. including Koreans.

American intervention in the Korean War triggered the second wave of Korean immigration (Chang, 2003). The 1946 War Brides Act and the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act allowed American soldiers stationed in Korea to bring their Korean brides and children to the U.S, war orphans to be adopted by U.S. citizens, and students and professionals to pursue their careers in the U.S. (Lew, 2001; Min, 1998). From 1951 to 1964, approximately 18, 000 Koreans including 6,500 brides, 6,300 adopted children, and 6,000 students came to the United States (Chang, 2003).

The new immigration period began with the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act that abolished previous immigration quotas (Woo, 1999). The 1965 Immigration Act has been a critical turning point to Korean American communities (Kibria, 2002). Korean immigration to the U.S. increased dramatically during the period, reaching up to 30,000 per year in 1976 and approximately 35,000 during the mid 1980s (Lee, 2005).

Studies show that Korean immigrants who came to the United States during the period tend to present more diverse range of socioeconomic classes and eventually result in the diversity of Korean communities in the U.S. According to Mo (2000), due to the 1965 Immigration Act favoring skilled workers and professionals, most Korean immigrants who entered the U.S. right after 1965 were from middle to upper socioeconomic backgrounds. However, as the 1976 amendments to the 1965 Immigration Act shifted its preference to family reunion, more families and relatives of Korean Americans from less prosperous backgrounds and lower levels of

education and skills begin to immigrate while the number of professional, middle-class immigrants began to drop significantly (An, 2009b; Abelman & Lie, 1995). Therefore, researchers emphasize the need to pay attention to the diversity within this population in order to better understand the lives and experiences of Korean Americans in the U.S. (Kibria, 2002; Lee, 2009; Min, 1998).

**Research on Korean Americans in the U.S.** This section provides a review of literature on Korean Americans and their unique ethnic characteristics in American society. Understanding of sociocultural backgrounds of Korean Americans will help this study situate Korean American social studies teachers' experiences in the prior knowledge.

Historically steady and substantial inflow of immigration from Korea has accelerated the growth of the Korean population in the U.S. (Chang, 2003). Today, Korean Americans are one of the largest and fastest growing Asian immigrant groups in America. There are approximately 1.4 million Koreans living in the U.S. as of 2005 (UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2007). Koreans are the fifth largest group among Asian Americans, comprising 10.6 percent of the total Asian American population (Le, 2010). This group contains a large proportion of immigrants. Over one-quarter of the Korean foreign born in the United States arrived in 2000 or later. There were 1,030, 691 foreign born from Korea residing in the U.S. in 2008, accounting for 2.7 percent of the country's 38 million immigrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2010). Between 2000 and 2008, the Korean immigration population nearly doubled in New York, California, Georgia, and Virginia (Migration Policy Institute, 2010). In 2008, the Korean immigrants were the seventh largest immigrant group in the United States (See Table 1).

[Table 1] Total and Korean immigrant populations (1960-2008)

Year	Total Immigrants	Korean Immigrants	Rank
1960	9,738,091	11,171	44
1970	9,619,302	38,711	37
1980	14,079,906	289,885	11
1990	19,797,316	568,397	9
2000	31,107,889	864,125	7
2008	37,960,773	1,030,691	7

Studies have explored what it is like being Korean Americans in the United States, how they have experienced American society, culture, economy, and education, what racial, social, and cultural issues and challenges that they have faced with, and how they are similar to or different from other Asian ethnic groups (An., 2009; Lee, 2009; Min, 1996, 1998; Pang et al., 2004; Takaki, 1989; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Based on previous literature, this section will discuss distinctive ethnic characteristics of Korean Americans so as to situate Korean American social studies teachers' experiences in the prior knowledge. The characteristics are: (a) the influence of Confucianism on Korean Americans' beliefs and ways of life; (b) rejection of pan-Asian identity and establishment of tight-knit ethnic community; (c) Christian church as pivotal community organization; (d) mixed and heterogeneous social, economic, and educational status within the group; and (e) the first vs. second generation.

Confucianism, which originated in China, has a powerful effect on the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of all people of Korean descent regardless of their religion (Pang, 1998). As a social, political, and economic philosophy, Confucianism, emphasizing filial piety, family/kin ties, patriarchal, hierarchical family orders, and children's education, provided significant principles and philosophical beliefs that guide not only Koreans but also East Asians' lives and social relations (Min, 1998). Studies show that based on Confucianism, Korean immigrants believe

children should have loyalty and respect to their parents as well as elderly people. Meanwhile, parents consider children's schooling and academic achievement as a serious process of social mobility and hold high expectations and standards for their children (Pang, 1998). Therefore, extraordinary Korean American as well as Asian American educational achievement has often been credited to the cultural influence of Confucianism (Pang et al., 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Although Korean Americans share similar Confucian beliefs and traditions with other East Asian ethnic groups, Koreans in the U.S. often reject pan-Asian ethnic identities (An, 2009b; Lee, 2009). Instead, Korean Americans have established tight-knit, exclusive ethnic communities and networks (Lee, 2009; Min, 1998; Pang et al., 2004). In her study of Asian American students, Lee (2009) categorized Asian Americans into four groups: Asians, Asian Americans, New Wavers (recently political refugees and lower-class immigrants from Southeast Asia), and Korean. She separated Koreans as a distinctive group because first and second generation Korean Americans in her study asserted that Koreans are superior while other Asian ethnic groups are tacky and hideous (p. 29). Korean American students, their parents, and other community members maintained tight-knit, exclusive ethnic networks based on Korean churches, ethnic media, and alumni associations. According to Min (2005), Korean immigrants tended to build tight community organizations and be affiliated with many ethnic networks. The Korean community in the New York metropolitan area has more ethnic associations than Chinese or Indian communities whereas its population is only about 30% of Chinese and 70% of Indian population (p. 20). Some studies demonstrate that Koreans have a powerful, but contested ideology of "Korean by blood" (Kibria, 2002, p. 201) and believe that having Korean blood means being an authentic Korean (An, 2009b).

Among diverse ethnic organizations, Korean ethnic church is the center of the Korean community (Kim, 1980; Kim & Yu, 1996; Takaki, 1989). Christian churches have played a significant role in sustaining ethnicity for Korean Americans and recent immigrants (An, 2009b). Many Korean Christian churches in America provide free Korean meals, Korean language programs for children, and Korean traditional and cultural events so that Korean immigrants can maintain their regular social interactions and maintain cultural traditions (Kim & Yu, 1996; Park, 2009).

Even though Korean Americans seem to be a homogeneous group having the same language, Confucian beliefs and traditions, and historical experiences, their socioeconomic status and achievement levels are diverse, and their sociocultural experiences are heterogeneous. A large number of previous studies focused on Korean Americans' high academic achievements. 58 percent of Korean immigrant who were 25 or older had completed four years of college, and 97 percent had completed high school while approximately 24.4 percent of the U.S. population had received a college education, and 80.4 percent had high school diploma (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Meanwhile, Korean immigrant youths have reportedly struggled with academic as well as psychological problems in American schools. An (2009b) asserts that stuck in the model minority myths, Koreans who are not good at math and science or show low academic achievement are often been viewed as deviants or teased by classmates. Those students often show low self-esteem and identity confusion (Pang et al., 2004). Compared to Chinese and Japanese immigrant youth, Korean immigrant students experience the most serious mental problems in their schooling and social adjustment process due to the cultural conflicts between

Korea and the U.S. (Yeh, 2003). In addition, they may not openly talk about their problems to the teachers and are less likely to receive counseling or proper interventions (Lee, 2009).

Korean immigrants and second generation Korean Americans have come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. According to Zhou and Kim (2006), approximately 40 percent of Koreans who immigrated to the United States during the 1980s were professional and managers prior to immigration. It remains one of the highest percentages of professional and managers among immigrant nationalities. As discussed earlier, Korean Americans have shown high high school and college graduation rates compared to average Americans. Nevertheless, Korean Americans have a higher percentage of families in poverty (14.7%) compared with Chinese Americans (11.1%). Since many Korean immigrants was unable to find professional jobs in the U.S., many Korean immigrants turned to small business (Kibria, 2002; Takaki, 1989). Korean Americans showed the highest self-employment rate (34.5%) among all minority and immigrant groups in Los Angeles (Min, 2005).

The gap between first generation Korean immigrants and second generation Korean Americans within Korean communities in the United States have existed (Kim, 2005; Lew, 2001; Pang, 1998; Palmera, 2007; Takaki, 1989). Although many of first generation Korean immigrants tend to continue to protect Korean cultural traditions and language within their exclusive, tight-knit communities, many second generation Korean Americans found themselves “floating insecurely in the rootless groping fashion of men hung between two world” (Takaki, 1989, p. 286). As American born youth who possess the U.S. citizenship and attend American schools, they often do not share nationalistic spirit, cultural traditions, and Confucianism-based belief systems of their immigrant parents (Takaki, 1989). Therefore, older Korean immigrants

believe that those second generation Korean Americans who do neither speak Korean nor show respects to parents and the elderly as problems (Pang, 1998).

Conflicts between Korean immigrant youth and second generation youth are also witnessed. Korean born immigrant students are often called as FOB (Fresh off the boat) while American born Korean Americans are viewed as Twinkies. According to Palmera (2007), first generation immigrant students believed that those Twinkies are “sell-outs” or “white wannabes” who want to be in the mainstream society but do not belong to it. Meanwhile, Korean Americans think that new immigrants from Korea are foreigners, thus Korean Americans are the authentic Korean. Those two groups have drawn a border between the groups and developed different subcultures and communities inside and outside of schools.

A review of literature on Korean Americans in the United States in this section shows unique as well as diverse characteristics of Korean American ethnic group. Studies show that Confucianism and Christian church communities provide a pivotal influence on Korean Americans’ beliefs, social relations, and general living patterns. Korean Americans emphasize their national unity and superiority of their ethnicity more than any other Asian ethnic sub groups so that they construct highly exclusive, tight-knit society (Lee, 2009). However, research reveals that the seemingly homogenous group of Korean Americans are in fact highly heterogeneous and diverse in terms of their cultural beliefs, racial/ethnic identities, and intra/intergroup interactions.

This study situates Korean American social studies teachers’ experiences of teaching and social studies curricular and pedagogical positioning within these sociocultural backgrounds and experiences of Korean Americans in the U.S. This study will explore whether and to what extent



Korean American social studies teachers have had similar personal, historical, social, and cultural experiences and how those experiences provide impacts on their social studies curricular and pedagogical understandings and practices. Considering Korean American communities' unique and complex ethnic characteristics witnessed in previous literature, exploring Korean American social studies teachers' experiences will provide their unique stories in American school contexts and heterogeneous experiences and perspectives of the teachers.

### **Korean Americans in the Teaching Profession**

Few studies have explored the experiences of Korean American teachers working in K-12 school in the U.S. Despite the rapid growth of Korean Americans and immigrants in the United States and their rank of 5th largest Asian ethnic group, Korean American teachers and their unique voices and experiences within American schools have been largely undocumented (Park, 2009). Although some researches on Asian American teachers included Korean Americans as a part of their participants, Korean American teachers have often been homogenized and undifferentiated with Asian American category, and Korean Americans' unique cultural, ethnic characteristics have not been highlighted. This section introduces few studies addressing Korean American school teachers and their experiences of teaching profession respectively and discusses their implications and limitations.

Park's (2009) study is one of few studies which focus on Korean American teachers. In this study on 56 Korean American teachers mostly from Los Angeles public schools, Park found out Korean Americans who chose teaching as a career have families and friends who supported their career decision making. Despite its minority status, Korean American teachers rarely felt isolated in their teaching environments because of Korean teachers support networks. Korean

American teachers who work in the same school help their colleagues to adjust and establish at their schools and to have voices in decision-making. Korean American teachers in this study believed that they would not be able to survive without this support network system, and their “survival strategy” is similar to the one with other Asian American teachers in the previous section (Yee, 2009). Protestant churches are significant institution in Korean American teachers’ community and social network. Many of the Korean American teachers joined Korean ethnic churches and discussed the impact of religion on their lives and teaching experiences. Based on Christian beliefs, they viewed teaching as an act of fulfilling their destiny or calling in life and emphasized their responsibilities to help students.

In her study of Asian American high school students and their schooling experiences, Lee (2009) included one Korean American teachers’ story and her interactions with Korean American students. Lee explained that the Korean female music teacher who serves as a faculty advisor of Korean student group maintains highly assimilationist views and supporting Korean students to adopt “dual identity” (p. 35). For example, the Korean teacher encouraged the maintenance and use of the Korean language among Koreans. However, she often encouraged Korean students to accommodate the white majority. She advised her students to change their names to American ones “to make it easier for them” (p. 34). She believed that it is important to maintain Korean culture, but it is more appropriate for this to be done at home or among Korean friends. She encouraged Korean students to conform to certain white, middle-class behaviors in order to succeed in the U.S. Lee explained that this strategy of dual identity is Korean style pragmatic way to adopt American values. According to Lee, the teacher and other Koreans understand that they possess subordinate, minority status in American society, thus they

strategically make accommodations to American culture for their academic achievements and social mobility.

As a Korean immigrant woman who is a former school teachers in Korea, Shin (2001) reflected on her own experiences of teaching in Korea and in the U.S. and provided suggestions for meaningful learning in cultural differences between Korean and the U.S. Based on her educational experiences in both cultural and educational settings, Shin felt that students must develop multicultural understandings and respect for cultural diversity and that it is problematic that teachers implement multicultural education simply through games or one-time events. Shin argues that learning about not only cultural differences but also cultural similarities and human values existing within both cultures is import. She also emphasized that real life examples, media, and hands-on experiences will help students better understand and accept other cultures and incorporate themselves into the global culture of our world.

Although these studies put Korean American teachers on the center of their inquiry and shed light on their unique experiences and voices, they have some limitations. In Park's (2009) study, most participants were recruited in Los Angeles areas, and interviews were conducted through emails. Its participant recruiting and data collection method failed to describe more in-depth voices of Korean Americans teachers. Lee (2009) and Shin (2001) investigated one Korean American teacher's story, thus it is hard to generalize their findings. Moreover, none of these research focused on social studies teachers of Korean descent. This study aims to explore Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching in urban public schools and how their sociocultural experiences and backgrounds influence their curricular and pedagogical practices.

I reviewed the literature under the categories of teachers of color, Asian American teachers, and particularly Korean American teachers in the previous sections. In the following section, I discuss how social studies teachers of color experience the teaching profession and what their curricular and pedagogical stances and practices are based upon the findings and discussions from the previous sections.

### **Social Studies Teachers of Color**

Teachers' personal, historical, social, and cultural conceptions and previous experiences and how those backgrounds provide impacts on their curricular and pedagogical understanding has been one of the most significant research areas in social studies scholarship, particularly teacher education (Adler, 2008; Salinas & Castro, 2010). However, social studies teachers of color, especially, the connection between the personal and sociocultural backgrounds of teachers of color and their curriculum meaning making and enactment have not received much attention in social studies. Unlike other subject areas, social studies, whose goal is to prepare knowledgeable and engaged citizens and whose curricular focus is on American history and society, can be a significant as well as controversial area where social studies teachers' gatekeeping role really matter (Thornton, 2005). This section discusses how social studies teachers of color experience the profession and what their curricular and pedagogical stances and practices are.

Social studies teachers of color are reportedly cognizant of the complexities of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and cultural issues, carefully consider how learners see themselves in the portrayal of American history, and present multicultural, socially just perspectives in their social studies classroom (Salinas & Castro, 2010; Subedi, 2002, 2008; Pang & Gibson, 2001). For

example, Asian immigrant and/or Asian American teachers, based on their own struggles as minorities, recognized well the diverse cultural backgrounds of her students and showed commitment to address racial, ethnic, and cultural struggles that her students experienced in the curriculum (Branch, 2004; Subedi, 2002, 2008). Especially, Asian immigrant teachers often faced a false racist perception of Asian immigrant teachers being unqualified to teach a content area course like social studies. Parents of their students thought they are “not American enough to teach social studies (Subedi, 2002, p. 288)”, and their teaching of American history, government, and literature became a suspicious act within the dominant racial imagination.

The pervasive racial stereotyping and educational environments that challenged their legitimacy and authority as a teacher made them reflect their own racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and identities and develop their own strategies to create meaningful education for their students. Branch’s (2004) study on a Japanese American social studies teacher shows that her teaching practices and how her life experiences influenced her social studies teaching philosophies. As a person of Japanese descent, who had felt marginalized and ashamed of her Japanese heritage while a student, the teacher did not want her students to feel the same sense of ethnic isolation. The Japanese American teacher centered race in the social studies curriculum and guided students’ racial and ethnic identity development through the curriculum. She emphasized respect for cultural diversity because she believed that people who sense that their ethnicity is respected by others have a better chance of developing healthy ethnic identity (p. 533). Likewise, Subedi (2008) also showed that Asian American and immigrant teacher tried to learn/unlearn her students’ cultural and economic identities and open spaces for them to speak up their voices to bridge the gap between social studies official curriculum and

cultural knowledge that those students bring into their classrooms. The teacher employed diverse pedagogical strategies, including controversial issue discussion, critical writing, and cross-cultural dialogue projects in order to help students construct their own stories and make meaning from their learning. He found that those teachers devoted much of their classroom instruction to creating cross-cultural dialogue.

Latino social studies teachers indicated similar curricular and pedagogical tendencies in their classrooms. Social studies preservice teachers of Latino descent in Salinas and Sullivan' (2007) study used a critical multicultural rendition of historical thinking to pose questions regarding significance, epistemology, agency, and judgment that may be omitted, distorted, and diluted in the official social studies curriculum. Despite their departments' collective lesson planning and the state standardized exams, the two Latino teachers often criticized traditional historical metanarratives in the social studies official curriculum and presented alternative narratives and views through historical thinking. Similarly, Rodriguez, Salinas, and Guberman (2005) and Salinas, Franquíz, and Guberman (2006) examined Latino teachers' use of historical thinking in their social studies classrooms. Those bilingual preservice Latino teachers reportedly understood multiple ways of utilizing students' prior knowledge of history and viewed larger societal discourses on race, immigrant status, and language in their use of primary sources and DBQs.

Fickel (2000) stressed the central role of personal biographies, beliefs, and theories on social studies teachers' content selection, instructional experiences, and knowledge to which students are exposed. The Native American teacher in Fickel's study was able to articulate that his own family background, high school, and teacher education were the critical aspects that

shaped his beliefs and practices of social studies teaching. His family backgrounds let himself to read a wider variety of nature on the history of the Cherokee and other American Indians, where he found more divergent as well as complex perspectives to understand history. Readings of John Dewey that he encountered during teacher education program helped him expand his experientially constructed worldviews and personal history. Consequently, his content selection and pedagogical decisions are filtered through his core belief about the aim of social studies education being the cultivation of active, critically thoughtful citizens for a democracy. His notion of ‘social studies without a textbook’ (p. 381) widened the social studies content of his curriculum and expanded his students’ chances to learn and access to critical knowledge.

With their personal and family histories, four African American social studies teachers in Pang and Gibson’s (2001) study continually raised questions about race, culture, and social class with their students and extended their social studies curriculum beyond official knowledge. Those teachers viewed social studies as a self-limiting subject since its official curriculum, particularly textbooks, failed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the lives of various people in the United States. They believed that social studies teachers should work for social justice and emphasized democratic values, including voting, respect for individuals, and mutual understandings. However, they did not discuss method to teaching their students social action skills and struggled to develop how to promote multicultural, social justice perspectives in their classrooms. The pressure of national and local movements to achieve standards and high-stakes testing were also revealed.

Taken together, literature says that based on their diverse family backgrounds, cultural heritage, experiences of racism and discriminations, and teacher education programs, social

studies teachers of color incorporated those personal as well as sociocultural experiences in their curricular and pedagogical decision making. Those teachers of color demonstrated their commitment to teaching for social justice and cultural diversity, recreated social studies curriculum beyond official knowledge based on critical thinking, and sought out education for multicultural, global citizenship. However, racism inside and outside of their schools and pressures of local and state standards and high-stakes testing acted as factors which made those teachers helpless as well as deskilled.

Even though several studies examined the experiences of social studies teachers of Asian descent, more research is needed to gain deeper insight into the experiences of teachers of specific Asian groups, their curricular and pedagogical decision making, and the influence of sociocultural backgrounds and contexts on their experiences (Pang, 2010; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Subedi, 2002). There are no empirical studies on the to experiences, stories, and voices of Korean American social studies teachers and how their cultural values and experiences play a role in their curricular and pedagogical practices while Korean American is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in U.S. (Park, 2009). Their stories have largely been undocumented or homogenized under the Asian American teacher category (Lee, 2009; Park, 2009). Addressing these concerns, this study will investigate the experiences of Korean American social studies teachers, including both Korean born immigrants and American born second generation Korean Americans, in American schools. I will focus on what unique sociocultural experiences and backgrounds they bring into the social studies classroom that influence their positioning of social studies curriculum and pedagogy are. This study aims to build on previous research on social studies teachers of color and provide deeper insights into how social studies teachers of Asian



descent, especially Korean American teachers, make meaning of the social studies curriculum and pedagogy.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature framing the inquiries of this study. It began with literature review on teachers of color, Asian American teachers, and specifically Korean American teachers. Many previous studies demonstrate that teachers of color can play a significant role in assisting minority student's academic achievement and creating socially just and multicultural school curriculum for all students and that their quality of pedagogical practices and care for students not their racial background contributes to their effective teaching. Asian American teachers including Korean American teachers are often exposed to pervasive racial biases and stereotypes against Asians, for instance the model minority myth, which caused the teachers' marginalization and isolation in schools. Their potentials of being a role model for minority students, bringing diverse cultural resources, and creating multicultural curriculum have often been ignored. Research on social studies teachers of color also indicate that the racial stereotyping and educational environments often challenged their legitimacy and authority as a teacher. Meanwhile, they are reportedly cognizant of the complexities of race, ethnicity, gender, and cultural issues and tend to create socially just and multicultural social studies curriculum based upon their minority status experiences, multicultural perspectives, and diverse personal/cultural backgrounds. In line with the review of the literature, this study explores Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching profession and social studies curricular and pedagogical practices in classrooms.

The next chapter discusses research methodology that this study employed.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, collective instrumental multicase study approach in order to examine Korean American social studies teachers' curricular and pedagogical perceptions and practices. This chapter begins with the rationale for the use of qualitative, collective instrument case study approach and the case study research method. This chapter continues with a description of my role as a researcher and research design including descriptions about the contexts of study, case selection process, and participants and school settings. An explanation of data analysis methodology follows. This chapter concludes with a description of how this study protected participants' human subject rights.

[Figure 3] Overview of Chapter III

METHODOLOGY	
Rationale	
Positionality of the Researcher	
Research Design	
Research Settings	
Case Selection	
Participants and School Context	
Case 1: Mr. Joseph Moon	
Case 2: Ms. Susan Jin	
Case 3: Ms. Young Kim	
Data Collection	
Observations	
Interviews	
Artifacts	
Data Analysis	
Phase one: Organizing data	
Phase two: Immersion in data	
Phase three: Generating categories and themes	
Phase four: Coding data	
Phase five: Offering interpretations through analytic memos	
Phase six: Searching for alternative understandings	
Phase seven: Writing the report	
IRB/Human Subject Clearance	

### **Rationale**

This study employs a qualitative, collective instrument case study (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Stake, 2005). Qualitative research is an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that seek rich descriptions of people, place, conversations, and context (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research deals with complex interrelationships among all that exists, which cannot be handled by statistical procedures (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Stake, 2005). Therefore, qualitative researchers place a high priority on the describing, understanding, and interpreting socially constructed phenomenon instead of measuring data or generalizing findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this study, I seek to unpack socially and culturally situated experiences of Korean American social studies teachers by investigating their teaching practices in global history classrooms and provide in-depth in-depth description and analysis of their curricular and pedagogical decision making.

This study uses collective instrument case study approach (Stake, 2005). A case study is “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59). Narrowing down to particular sites, subjects, materials, topics, questions, and themes, case studies emphasize explanatory as well as descriptive interpretations of certain cases and deal with a full variety of data sources and evidence (Stake, 2005). A multicase study means a research on two or more subjects, settings, or depositories of data (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Researchers can conduct two or more case studies and then compare and contrast their contexts. Multicase study is an effective methodological

approach because multicase study enables me to understand complex experiences of Korean American social studies teachers' experiences and to compare and contrast their experiences. This approach is particularly suitable to the goal of this study because this study seeks to investigate unique and complex experiences of three Korean American social studies teachers whose voices and stories have often been homogenized and interpreted undifferentiated manners (Subedi, 2008). In the following chapters, I will discuss how I position myself as a researcher in this study and how I design research methodologies.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, especially research on racially and ethnically marginalized community, it is imperative for researchers to acknowledge their own values and frames of references about the research process and focus, understand multiple ways they are positioned in their fields, and consider ethical research practices (Banks, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Subedi, 2007). This section discusses how my experiences as a student and a social studies teacher in Korea and as a doctoral student and teacher in diverse settings in the U.S. shape my inquiry on Korean American social studies teachers and how I, as a researcher, position myself and approach research settings and participants.

As a Korean immigrant woman who was born in Korea and educated in its public schools, I experienced and was familiar with a centralized and standardized educational system. National curriculum and textbooks dominated school curriculum, particularly social studies curriculum due to its focus on national history, political and economic systems, and geography. Because of the Korean War and consecutive national division between the North and the South, social studies education including Korean history has always been the most controversial subject area

while the government designated curriculum standards and textbooks did not allow critical/alternative viewpoints understanding the war and related historical events (Jho, 2007). School curriculum was mostly defined and heavily influenced by national level high-stakes tests, and what is portrayed in the textbooks and standards should be the single right answer for historical inquiries.

When I became a social studies teacher in Korea, the nature of high-stakes testing and narrowly-defined social studies curriculum made me frustrated. Although I tried to employ student-centered activities and help students develop critical reading and thinking skills, I had to follow the government designated curriculum standards in a timely manner and prepare students for Korean SAT and relevant high-stakes tests. Even though I did not like teaching for test taking skills and memorization, it was ironic that I was perceived as a good teacher by school administrators who can effectively prepare my students for high-stakes testing and increase their scores.

After I started my doctoral studies at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City, my experiences of learning social studies education and research as a doctoral student provided me with diverse, different frames to understand the role of social studies teachers as gatekeepers and their curriculum meaning making in multicultural, urban settings. I was fascinated by the fact that teachers have more freedom to construct their own curriculum and play more powerful roles in designing their lessons and teaching materials. At the same time, however, I as a Korean immigrant, acknowledged the marginalization of ethnoracial minority groups and their histories and cultures in the social studies official curriculum and textbooks and

became interested in critical perspectives to understand social studies curriculum, both official and enacted.

Teaching Korean history and culture at one Korean ethnic school in New York, I have had chances to discuss controversial issues and viewpoints to understand Korean history with my second generation Korean American students. Those students have helped me revisit my own perceptions on Korean history and rethink what it means to them to learn Korean history and maintain Korean ethnic identities. My social studies teaching experiences in both Korea and the United States and changing perceptions of curriculum and instruction might be unique, but at the same time similar to Asian American and immigrant teachers' teacher identity formation and curricular and pedagogical positioning influenced by dynamic sociocultural circumstances, which are witnessed in previous literature (Chen, 2009; Park, 2009; Shin, 2001). Thus I use my own educational experience as a springboard to frame the inquiry of this research: How Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy.

On the other hand, my experience of teaching in an after-school program in one independent school in New York has allowed me to think how I am perceived by teachers and students having diverse backgrounds. I have often been viewed as a quiet, hard-working Asian teacher who might be good at math or speak Mandarin. The experiences of racial stereotypes and biases enabled me to question how other Asian American teachers, particularly Korean Americans, experience teaching in American schools. I hoped to understand how Asian American teachers' sociocultural experiences including personal biographies, cultural heritage, family backgrounds, and immigration experiences influence their personal and professional identifications and classroom practices. I believe that my experiences of teaching and learning

social studies in South Korea and the U.S. will enable me to better understand Korean American, both Korean born immigrant and American born second generation Korean American, social studies teachers' sociocultural backgrounds and experiences and to relate better to my participants.

I understand that my experiences in learning and teaching social studies are not the same as the experiences of teachers who participated in my study. Therefore, I did position myself as an "indigenous-outsider" (Banks, 1998; Subedi, 2007) when I accessed to the potential participants or their professional communities. During my pilot study, my positionality as an indigenous outsider was started to develop on the basis of my being a Korean immigrant in the United States. As a Korean immigrant woman who is a former social studies teacher in South Korea having Korean cultural, historical, philosophical, and linguistic backgrounds, I was welcomed as an indigenous member by Korean American teachers during my pilot study and dissertation research participant recruiting and fieldwork. Those teachers liked to speak Korean and share their cultural experiences and heritage with me and allowed me to observe their teaching practices.

Meanwhile, age, academic affiliations, or immigration experience and professional status differences sometimes created distance between some Korean American teachers and me (Subedi, 2007). My position as a doctoral student affiliated with an Ivy League school was perceived as a young student who does not know about the realities of American public schools by some first generation Korean immigrant teachers. Several middle-aged members of Korean American Teachers Society (pseudonym) where I started participant recruitment considered me as an outsider at the beginning because they thought so-called "researchers" tend to collect data

without any contribution to their society and take advantages from them. Therefore, by participating in their monthly meetings and doing volunteer works for their organization, I tried to position myself as a humble young learner who wants to learn about Korean American teachers' experiences and concerns and hopes to contribute to their professional society. Based on my pilot study experience, I positioned myself as an indigenous-outsider as well as a humble young learner so that I can better relate to and have good conversations with my participants.

### **Research Design**

In this section, I describe the context of study, case selection process, and participants and school settings. Detailed descriptions about the research contexts, participant recruiting process, and backgrounds of each participant and his/her schools of the study provide more contextualized interpretations of the phenomenon and set the bounds for this multicase study (Stake, 2005).

### **Research Settings**

This study explored three Korean American social studies teachers and their social studies, global history in particular, classrooms in urban public high schools. I chose to explore three Korean American teachers working in an urban, multicultural school district for two reasons: diversity and accountability to local, state, and national standards.

First, the school district where the three teachers and their schools are located in is the one of the largest and most diverse school districts in the United States with over 1 million students in nearly 1, 700 schools. Many of those students were low-income, racial minorities who speak over 125 different languages including 30 percent of immigrants from almost 200 countries and territories (Conger, Schwartz, & Stiefel, 2007). Those immigrant students and their



parents brought diverse racial, ethnic, gender, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds to the district and its schools. The school district also had racially and ethnically diverse teaching force. From 2000 to 2002 school year, the percentage of teachers of color in its state was 22.6 percent, compared to its national average of 14 percent (Gay et al., 2003). However, recent media reports revealed that the percentage of teachers of color, especially African American teachers, who have been newly hired in the district, has fallen substantially, from 27 percent during the year of 2001 to 2001 to 13 percent in 2008 while the percentage of White teachers has stayed constant (Green, 2008). This study aims to investigate how the Korean American social studies teachers experience teaching social studies in these diverse school settings and to what extent their curricular and pedagogical practices serve diverse needs and interests of their multicultural student population.

Second, this study focuses on Korean American social studies teachers working in public schools because public institutions are held more accountable to the standards of local, state, and national agencies in comparison to private schools (Marri, 2003). Under the authority of state Department of Education, the state-mandated high-stakes test is administered in all high schools across the state. Many public schools in the district follow the state test-defined curriculum, the prescribed state curriculum with four years of social studies required (Crocco & Thornton, 2002). Studies emphasize that the mandated testing and increased emphasis on accountability provide much pressure on social studies teachers and lead to the “dumbing down of teacher work” (Costigan, Crocco, & Zumwalt, 2004, p. 129).

Considering the contexts of public schools in an urban school district, this study sheds light on Korean American teachers’ beliefs and practices of teaching social studies. In the

following section, how I selected participants and the school settings that they were working within will be discussed.

### **Case Selection**

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that qualitative researchers' site selection and sampling often begins with accessible sites based on convenience and builds on connections from the early data collection. This study used convenience and snowball sampling.

To recruit participants, I contacted Korean Education Center and Korean American Teachers Society and received Korean American social studies teachers' contact information. The president of Korean American Teachers Society named three Korean American social studies teachers who are former and present members of its organization and have positive reputations in local Korean communities. I also looked at the list of local public high schools and checked out their web pages to identify Korean American teachers. Korean American teachers were identified by their last names (Park, 2009). To obtain additional subjects, a snowball sampling method was used. I asked those early selected Korean American social studies teacher if there is Korean American social studies teachers that they might know and was able to obtain several more contact information from them. Through this process, 15 potential research participants were preliminary selected. I contacted those potential participants via emails and phone calls. I met those teachers either in their schools or nearby cafes, explained the purpose of the study, and requested to participate (Subedi, 2007).

I finally selected three Korean American social studies teachers who might well represent the diversity of teacher identities and school settings (See Table 2). Two out of three participants were America born second generation Korean Americans who were born and raised in New

York metropolitan areas. One teacher was a Korea born first generation immigrant who immigrated to the U.S. in her thirties with her families. The three participants were working in diverse school settings in terms of racial/ethnic composition of students and teachers, achievement level, general reputation, and locations. I tried to diversity the sample and research settings so that I can examine commonalities and complexities of their experiences and intragroup diversity within Korean American teachers. Detailed descriptions about each participant and his/her school settings will be provided in the next section.

### **Participants and School Contexts**

This section introduces brief background information about the three Korean American social studies teachers and the school, students, and community environments that they were working within. Detailed personal backgrounds and sociocultural experiences of each participant and his/her school contexts will be discussed more extensively in the case sketch of findings section. Pseudonyms are used in order to maintain confidentiality of the participants and their schools.

**Case 1: Mr. Joseph Moon.** Mr. Moon (pseudonym) was an eighth year social studies teacher who has been teaching global history at Millennium High School (pseudonym). He studied social sciences and earned a social studies teaching certificate in college. After four years of teaching, he achieved a master's degree in TESOL. He started teaching as a student teacher at Millennium High School where he became a full-time teacher upon graduation. Being born and raised in the New York metropolitan area, Mr. Moon considered himself a Korean "American" because of his citizenship, native language, and cultural backgrounds. However, he identified himself as Korean "immigrant" at the same time because he understood "what it is like to be

growing up in an immigrant family and having parents who are struggling with the life of immigration.” Detailed description about his personal biography and overall experiences of teaching at Millennium High School will be discussed in the findings chapter.

Millennium High School was an alternative, public high school with the mission of educating new immigrant English language learners (ELLs) who have been in the U.S. for less than four years. As of 2011, 324 students are enrolled in the Millennium High School. Its students hailed from over 50 different countries and spoke 30 languages and dialects. Forty three percent of the total student population was Hispanic, followed by 25 percent Asian, 16 percent White, and 15 percent of African American.

**Case 2: Ms. Susan Jin.** Ms. Jin was a third year social studies teacher in her early thirties. She was a second generation Korean American who was born and raised in New York. Teaching was her second career, undertaken after she worked for a government organization in Washington D.C. for two years. She studied political science and Asian studies in college and journalism and American studies during her master’s education and acquired a social studies teaching certificate in her second master’s program. Growing up under conservative Korean immigrant parents, she learned Korean at a local Korean weekend school. She knew how to read and write it, but she was not fluent in speaking. Ms. Jin was a painter who was running her own on-line gallery and a sincere Christian who loves Bible study in her church.

Excellence High School was one of nine high performing, specialized high school in its school district. Excellence High School admits students based on their scores, particularly scores on math and science, of Specialized High School Admission Test. Student graduation rate was 100 percent, and their passing percentage of the state mandated high-stakes tests were among the highest in the state. 417 students are enrolled in the school. Its student population was diverse. Sixty one

percent of the total student population in Excellence high School was Asian, followed by 17percent African American, 13percent White, and 9percent Hispanic.

**Case 3: Ms. Young Kim.** Ms. Kim was a Korea born immigrant woman in her 50s who has been teaching social studies during the 18 years in Grandville High School. She studied English literature and history in college and taught social studies in middle schools in Korea. After she came to the United States with her family in her 30s, she studied bilingual education at master's level and obtained an initial certificate of social studies education. Ms. Kim recently acquired the U.S. citizenship in order to obtain a permanent teaching license. She was a sincere Catholic and serving as a principal of Korean Sunday school in her church. She was also an active member of Korean American Teachers Society.

Grandville High School was an urban high school having more than 100 years history, serving almost 3, 000 students who were from approximately 100 countries and spoke 59 languages, including 31 percent of English language learners. Its class size was relatively big with 28 to 32 students. Hispanics were the most dominant student population (61%) followed by Asians (24 %) and African Americans (8%).

Grandville High School was one of ten high schools the state education department has deemed persistently lowest achieving. Because of its poor performance and low graduation rate, the school was once at risk to be shut down by its state educational department).

### **Data Collection**

Sources of data include observation, interviews, and artifacts. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) recommend a variety of data collection methods and sources because specific details from a wide array of data help researchers build an in-depth understanding of the case. Addressing this

recommendation, this study used multiple data collection methods, including observation, interviews, and artifacts and triangulate the data. Each source of data is detailed in more depth below.

### **Observations**

Observations provide the researcher with more natural environment of the seeing and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon (Stake, 2005). Observations of the three Korean American social studies teachers' ninth grade global history class took place during the spring semester of 2011. I observed each teacher one or two times per week, which turned out to be a minimum of 23 classroom periods of each teacher, throughout the semester (Mr. Moon – 25 periods of 70 minute class, Ms. Jin – 23 periods of 46 minute class, and Ms. Kim – 25 periods of 49 minute class).

A semester-long observation including minimum 23 classroom visits for each teacher provided extensive data on the teachers' social studies teaching practices. My classroom observation protocol focused on the three teachers' teaching experiences of global history for the two main reasons. First, global history is a course required for two years, mostly ninth and tenth grade levels. Investigating a course that all public high school students in the district allowed me to compare and contrast the three teachers' teaching practices and perceptions on the course and pedagogy and increase the generalizability of my findings.

Second, global history is a course that all the three participant teachers taught in common. Interestingly, all twelve Korean American social studies teachers that I considered and reached to recruit for my pilot study and this dissertation research taught global history in common while none of them taught U.S. history. This phenomenon interested me and led me to come up with

[Table 2] Participants and Context

Name	Age	Ethnic Identity	Years of Teaching	Certified Areas	School Name and Settings	Student Population	Teaching Subjects	Birth Place	Native Language	Religion
Mr. Joseph Moon	30s	Korean American and Korean immigrant	8 years	-Secondary Social Studies (BA) -TESOL (MA)	Millennium High School/ Independent school for newcomer students	Total 324 students (44 % Latino 25 % Asian 16% White 15% African American )	Global History (9 <sup>th</sup> grade) ESL)	New York, U.S.	English	Christian (Protestant)
Ms. Susan Jin	20s	Korean American	3 years	Secondary Social Studies (MA)	Excellence High School/ High performing specialized high school	Total 417 students (61% Asian 17% African American 13% White 9% Latino)	- Global History (9 <sup>th</sup> grade) - Economics (12 <sup>th</sup> grade)	New York, U.S.	English	Christian (Protestant)
Ms. Young Kim	50s	Korean immigrant	17 years	-Secondary Social Studies (BA in Korea and MA in US) - Bilingual (Korean) Education (MA in US)	Grandville High School/ Low performing school which was at risk to be shut down	Total 2,583 students (61% Latino 24% Asian 8% African American 5% White)	Global History (9 <sup>th</sup> grade and Integrated level ESL)	Seoul, Korea	Korean	Christian (Catholic)

the title of this study *Are they “American” enough to teach social studies?* I aimed to explore Korean American social studies teachers’ unique experiences of teaching global history and not teaching of U.S. history and examine their identification of themselves as social studies teacher of color. Investigating a course that all the Korean American social studies teachers that I contacted with enabled me to research Korean American teachers’ unique experiences of teaching social studies in American public schools and provided me with an opportunity to compare and contrast the three teachers’ teaching practices while minimizing subject matter variables in this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The major focus of observation in this proposed study was the three Korean American social studies teachers’ teaching practices and curricular and pedagogical decision makings, including their pedagogical strategies, curriculum interpretations, assessment styles, interactions and conversations with students. Physical and environmental settings of their classrooms and schools, including hallways and teachers’ lounge, were also observed. Observation protocol that I used is introduced in Appendix A.

All class periods that I observed were digitally recorded with each participant’s agreement. I kept a research journal to record my field notes, observation data, and post observation reflections.

## **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with the three Korean American social studies teachers were conducted. This study employed semi-structured interview approach purposefully in order to have “good conversations” (Ladson-Billings, 1994) with participants and help participants feel more comfortable to talk about their own perceptions about the curriculum and pedagogical



practices (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviews with those teachers enabled me to generate thick descriptions concerning their curricular and pedagogical decision making, sociocultural influences on their perceptions on social studies curriculum and pedagogical practices, and sociocultural contexts and school environments that they are situated within (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Stake, 2005).

I conducted three formal, 30 to 60 minute interviews with each Korean American social studies teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of a semester. First formal interview session focused on life history of Korean American social studies teachers, including their or their families' immigration history, personal backgrounds, childhoods, K-12 educational experiences, college/teacher education experiences, and overall social studies teaching experiences. Second formal interview delved into the participants' teaching philosophies, beliefs and perceptions about social studies curriculum, particularly state and local social studies curriculum standards, and pedagogical and assessment styles. Third formal interview explored self-reflection of their social studies teaching throughout the semester and additional information which was not captured during the previous interviews and observations. Detailed interview questions are attached in Appendix B.

I also conducted many informal interviews and casual conversations with participants before and after classroom observations besides the three formal interviews in order to investigate the Korean American social studies teachers' experiences, perceptions, and practices within more casual settings.

Interviews were conducted in English, Korean, and/or both. As a bilingual researcher, I strived to provide each participant a chance to choose interview language they feel more

comfortable. Interviews with Mr. Moon were mostly done in English. Ms. Jin used both English and Korean during the interviews. I interviewed Ms. Kim mostly in Korean. Interviews conducted in Korean were translated into English during transcribing process. All formal interviews and a majority of informal interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

### **Artifacts**

Artifacts including teacher-generated documents and classroom materials were collected. I collected the three Korean American social studies teachers' lesson plans, readings, work sheets, assessments, and other classroom artifacts that those teachers provided in their classrooms during observations and interviews because these are useful sources to examine the teachers' social studies teaching practices in their actual classrooms.

In addition, I looked at the websites of the schools the participants worked which included their teaching materials, curriculum, and school events. I also read local newspapers dealing with stories and events of those schools or participants in order to understand school contexts that participants worked and additional background information about participants.

### **Data Analysis**

This study followed seven data analysis phases that Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest for qualitative research. The seven phases include (a) organizing data, (b) immersion in data, (c) generating categories and themes, (d) coding data, (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos, (f) searching for alternative understandings, and (g) writing the report. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explain that the seven steps of qualitative data analysis is the essential process of bringing meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in this study. Throughout the process, this study adopted constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978; Strauss

& Corbin, 1994) in order to generate more balanced, cohesive interpretations of the phenomenon.

This section briefly introduces each step and explains how this study followed the process.

### **Phase One: Organizing Data**

I organized data by constructing logs of the types of data according to dates, names, and places where, when, and with whom they are generated, performing the minor editing necessary to make data retrievable, and cleaning up what seems overwhelming and unmanageable (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). At this stage, I used ATLAS.ti 6.0, a computer software program designed for the management and analysis of qualitative data, and entered the data into it. I chose ATLAS.ti 6.0 because it is one of the most useful qualitative data analysis tools which enabled me to associate codes or labels with chunks of data and to search codes for patterns (Lewis, 2004).

### **Phase Two: Immersion in Data**

During the second process of immersion in the data, researchers should read and reread through the data in order to become more familiar with the organized data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I read the organized data carefully to get a sense of the whole (Creswell, 2003). I wrote down some comments and ideas as they come to mind and created summaries of understandings that emerged (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003).

### **Phase Three: Generating Categories and Themes**

The process of generating categories and themes involves understanding patterns evidence in the data and expressed by participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Based on careful reading and reflecting, researchers can develop categories and themes which “should be internally consistent but distinct from one another” (p. 159). In this study, I generated categories and themes of the data based on constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin,

1994). I looked for significant issues, recurrent events, or notable activities in the data that becomes categories of focus. Then, I wrote about the categories that I explored while continually revising the data, comparing similarities and differences within and between each participant's data source, and searching for new understandings (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Boejie, 2002). A list of initial codes was developed based on the generated categories and themes.

#### **Phase Four: Coding Data**

I coded data using ATLAS.ti 6.0. The initially generated list of codes was entered into the ATLAS.ti program, then I assigned codes to units of data (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (2006) recommend that new understandings and codes may well emerge during the coding process, thus researchers need to reorganize and change the original coding scheme. On this stage, I employed constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and reviewed the coded units of data in order to check consistency of coding and minimize redundancy (Creswell, 2003). During this process, new codes were added, and redundant codes were reduced. A list of code is presented in Table 3.

#### **Phase Five: Offering Interpretations through Analytic Memos**

Following coding, I wrote analytic, reflective memos. Scholars emphasize the importance of analytic memo to push researchers' thinking and foster creative understanding about the phenomenon (Knight, 2002). By writing analytic memos, I organized my preliminary ideas of interpretations, summarized key points of the findings, and designed how they can be represented in the qualitative narrative by constantly revisiting the coded data (Creswell, 2003).

[Table 3] Code List

Personal, social, and cultural background	fb (family background)	
	relig (religion)	
	crie (cross-cultural/international experience)	
	k12scl (K-12 schooling experience)	
	tee (teacher education experience)	
	pscb_oth (other personal, social, and cultural backgrounds)	
School contexts	kai (Korean American identity)	
	std (students)	
	senv (school environment)	
	admclg (administrators and colleagues)	
	parent (parents)	
Overall teaching experiences and beliefs	worth (worth)	
	chal (challenges)	
	btle (beliefs in teaching, learning, and education)	
	gte (general teaching experience)	
	kat (being a Korean American teacher)	
	str_posi (positive student-teacher relation)	str_posi (positive student-teacher relation)
		str_neg (negative student-teacher relation)
Social studies curriculum: Perceptions and practices	achv (achievement)	
	eng (engagement)	
	ctz (citizenship)	
	crt (critical thinking)	
	mp (multicultural perspective)	
	global (global perspective)	
	ossc (official social studies curriculum)	
	history (perceptions on history)	
Social studies pedagogy: Perceptions and practices	wrelig (world religion)	
	text (textbook)	
	dis (discussion)	
	tech (technology)	
	pres (presentation)	
	deb (debate)	
	cre (current event)	
	expr (experiential learning)	
	ctv (controversial issue)	
	ell (english language learning)	
	coop (cooperative learning)	
	ass (assessment)	
read (reading)		
writ (writing)		

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	<u>vis_film (film)</u>
vis (visual resources)	<u>vis_art (art)</u>
	<u>vis_photo (photo)</u>
	<u>vis_map (map)</u>
<hr/>	
	<u>proj (project based learning)</u>
	<u>dfl (differentiated learning)</u>
	<u>pers (personalized teaching)</u>

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According to Patton (2002), interpretation means “attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order” (p. 480). I tried to identify and integrate understandings and findings of the phenomenon.

### **Phase Six: Searching for Alternative Understandings**

While interpreting the data, I continually searched for alternative understandings of the findings (Glaser, 1978). I constantly sought to challenge the interpretations that I generated and provide more plausible, logical, cohesive, and consistent interpretations of the phenomenon (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

### **Phase Seven: Writing the Report**

I finalized emergent understandings based on supporting data and evidence and wrote the findings section in a narrative form (Creswell, 2003).

### **IRB/Human Subject Clearances**

This study complied with the requirements set out by the Teachers College Institutional Review Board and the New York City Department of Education’s Proposal Review Committee. A detailed description of the human subject population, research methodology, time involvement, and confidentiality procedures is provided (Appendix C). The purpose of study, research procedures, time

involvement, human rights protection issues, and potential benefits and risks were explained verbally to the participants and their school administrators. Then, consents were obtained through the use of appropriate informed consent forms.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the key limitations of this study is its small sample size. While this study seeks to provide rich, in-depth descriptions about the experiences of Korean American social studies teachers' experiences in American public schools and understandings about the influence of sociocultural experiences on their curriculum decision making, this study's sample size, three Korean American social studies teachers, is relatively small. The data generated from those three teachers might be able to represent the experiences and voices of Korean American social studies teachers accurately (Joppe, 2000). The result of the study could be different if it could be conducted with a larger number of informants for a longer time.

The exploration of Korean American social studies teachers' experiences in this study lacks strong connections with how students think about and learn in their classrooms. Brok, Levy, Rodriguez, and Wubbles (2002) shows that teachers of color have more favorable perceptions of their own practices, behaviors, and relationship with students than their students do. Their study recommends that students' perceptions of teachers of color should be considered in order to have more balanced understanding about the practices of teachers of color. Moreover, Adler (2004, 2008) argues that researchers should build strong relationship between teachers' beliefs, their practices, and adolescent learning. This study addressed those suggestions in a limited way. Although I tried to take a closer look at how these Korean American social studies teachers interact with students inside and outside schools and to what extent those teachers promote

culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse students, this study focused on teachers' experiences and may lack the voices of students.

The issues of language and translation can be a significant matter. Interviews with the participants were conducted in English, Korean, and sometime both. I purposefully let each participant choose language they feel most comfortable in order to have deeper conversations and to help them open their experiences and perceptions extensively. Interviews conducted in Korean were translated into English during transcribing process. There might be no equivalent word exists in the target language. The interpretation might be heavily influenced by the ability of language translation of researcher and his/her choices and usage of terms. However, I believe that as a native Korean speaker and a former social studies teacher in Korea who have previous work experiences of translation and interpretation, I can communicate with Korean American social studies teachers effectively in both languages and translate their words successfully.

### **Chapter Summary**

This qualitative, collective instrumental multicase study explored Korean American social studies teachers' curricular and pedagogical perceptions and practices during the spring semester of 2011. Three Korean American social studies teachers, Mr. Josept Moon, Ms. Susan Kim, and Ms. Young Kim, in urban public schools who taught ninth grade global history course participated in this study. Data sources included a semester-long classroom observations, formal/informal interviews, and artifacts including teaching materials and unit plans. Data analysis followed seven data analysis phases that Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest for qualitative research.



The data collection and data analysis process helped generate findings about the three Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching social studies and their pedagogical and curricular beliefs and practices. The next chapter describes these findings.

#### IV. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I respond to this study's three research questions: (a) What are the Korean American social studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?; (b) How do the Korean American social studies teachers perceive and implement social studies curriculum and pedagogy in the realities of their classroom?; and (c) How do personal biographies and sociocultural contexts shape the Korean American social studies teachers' curricular and pedagogical decision-making?

In order to answer the research questions, I explore each teacher through a case sketch. I begin each case sketch with a personal biography and sociocultural background. This section focuses on each teacher's self-ethnoracial identification, familial background, K-12 schooling, and teacher education experience. This section is followed by a description of the school context in which each teacher is working, overall experiences of teaching profession, and being a Korean American teacher within the contexts. Next, I discuss each teacher's beliefs and perceptions about social studies curriculum, both official and enacted, and curriculum decision making practices in the global history and geography classroom. This section focuses on how each teacher understands social studies subject matter and its curriculum including textbooks, standards, and high stakes tests, and how their sociocultural backgrounds and perceptions are translated into their curricular choices. Then I explore each teacher's instructional strategies, pedagogical decision-making, and overall understandings about social studies teaching and learning. This section discusses the instructional methods each teacher utilizes, their rationale and purpose, and how their previous knowledge and sociocultural experiences emerged into their

pedagogical approach. I finish each case sketch with a discussion of each teacher's perceptions and practices of social studies curriculum and pedagogy in relation to the research questions.

[Figure 4] Overview of Chapter IV

FINDINGS	
Case 1: Mr. Joseph Moon	
Personal biography	
School context	
Perceptions and experiences: Teaching profession	
Perceptions and implementation: Social studies curriculum	
Perceptions and implementation: Social studies pedagogy	
Case summary	
Case 2: Ms. Susan Jin (Same format as above)	
Case 3: Ms. Young Kim (Same format as above)	
Chapter Summary	

### **Case 1: Mr. Joseph Moon**

#### **Personal Biography**

Mr. Joseph Moon was an eighth year social studies teacher in his 30s who has been teaching global history and geography at Millennium High School in an urban, multicultural school district. His Korean parents and grandparents emigrated to the U.S. seeking a better life in the late 1970s.

Mr. Moon identified himself as a dual identity Korean: Korean American and Korean immigrant. Mr. Moon considered himself a Korean American because he was “born in America, this is the culture that he knows best, English, the language that he is speaking is the language that he feels most comfortable with.” He was an “Anti-Korean” growing up resisting being a Korean and wanting to be as American as possible and experiencing growing pains of identity in his teen years. During the first interview, Mr. Moon shared his childhood as follows:

I remember growing up like kindergarten, and some would say “What are you?” If I say Korean”, then they asked “Where is it?” But I didn’t know where Korea was, anything about Korea. So I hated to be Korean... There were many Korean immigrants in the church that I went to. I would fight with them all the time, and I was often bit up as I made fun of them like their languages and accents... Yes. I was trying to put stigma on them. I thought I was better... And being rebellious, rebelling against my parents and their culture.

He, at the same time, identified himself as Korean immigrant because he understood “what it is like to be growing up in an immigrant family and having parents who are struggling with acculturating this culture, the difficulty trying to kind of balance between your native culture and American culture.” Later in his childhood, he got along with many friends whose cultural and ethnic backgrounds were very diverse and with Korean American peers at a local Korean protestant church. Born a Protestant Christian, Mr. Moon maintained devout lifelong Christian faith. Like many other Korean immigrants, Korean church was the place he built his Korean ethnic networks (Min, 1996).

He also confessed that he was “pretty much like a C student” by saying “I hated school in my entire life because the curriculum never connected to me, and I never understood why I need to be in school.” He was not a student who lived up to the model minority myths (Lee, 2009). He failed in math and science. However, he excelled in English and took AP English. Social studies was not the subject that he excelled and felt to be connected. “Copying down notes, chalk and talk” was his memory of K-12 social studies education.

What changed his professional life was *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) that he read in Foundation of Education course during his college freshman year. He was deeply impressed by Freirean education for liberation and social change. He became interested in the issues of equity and social justice in education. The course served as a spring board to make him

think critically about why school was not meaningful to him and to help him work hard to become a teacher. He studied social sciences and earned a social studies teaching certificate in college. After four years of teaching social studies for English language learners (ELLs), he wanted to know better about his students and their learning styles and obtained a master's degree in TESOL.

He started teaching as a student teacher at Millennium High School. Mr. Moon purposefully chose to do his student teaching at a multicultural, urban school while most of his cohorts preferred to be placed at suburban schools. Mr. Moon described his student teaching as a life time experience full of inspiration and excitement. He liked the cultural diversity of the school, the student population, teachers, and felt strongly connected to the urban, multicultural school environment with which he was familiar and grown up. He reflected on himself being “a young, passionate, and confident teacher with energy back then.” He became a full-time teacher upon graduation

### **School Context**

Millennium High School was an alternative, public high school with the mission of educating new immigrant ELLs who have been in the U.S. for less than four years. The students hailed from over 50 different countries and spoke 30 languages and dialects, including 111 Spanish speakers, followed by 56 Chinese and 32 French. Forty three percent of the total student population was Hispanic, followed by 25 percent Asian, 16 percent White, and 15 percent of African American.

Millennium High School was programmed on a 16 week semester schedule. Students were divided into yearlong interdisciplinary clusters that are organized around a particular theme.

Each cluster was composed of approximately 60-75 students and a team of four teachers, one from each of the major subject areas. The cluster was further divided into three strands, or classes, of 20-25 students each. Each cluster team of teachers was responsible for collaborating on, creating, updating, and implementing their own curricula each year. Students were not necessarily grouped according to language, achievement, age, or grade level.

Mr. Moon belonged to a cluster named “Origins and Perspectives,” composed of about 70 percent of freshmen and 30 percent of repeating ninth grade students. Mr. Moon noted that a majority of the repeating students “had not gone to school, or their formal schooling had been interrupted by many reasons before coming to America.” Their English proficiency level was low.

He highly favored the cluster approach because he can discuss diverse origins of humanities and perspectives that his newcomer immigrant students brought in his global history and geography class through interdisciplinary approaches. He also liked the cooperative atmosphere of the school which enabled him to share his ideas of students, curriculum development, and interdisciplinary lessons with teachers in other departments and to serve the best interest of his students. Mr. Moon proudly noted that Millennium High School was a growing academic community providing safe and friendly learning environments for newcomers.

Adopting project-based approach, Millennium High School classrooms were generally structured around the completion of projects and problem-solving activities in cooperative groups. At the conclusion of each semester, all students were required to present and defend a cluster portfolio which demonstrates their progress and mastery in the subject areas covered in their interdisciplinary clusters. A state-mandate test which served as a graduation requirement for

a majority of students in the school district was waived in the Millennium High School. Mr. Moon liked the fact that teachers at the school can have more freedom and autonomy to design their own interdisciplinary, theme-based curriculum which better serves the complex needs and academic interests of newcomer students without pressure from the mandated state test and standards. School administrators had been highly supportive of the curricular approach and let teachers have authorities on their curricular and pedagogical choices.

### **Perceptions and Experiences: Teaching Profession**

**I am like a fixture of this school.** Growing up in an immigrant family having cultural struggles within local urban, multicultural communities, Mr. Moon believed that Millennium High School was a good place for him to fit well and function best as a social studies teacher of color who better connect to the newcomers and provides meaningful educational opportunities serving their needs. Based upon his memories and experiences of living in low-income, minority inner-city neighborhoods, he was well aware of the newcomer ELLs' inner-city life styles and potential hurdles in learning a new language and making a cultural adjustment, which become even more complicated by social, cultural, and economic difficulties often associated with immigrants, such as poverty and experiences of discrimination (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009).

He was a teacher who was always surrounded by students in hallways or during lunch hours. Not only Asians but also students from other ethnoracial backgrounds often came to talk to him about basketball, college, and varied issues of schooling and families. Because “looking Asian and an immigrant”, Mr. Moon felt that students “definitely related to” him, appreciated the fact that he has immigrant background like them, and felt comfortable around him. His

administrators, colleagues, and student teachers that I met also spoke highly of his capabilities of engaging with the culturally diverse immigrant youth and successful teaching career at the Millennium High School. “I am like a fixture of this school,” he said.

If I was in a suburban school where there is no Asian student, I can say that can be very different and difficult for me. But I think in this school, it works well. It (being a teacher of color) can be my advantage. It doesn't hurt me.

Despite his stellar reputation, recognition, and popularity, he admitted that new immigrant ELL was a “very difficult population to teach because they don't speak the language. And it was hard to teach when I can't communicate with them.” He also confessed that his ideals for Freirean philosophy of education for social justice had faded away after his first two years of teaching the population. For the first couple of years, he disliked that fact that he had to teach from very basic academic skills and disciplines. In particular, as the school was “getting a huge influx of lower functioning students”, especially Chinese new immigrants during the recent years, Mr. Moon and his colleagues had been facing even harder challenges of teaching and serving complex academic needs of their new student population.

How to open the notebook, how to place pens and papers, how to do their homework, like basic schooling skills. I spent maybe two months have students to take out their notebook and pencil, walking around classroom and checking “Where's your notebook?”, like things that we do in elementary school.

However he still believed that he was practicing education for social justice on a basic level. He liked the fact that he can “help students who might not have any sort of education in his motherland and start a new school life in the U.S.” Although he needed to teach “everything from the beginning”, which made him feel that he was doing a trivial job sometimes, he thought



it was very rewarding experience that students showed differences from the very first of month of their school and after a year.

**Is Mr. Moon American?** Meanwhile, Mr. Moon had been struggling with how he as an American citizen and public school teacher of Korean descent is viewed by others and thinking how he himself can define his professional identity. Once one of his colleagues did a lesson titled “Is Mr. Moon American?” in his U.S. history classroom discussing what American identity is. A half of students in the class said Mr. Moon is American while the other half said he is not. Although Mr. Moon thought it was an interesting discussion, he felt the authenticity of his identity as an American citizen was questioned. He pointed out pervasive racial biases people have against people of color by saying:

If you don't look (like) American, you will be judged. For example, when you look at me, do you see American?...I was born in America, and this is the culture that I know best, the language that I am speaking is the language that I feel most comfortable with it. Everything culturally in that sense about me is American. But I am not considered as American because I look different. My background and just how I look like makes me Korean.

Facing dominant racial stereotypes and claiming a legitimate identity as an authentic American, Mr. Moon seemed to selectively choose and present his cultural identity depending on the situations. At the Millennium High School, he was known to be a highly loud, energetic, and active figure whose characteristics contradict the stereotypes of Asians as being quiet and passive. “Good morning! Que Passo?” His loud greetings in multiple different languages at the beginning of his class often resounded throughout the classroom and hallway. His big, tall, and muscled body image, fluent English proficiency, and weight lifting class he taught as an elective course also contradicted the typical image of an Asian immigrant male.

Meanwhile, Mr. Moon half-jokingly presented himself as a Korean nationalist who advocates Korean power and pride to his students. He frequently said “You don’t know where Korea is? Somebody just failed my class” or “What is the most beautiful peninsula in the world? Korea! Because that is where my mama is from.” Students jokingly responded to his comments by saying “Oh, no! I know where Korea is. It is the most beautiful country” or rather arguing “No! Mexico is the best because my family is from Mexico.” Mr. Moon often concluded these conversations with the statement that people value their own origins and perspectives and that every culture is beautiful in its own way.

One interesting point Mr. Moon figured out was that he, among many other teachers who are from other countries, was the only teacher in Millennium High School who often talked about his country of origin and got away from being heavily nationalistic. Mr. Moon and I discussed that his easygoing personality, strong “Americanness” seen on the other side of him, and school culture celebrating diversity gave him a leeway to get away from the image of Asian nationalist and selectively present his identity (Merseeth, Sommer, & Dickstein, 2008).

In this section, I discussed Mr. Moon’s overall perceptions and experiences of teaching profession and the impacts of his race, ethnicity, immigration background, childhood experiences, and current school contexts that shaped his perceptions and experiences. In the next section, I will explore Mr. Moon’s perceptions and practices of social studies curriculum and multiple personal and sociocultural influences on his curricular positioning.

### **Perceptions and Implementation: Social Studies Curriculum**

**Toward a truly global-oriented social studies curriculum.** Working with newcomer youth for eight years, Mr. Moon understood that current social studies curriculum is “definitely

too Eurocentric” and marginalizes “so called the third world where most of his students are from.” Referring to the large influx of immigrant students from East Asia and Latin America during the last decade in Millennium High School, Mr. Moon expressed his frustration with the official curriculum which “simply touches upon China and does not teach much about Latin America.” Citing an example of Renaissance, Mr. Moon discussed that the official curriculum standards do not include intellectual, social, and scientific movements that happened on the other parts of the world, and thus reinforce Eurocentric viewpoints. He also pointed out that the official curriculum does not provide much attention to the Latin American revolution which might be a highly significant and critical historical event for many of his Hispanic immigrant students. Thus, he poignantly criticized that traditional social studies education highlights Western heritage and narrowly defined national citizenship without consideration of the ever increasing cultural diversity in the U.S. and a broader global society. He argued that “It is not going to work” in his classroom as it did not resonate with him at all throughout his K-12 education.

As Quijcho and Rios (2000) discussed, Mr. Moon’s personal backgrounds of academic and cultural struggle of schooling helped him discover and name the Eurocentric worldviews within the official curriculum which create uninviting or even hostile learning environment for newcomer ELL students. Mr. Moon frequently faced with the cultural resistance against the dominant discourse of global history in the textbooks and the feelings of marginalization that his newcomer students vocally express in his classroom. During a unit on ancient Mesoamerican civilization, Mr. Moon’s Hispanic immigrant students revealed their complaints and frustrations about European colonization and imperialism by asking the following question:

You know what, when I see the Aztecs and the Incas, Spanish always take gold. My question is why always, always Spain came and they took something good? Why? I mean, why Spain? How they always come? How did Spain start? So stupid!

Given his own experiences of academic resistance and marginalization during his K-12 schooling, Mr. Moon demonstrated empathy for his students' rejection against the Eurocentric discourses presented within the official social studies curriculum (Ozbalas, 2008). When he faced with this type of comments and even stronger angers from his students, Mr. Moon tried to provide students with opportunities to express their ideas and elaborate their thoughts on the dominant Eurocentric views on the current global history.

His and his students' critical view on the official social studies curriculum seemed to serve as a momentum for his attempts to create more global-oriented social studies curriculum. After rigorous discussions with his colleagues in the Origins and Perspective cluster, Mr. Moon cut down his global history curriculum extensively and shifted its approach to global, multicultural citizenship education with emphasis on critical thinking, cross-cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, and historical empathy development. Mr. Moon discussed various issues of curriculum reform with his colleagues in weekly teacher cluster meetings to find ways to make his curriculum portray previously marginalized cultures in a balanced way and more responsive to his students. He figured out that with the state standards, social studies is "burdened with things that don't really need to be there." Thus, he decided to "pick topics that are important with specific skills" and "spend more time for each unit, not rush, to build the key skill sets" because "if they come across, whatever history later on they know what to do to find answers themselves."

Teaching ancient civilizations during the first semester of global history and geography course, Mr. Moon put a great deal of emphasis on Ancient Sumer, Mesoamerica, Egypt, and China instead of Greece and Rome. He stated that the cultures of his students should be heard more and their origins and perspectives should be explored further. By doing so, he hoped his students find meanings of learning global history and gain multiple angles and critical perspectives to understand and interpret history (Almarza, 2001). Mr. Moon explained his rationale of the new curriculum as follows:

Compared to Greece and Rome, Mesoamerica might not contribute to the modern civilization that much. But that doesn't mean that it doesn't deserve to be taught. I think it is fun, their stories are great, more colorful (Mr. Moon laughed loudly) so that kids can make great stories out of it...I know in the state mandated test, questions about Mesoamerica would be just three or four. So, in terms of the test, I don't have to spend much time for Mesoamerica. But I think it's important to let them know about it.

For example, he taught a unit on China addressing dynamic aspects of its history, geography, and culture and connecting its past and present for four weeks. Lessons included geographical characteristics of China and surrounding regions, topographical map making group projects, myths of the Great Wall and Shi Huangdi, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, vocabulary learning, and controversial issues of contemporary China and independence of Tibet.

His curricular approach infused with global and multicultural perspectives seemed to have greater academic as well as emotional appeal to his newcomer ELLs (Gay et al., 2003). When Mr. Moon introduced rich ancient history, religious beliefs, and cultural artifacts of Middle East, his Muslim students vocally expressed their deep appreciation multiple times by saying "Thank you for respect, Mr." With excitement, they took leading roles in discussions and activities by providing extensive descriptions about how different groups of Muslims believe in

and practice Islam and what Islam means to them. In particular, several Indonesian and Bangladeshi Muslim students in his class liked the fact that Mr. Moon challenged the pervasive images of violence and Middle East which are often associated with Islam and rather emphasized a large number of Muslim population and spread of Islam in different Asian regions. In the following section, I will explain how Mr. Moon's beliefs and passion for the truly global social studies curriculum led his curricular reconstruction and creation of World Religion curriculum.

**Curriculum reconstruction: World Religion curriculum.** Instead of teaching world civilization by taking a chronological or regional approach, Mr. Moon taught World Religion curriculum by putting religion at the center of the global history curriculum. The curriculum followed the major themes and topics required within the mandated state curriculum standards, but focused on world religions and perspectives and origins out of them compared to other mainstream classrooms. He elaborated his rationale of the curriculum as follows:

I think good understanding of the world comes from perspectives that student learn from world religion because there are definitely the way people think, their perspectives to see the world as well as what is important in their lives. And students should fully understand others' beliefs and respect each other's cultures and perspectives. I think it is great especially in this school setting because we have such diversity in world religions.

Throughout the semester, students learned Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and compared their religious beliefs, world views, rituals, and the lives of people influenced by the religions. Mr. Moon looked comfortable and confident about talking religion and even controversial issues related to different religions.

As Subedi (2006) discussed, Mr. Moon believed that teachers should be knowledgeable about what they believe and what others believe in order to teach religions in an open way and to have candid, meaningful conversations with students. Therefore, he tried to study and understand

different religions by visiting a local Hindu temple, reading Koran, or listening stories from his orthodox Jewish colleagues. He displayed religious symbols like statues of Buddha and Hindu gods and kept various religious books including the Torah, teaching of Dalai Lama, Koran, a series of Hindu myths, and many others in his classroom.

Students liked the fact that Mr. Moon was highly knowledgeable of diverse religions and exhibits high respect to them. When Mr. Moon showed his bilingual Christian Bible (English and Spanish), a number of his Hispanic immigrant students clapped and said “Oh, I have the same book” and “Thank you, Mr! That is what we study Christianity.” Muslim students in his class expressed their deep appreciation toward Mr. Moon when they found out that Mr. Moon kept Koran covered with nice cloth and placed it on the highest place in his classroom as the way Muslims treat it.

When he started the first lesson on the World Religion curriculum, Mr. Moon conducted a ‘Student Religion Survey’ and asked students to read other students’ answers about their religious beliefs and world views. While discussing diverse religious practices and perspectives of students in Millennium High School, Mr. Moon asked students to be very respectful when they talk about religion by saying that “When we talk about someone’s religion, it is like talking about their mama. It is a very sensitive and important topic for our lives. Even though you have different opinions, that doesn’t mean that you can say they are stupid.”

Despite their limited English speaking skills, students actively and candidly expressed their curiosities, opinions, and sometimes frustrations toward different religious beliefs, discussed why they needed to study religion while it can be a very controversial topic, and demonstrated their willingness to study and understand diverse religions. Ms. Moon hoped that

his new immigrant students would be able to develop cross-cultural competency, accept other people's beliefs, and critically analyze how religion influences one's way of thinking and behavior throughout the curriculum (Dallavis, 2011).

Of course, Mr. Moon faced with multiple conflicts and disagreements from some students while teaching religion. He shared an anecdote about how he addressed the issue with an upset Chinese student after a lesson on Dalai Lama:

When I taught Buddhism and showed a video of Dalai Lama and his speech, one of my students emailed me, and he was quite upset about the fact that I showed the Dalai Lama lecture. He was upset at the fact that students clapped at the person who is known to perpetrate the deaths of many people in China. Because of the violence happened a couple of years ago. And he was upset that he discussed about a person who is against their country. And then I gave him an email back talking about what is education. I explained should I just omit the sensitive topics? And I also talked about his own country. Censorship in China, I mean do you think it is healthy? Again in American school, this is a part of school curriculum and also an important part of being a critical thinker to learn about other viewpoints. And I explained him that you can make your own decisions after you learn about all different perspectives and ideas not just censor them. And then he understood that.

He admitted that it was natural for young students to experience a hard time to understand different gods and worldviews which are significantly different from theirs, their parents', and their religious leaders'. He was skillful of discussing the issue with his students at the beginning of the semester and transforming their conflicts and disagreements into educative moments.

The purpose of this [study] is not to change your belief or to convert you. That's the word convert, to change someone's belief. What we are going to focus is how the world is affected by religion. Religion is the cause of many wars. It is also the cause of many good things in the world. The most beautiful architecture, the most beautiful buildings, the most beautiful statues and things... Religions have been done a lot of good things and important things in the world, and it does cause a lot of pain as well.

He also added that he is not going to avoid teaching a sensitive topic like religion just to take an easy way and keep away from controversy.



**Social justice and equity.** As a number of research on teachers of color pointed out (Burant, Quioco, & Rios, 2002; Rhee, 2008; Zong, 2010), teachers of color are aware of multiple forms of racism imbedded within schooling and society, willing to name them, and committed to social justice and multicultural agenda. Influenced by Freire (1970) and his notion of education for equity and critical pedagogy, Mr. Moon demonstrated his critical awareness of racism and inequity within the official curriculum and willingness to frame his World Religion curriculum around the social justice and equity standpoint. He mentioned that the current curriculum which emphasizes Western heritage while silences the other parts of the world is neither inviting nor appealing to his newcomer students, thus designed to fail the students.

His World Religion curriculum investigated diverse forms and issues of social injustice, such as discriminatory acts and biases in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender within his World Religion curriculum. He started his first lesson on Islam with prejudices and biases people have against Muslim. In the lesson, the whole class honestly revealed their negative images and perceptions toward Islam and Muslims, for example, terrorism in the Middle East, violence, or extremists, and discussed how their perceptions were formed. Mr. Moon showed a list of top 10 largest national Muslim populations: Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, and China. Students expressed their surprises saying that Saudi Arabia and a number of Middle East countries are not in the list and that Islam is very popular and widely spread religion around the world. Mr. Moon added that only 18 percent of Muslims live in the Arab world and that there are more Chinese Muslims in the world than Muslims in Saudi Arabia. A number of students noted that that was a very interesting fact to know and that they will not judge Muslims, their nationalities, and origins but see their diversity instead.

In the following lessons, Mr. Moon spent a great amount of time on women's role and contribution in Islamic society, teaching of Koran and its similarities with teachings of other religions, and revisiting Islamic arts. These types of social justice agendas continued in other units, such as underrepresented role of women and their contributions to ancient to modern civilizations, marginalization of Tibetan Buddhism, challenging prejudices against Orthodox Jews and the meaning of Judaism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Drawing upon Freirean notion of education for liberation and critical pedagogy, Mr. Moon aimed to provide equal educational opportunities for his students to make meanings out of the curriculum by contesting the pervasive socially injustice views and practices around the world. He hoped his students to excel and become agents who can challenge the pervasive stereotypes and discriminatory practices of the mainstream society.

Meanwhile, Mr. Moon's attempt at Freirean notion of social justice education demonstrated some limitations and shortcomings at the same time. As Mr. Moon himself admitted, it was evident that he tended to fold the controversial issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion into "issue of culture" (Levstik, 2000, p. 292) and to adopt soft touch approaches to deal with the issues. In his most of the lessons on the social justice agenda, he avoided using strong terms such as racism and sexism through a lens of power and ideology. During an interview with me, he admitted that he might "never explicitly teach about race or racism and expanded its meanings in a deeper level," but rather took an "informal" and "implicit" way to investigate it. Mr. Moon acknowledged that this was a new finding that he realized throughout the research period and demonstrated his willingness to find the ways to do that. Mr. Moon's effort of social justice-oriented curriculum and teaching for equity seemed to be an on-going

process that he continuously updated, evaluated, and improved, rather than a perfect curriculum packet, thus have great potentials.

This section focused on Mr. Moon's understandings and practices of the social studies curriculum. I will explore Mr. Moon's pedagogical decision-making and practices.

### **Perceptions and Implementation: Social Studies Pedagogy.**

**Employing literacy strategies and interdisciplinary instruction.** After first two years of teaching, Mr. Moon felt that he really needed to know more about how to teach ELLs due to the ever increasing cultural as well as linguistic diversity among newcomer students in Millennium High School. He suggested that social studies teachers should embed literacy strategies in a way that enables their students to read, write, and become critical thinkers about the specific topics they are learning and make literacy instruction inseparable from content-area instruction. While pursuing TESOL degree, he understood that his new immigrant students need to build English language proficiency in order to learn social studies contents and develop critical thinking skills more effectively and that he should incorporate English language teaching learning strategies into global history and geography curriculum in a balanced way.

TESOL education is great for learning how to teach "well" because you really have to make it clear because, and you also assume nothing of these students. It's total scaffolding, total modeling, and I think that's great teaching. If you model and scaffold enough, then students can build their own knowledge upon that...It (TESOL) really helps you to think the learner who is at zero, also challenging the learning who is at 10. And to teach not to the middle what most teachers do. You know, to try and differentiate your instruction, so that you meet the needs of most of your students.

His academic as well as professional background of TESOL seemed to help him utilize differentiated learning approaches for students having different levels of English proficiency and cultural backgrounds, construct student-centered learning environments, and provide necessary

academic supports that recent immigrant students need. Mr. Moon was skillful in employing English language teaching strategies while teaching global history and geography contents and developing interdisciplinary pedagogies to encourage students' literacy skill development and academic engagement (Cruz & Thornton, 2008; Salinas, 2006). Teaching Hindu myths, Mr. Moon went over new vocabularies with a word wall within a whole group and then divided small reading groups based on students' English proficiency levels to help students support each other to read and understand the myths in class. Then, he asked students to draw a comic strip summarizing a part of stories they read as homework and organized group storytelling activity so that all students could have a chance to talk and make a cohesive story.

**Advocacy of bilingual policy.** Mr. Moon allowed students to communicate in their native language when they worked in group. He spoke Spanish or Chinese to some of his students when they were having a hard time to understand classroom activities, projects, or homework. He confessed that he "ended up speaking broken Spanish" but tried to connect to his students and provide inviting learning environments for them. As Salazar and Franquiz (2008) illustrate, he believed that encouraging communications in students' native languages not only aided their English learning but also supported their collaborative learning. Consequently, he decided not to stick to English only policy.

Mr. Moon's childhood experiences of language learning and struggles with his family seemed to provide a great influence on shaping his belief in bilingual education. Growing up in an immigrant family with working parents, Mr. Moon was raised by his grandmother who could only speak Korean, and naturally the only language he spoke until he was five was Korean. When he went to kindergarten, his teacher sent a note to his parents saying that they should

Speak to him only in English and that is the only way he would be able to learn English. Multiple familial and cultural struggles and identity confusion he had to deal with followed later on:

Then my parents tried to speak to me in English. But what happened was that they speak to me in Korean, and I speak to them in English once I went to school and hung out with other kids. Then I became anti-Korean, even up until eighth grade... When I moved to a town where there were many Koreans, then I first listened to Korean music and learned language that kids used. But it was too late to learn Korean again at that point, one of my biggest regrets of my life.

While he strongly supported his students' English language acquisition which is highly significant to their academic achievements and social adjustments, he also believed that maintaining and being proud of one's origins and culture is as equally important as speaking English fluently.

**Creating a collaborative learning community.** In order to improve students' literacy skill, content knowledge development, and a culture of academics in the classroom, Mr. Moon sought to create a learning community where his students felt comfortable and construct collaborative knowledge with others. Building of learning community which offers climate of mutual respect and support to help students build positive relationships and motivation was a significant aspect of Ms. Moon's pedagogy (Banks, 2007; Marri, 2009). Mr. Moon frequently included collaborative group work, such as peer editing and group research project on Buddhism.

During the collaborative group projects, no student was left out although each showed a different level of participation. When students had a small group discussion about their WebQuest-based research project on Buddhist culture, each group member took turns voluntarily and did their presentation within support from their group members. Many students stayed patient when their peers murmured and kept their questions and comments until their classmates

finished presentation. After each presentation, most students exchanged positive comments, for example “Good job, man” or “You did so well” and cheered up each other. Mr. Moon believed that “students having a wide variance regarding language proficiency and cultural background can provide positive influences on each other” and that “having heterogeneous, authentic conversations, and motivating to work each other hard, the whole class can be high functioning.” His approach to create a collaborative learning community seemed to be based on his high expectations and care for newcomer students as a group and their academic engagement and success. He firmly believed that all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or English skill, can achieve academic success if their opportunities to find a relevance of their lives to school are supported by caring teachers and if a safe, open learning forum for them is given (Pang, 2009). In that sense, his collaborative learning community seemed to provide ample opportunities of academic engagement and motivation to his students.

**Visually-focused, technology-based instruction.** Unlike typical text-dependent social studies courses, Mr. Moon’s class included ample visual resources and graphic organizers, including maps, video clips, pictures of cultural artifacts, and graphs, which made social studies contents as well as English language learning more comprehensible (Cruz & Thornton, 2009; Salinas et al., 2008). Teaching Islam, Mr. Moon used images of Islamic arts, including ancient text of Koran, Mihrab mats, lamp, candle holders, and helped students appreciate Islamic arts, find symbols used in the arts and meanings of the symbols, and discussed how the art works reflect Islam.

During his last lesson on Judaism, the movie *The Chosen* (1981) served as a powerful visual source to describe stories of two Jewish families, with the historical events of the 1940s

including the revelation of the Holocaust and the struggle for the creation of the state of Israel. Students had a discussion about how different groups of Jews and their religious ideas were, what pervasive biases people had against Jews, and how students could understand Jews and Judaism after watching the movie. A majority of the students confessed that they thought orthodox Jews were “boring”, “looking ugly”, “quiet”, “too religious”, and “strange people.” However, as a result of the lesson, many found that Judaism and Jewish cultural heritage of were very interesting and were impressed by how Jews built their familial and social relationships based on love and faith throughout the movie. Several students mentioned that they would not be judgmental against Jews anymore. Mr. Moon also added that orthodox Jews had a lot of passion and faith in their lives and praised advanced cultural and religious tolerance of his students. Then he introduced Christianity as the next religion that students would study, which had close connections and similarities with Judaism.

Likewise, he frequently utilized technology-based teaching resources, such as PowerPoint presentations, web-based materials, and video clips equipped with Smart Board. Teaching Buddhism, he designed group research projects based on WebQuest. His students navigated Buddhist studies web pages, looked at images of Buddhist gods, temples, and symbols, and completed worksheet by answering the guiding questions for their research. This WebQuest-based research on Buddhism covered a wide range of previously marginalized regions within the official curriculum including Tibet, Indonesia, Japan, and other countries in Asia. Using technology-based teaching materials, visual sources, and activities designed with multiple resources seemed essential instructional method for his English language learners and provide strong academic appeal to them (Salinas, 2006).

This section examined Mr. Moon' pedagogical beliefs and practices within his global history class and the influences of his personal as well as sociocultural contexts on his pedagogy. In the next section, I discuss Mr. Moon's experiences of teaching social studies and his curricular and pedagogical perceptions in relation to the research questions of this study

### **Case Summary**

This section summarizes and provides a discussion of Mr. Moon's experiences of teaching profession and curricular and pedagogical practices shaped by his personal experiences as well as multiple sociocultural contexts in relation to the following three research questions of this study.

**What are the Korean American social studies teacher's perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?** Mr. Moon was a committed social studies teacher for newcomer ELLs. Drawing upon his cultural background of growing up in a Korean immigrant family and long-held academic struggles and resistance during K-12 schooling, Mr. Moon sought to better address academic interests and needs of new immigrant students. Freirean notion of education for social justice, equity, and liberation largely influenced his beliefs on education and motivation to become a teacher. He felt strongly connected to his new immigrant students who experience cultural and linguistic struggles and glad to teach at the Millennium High School because he can function best for those newcomer students. Mr. Moon occasionally experienced that his American citizenship and legitimacy as a teacher was challenged by pervasive racial stereotypes against immigrants and people of color within the school and society. Thus Mr. Moon wanted to be a cross-cultural agent who speaks for multiculturalism and social justice, and challenges racial stereotypes.



**How do the Korean American social studies teachers perceive and implement social studies curriculum and pedagogy in the realities of their classroom?** Mr. Moon created the World Religion curriculum prioritizing teaching global, multicultural perspectives and social justice agenda to improve the new immigrant youth's academic achievement and engagement. He poignantly criticized the current official social studies standards and textbooks which marginalizes the stories of people of color and immigrants and reinforces Eurocentric views. The World Religion curriculum and his pedagogical strategies to teach it emphasized global awareness, created collaborative learning communities, encouraged critical thinking and multicultural perspectives development, and incorporated literacy strategies with visual and technological aids within global history curriculum. The curriculum exhibited academic as well as emotional appeal to his newcomer ELLs.

**How do personal biographies and sociocultural contexts shape the Korean American social studies teacher's curricular and pedagogical decision-making?** His immigrant family backgrounds, bilingual ability, identity confusion and academic struggles during K-12 schooling, and current school contexts including supportive administrators and colleagues provided a significant impact on his transformative curricular interpretation and innovative pedagogical practices. As a teacher growing up with multiple academic and cultural struggles in an Asian immigrant family, he maintained high student expectations and capitalized on new immigrant ELLs' language and cultural diversity to enrich his curriculum instead of ignoring them as distractions. His powerful teacher education experiences and TESOL degree became solid foundation for his effective social studies curriculum and pedagogy for the newcomers.

In this section, I summarized Mr. Moon's experiences of teaching global history, curricular and pedagogical decision-making, and multiple sociocultural and personal contexts shaping his experiences. Mr. Moon's teaching experiences and their similarities and differences with the other two teachers in relation to the three research questions will be discussed further in chapter five.

### **Case 2: Ms. Susan Jin**

#### **Personal Biography**

Ms. Susan Jin was a third year social studies teacher in her early thirties. She had been teaching various social studies subjects at Excellence High School which located in a multiethnic, low-income, urban community. She was a second generation Korean American who was born and raised within a large Korean town in an urban area. She learned Korean from her immigrant parents and a local Korean weekend school, thus `was able to speak Korean while she considers her fluency as a third grade level. Her family kept Korean customs, foods, and life styles and maintained close relationships with their relatives in Korea which resulted in Ms. Jin's strong connections to her families and her "mother land". As a sincere Christian, She has gone to a local Korean church ever since she was a child and got along with Korean American friends in the church.

While studying political science and Asian studies in college, Ms. Jin participated in an exchange student program at one of the prestigious universities in Korea. She recalled the exchange student experience in Korea as one of the most "coolest" experiences in her life because she was able to explore Korean culture, meet local college students, and travel many different places which she had only heard before.

Her international experiences and academic backgrounds in college led her academic pursuit of journalism and American studies at master's level in an Ivy League university and eventually her first career at government in Washington DC. Like many Korean parents who want their daughter to become a school teacher based upon their beliefs that teaching is a stable, less demanding, but well-respected career which provides relatively equal opportunities to women (Min, 2005), Ms. Jin's parents always wanted her to be a teacher. But she frankly revealed that she was very opposed to it because she had always thought that she wanted to do "something greater." However, her career at DC was quite disappointing for her. It was not as challenging as she hoped it would be. Moreover, being an Asian woman within the predominantly White, male environment was a unique experience for her. She recalled her experience as a government officer as follows:

When I lived in Maryland, everybody was White, you know. All my coworkers, people working in the government, and neighborhood were all White. And I am like the only Asian. People looked at me like "What are you doing here?"... So I quit.

She thought the government officer job was different from what she expected, figured out "it is not a place for an Asian woman" after two years of her career, and decided to change her career.

She chose teaching as a second career with her long held dream of "making a difference." She acquired a secondary social studies teaching license through her second master's degree. She did her student teaching practicum at Excellence High School and was hired upon graduation.

### **School Context**

Founded in 2002, Excellence High School was one of the district's nine highest performing, specialized high school. Excellence High School admitted students based on their scores of Specialized High School Admission Test. The mission of the school was to nurture and

develop a community of diligent learners and independent thinkers. Affiliated with a local public college, Excellence High School was dedicated to providing a rigorous curriculum emphasizing the sciences and mathematics. The school also shared the college facilities, including library and gym, and students had opportunities to enroll in the introductory level college courses.

All courses at Excellence High School were offered at the honors level. All teachers possessed master's or higher level degrees. Student graduation rate was 100 percent, including four-year graduation rate of 97 percent, and attendance rate 98.5 percent. Their passing percentage of the state mandated high-stakes tests were among the highest in the state. With a few exceptions, almost all students went to college including a number of students being accepted in Ivy League universities every year.

Student population of the Excellence High School was diverse. Sixty six percent of the total student population was Asian, followed by 14.5 percent African American, 10 percent White, and 9 percent Hispanic. A majority of Asian and Hispanic students grew up in first-generation immigrant families, thus had bilingual abilities and maintain cultural heritages of their mother land. About four hundred (400) students were enrolled in the school.

Ms. Jin satisfied with academically focused, hardworking educational environment of Excellence High School with motivated students and professional staffs. Ms. Jin was cognizant that her high achieving students and their parents were highly enthusiastic as well as sensitive to academic success. She had a good understanding about their academic enthusiasm due to her experiences of growing up in an Asian family who took her education very seriously and had high expectations toward her. Although meeting the high achieving students' academic needs and addressing high expectations of their parents required a lot of time and energy, she said "I know I

cannot complain about my school. Kids are nice and well disciplined. They are *chakhae* (meaning kind in Korean) and *guiyuwoe* (meaning cute in Korean). I have a student whose mom always bakes for me. I am blessed."

In this section, I examined Ms. Jin's overall perceptions and experiences of teaching profession and the impacts of her ethnic, familial, childhood experiences, and current school contexts that shaped her teaching experiences. In the next section, I will explore Ms. Jin's perceptions and practices of social studies curriculum and multiple personal and sociocultural influences on her curricular positioning.

### **Perceptions and Experiences: Teaching Profession.**

**It is OK to be different.** Being a Korean American teacher at Excellence High School seemed to be an interesting and unique experience for her. There were two Korean American female teachers including Ms. Jin and a Korean American math teacher and dozens of Korean American and immigrant students in Excellence High School. The Korean American students often spoke in Korean to her talking about their families and academic concerns. She seemed to be a popular figure to many of her Korean students.

Ms. Jin seemed comfortable having conversations with the students in Korean. She made jokes drawing upon model minority myths and Confucian teaching on parent-child relationship, saying they must work harder and should not disgrace their Asian parents (Chen, 2009; Lee, 2009; Pang, 1998). Considering a large Asian student population, being a person of Korean descent and speaking Korean did not seem to be "othered" in Excellence High School. Korean American students and teachers easily opened up their origins, culture, and language. They looked enjoying being bilingual and multicultural. Ms. Jin often shared her stories of living with

Korean immigrant parents, celebration of Lunar New Year with her family, and her Asian American friends who had been struggling with acculturation. She answered my question of if and when she sees herself differently due to her Korean descent in the school as follows:

We live in the most global city in the world. In this school, all teachers are different. Some are white, some are Hispanics, and there are several Asian teachers as well. They are all different. And students, too. Half of students in this school are Asian Americans. It is OK to be different. Some are Christian, and other are Muslims. We are all different, and we respect that.

She seemed happy with the culturally diverse nature of her school and local communities, which was unlike the exclusively White, male dominant environment at the government office that she felt frustrated, and satisfied with her teaching career at Excellence High School.

**A balance between rapport and discipline.** Her close relationships with students were not be limited into Korean students. Ms. Jin was often surrounded by a number of students regardless their race, ethnicity, or native language during breaks and lunch time in hallways and built strong rapport with them. According to one of her students, Ms. Jin was the most popular teacher who got most high fives from students in the school. Students in her class regarded her as a humorous and smart teacher that they could relate and respect. In particular, her senior students that I met during the data collection admired her Ivy League educational backgrounds and previous government career. Ms. Jin was perceived as a young, bright, and relatable teacher by her students. Many of her students also came to her to ask advice for their academic progress, college interview and essay preparation, and extra-curricular activities before and after her class.

Although Ms. Jin built strong rapport with students, she seemed to maintain her authority as a teacher seriously, have strict student-teacher hierarchical relations, and expect a high level of mutual respect (Chen, 2009; Min, 1998). Her attempts to keep her authority and to maintain strict

student-teacher hierarchy seemed to be generated from her occasional exposes to racialized biases and jokes on her small body and younger looking image as an Asian woman (Subedi, 2008). The following interview quote from Ms. Jin exemplifies the most common racial dialogue she as an Asian woman was faced with: "My senior students, they act up. They are like "Ms. Jin, you are like my sister" because I am short and one of the youngest teachers in this school." Even though she mostly took this kind of remark as a joke, she strongly expressed that she did not want her authority and legitimacy as a teacher to be challenged by her students with any reason.

### **Perceptions and Implementation: Social Studies Curriculum.**

**Global history: All about analysis, interpretation, and engagement.** Throughout semester-long classroom observations and interviews, it is evident that Ms. Jin equated social studies education with developing critical thinking and analytic skills and nurturing culturally diverse and tolerant perspectives toward people around the world. She firmly believed that social studies curriculum should be diverse so that students can acquire “critical ideas about why such and such event happen and what leads to them” through multiple learning sources and hands-on experiences.

Her curricular choice came out of her conceptualization of history as interpretation and analysis, not a series of facts.

People think that history is boring, and it is all about memorization. But it is not, you know. It is really interesting people’s stories, and it requires lots of thinking. It is not math or science. It is not about equation or formulas. I want to break the perception.

After three years of teaching at the Excellence High School, Ms. Jin figured out that her high achieving freshmen were good at math and science and “memorizing everything, not thinking” because “that is the way they used to study in junior high.” She decided to make them think why

and how things happened from multicultural perspectives because “once they learn thinking skills, no need of memorization.” In order to challenge the idea of history as factual knowledge pervasive among her students, she decided to create social studies curriculum with emphasis on critical literacy skill development, historical empathy through experiential learning, and cultural diversity and tolerance. In the following sections, the three main components of her global history and geography curriculum are discussed.

***Focus 1: Critical literacy skills.*** Ms. Jin’s curriculum was focused on developing critical literacy skills (Ozbalas, 2008). Her curriculum incorporated an average of 40 pages of reading every week, 27 reading and writing homework assignments, and several research paper projects per semester. Readings assigned to her course included newspaper, academic journal articles, books, comics, and other sources featuring world history and contemporary issues that she selected through her own research. Ms. Jin expected that students develop their own perspectives to understand history and interpret it in diverse ways by reading multiple sources and learning how to put them together in a logical and analytic way.

Her social studies curriculum with emphasis on critical literacy skill led her to avoid using textbook as a single source of learning in her classroom.

It’s so easy to teach out of textbook. But I hate textbook. It’s so boring. Sometimes textbooks are not even completely right. I don’t think it is fair for students to just study one resource. Only one perspective! It might be even not only incorrect but also very biased. So, when you study U.S. history, U.S. history textbooks, it’s always about U.S. patriotism, like how great the United States is. Not just elementary school textbooks. All textbooks are.

As Fickel’s (2000) study of a Native American teacher’s social studies teaching practices illustrated, Ms. Jin’s notion of “social studies without a textbook” (p. 381) widened the global



history and geography content of her curriculum and expanded her students' chances to learn and access to critical literacy skills.

One of the readings that was highlighted during the semester was *The World is Flat* (2005) by Thomas Friedman. After reading the book, Ms. Jin's student had in-depth discussion on how the world has become flatten due to technology, historical events and profit competition. Based on the reading and a series of follow-up discussions, Ms. Jin asked students to make a short documentary film featuring a new interpretation of the book with supporting evidences. She also assigned a critical analysis essay project on "How un-American the Thanksgiving holiday is" with at least 30 explanations of it that students might be able to find from the book. These activities aimed to help students critically understand multiple reading sources, find supporting evidence and explanations for their arguments, and present their thoughts with diverse media sources.

***Focus 2: Hands-on, experiential learning.*** Ms. Jin's curriculum included a great deal of hands-on, experiential learning to help students obtain deeper understandings about key concepts or historical events and connect them to their lives (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). She explained her rationale of the curricular focus as follows:

If history is not hands-on, it can be very easily isolated, students do not care. They do not have emotion to it. I think they put emotion with history with writing and text, they are better engaged...I literally make them become history.

Ms. Jin designed a number of hands-on, experience-based global history and geography projects. "Goings On About Town" was a project that generated a great amount of interest and participation from her students. In this project, Ms. Jin asked students to conduct a "Culture Odyssey" by having artistic experiences, trying ethnic foods, and observing architectures

influenced by global cultural inspirations and to write a journal “critiquing these three components with a thesis that transcends them.” Based on her past experiences, she knew that a half of the students always went to Washington Square Park located in New York City and brought a picture of it describing the influence of Roman architecture manifested in it. She asked students to try “something new” and be more creative.

Students brought a great amount of pictures and colorful posters for their presentations and shared their interesting new cultural and historical experiences of the town. One student visited a barely known Catholic church and discovered interesting architectural components and religious artifacts in it. His presentation comparing the architectural and artistic characteristics of the church with European architecture and religious arts during the middle age drew attention from other students and won high praise from Ms. Jin. A number of students revealed that it was a really good opportunity for them to get to know where they live and who they live with and excavated interesting cultural artifacts they did not know before. Ms. Jin recognized that her students, living in a multicultural urban community with working parents who did not have much time to take them out on weekends and breaks, needed academic opportunities to explore their local town, experience its diverse cultural aspects which they have not tried before, and make connections with global history and culture.

***Focus 3: Cultural diversity, balance, and tolerance.*** Cultural diversity, balance, and tolerance were big themes of her global history and geography curriculum. Given the current social structure marginalizing Muslims and people from other religions and the current social studies curriculum lacking multicultural perspectives, Ms. Jin understood that all young students should be able to understand multicultural nature of the world and appreciate their origins.

Her curriculum shed light on previously marginalized regions such as East Asia and Middle East and investigated how our lives are interconnected with and influenced by them. Although she could not cover every country because of time issue, she attempted to challenge pervasive biases and misunderstanding toward the previously underrepresented regions and religions. In her extensive unit on Middle East, Ms. Jin had her students read Koran, discuss religious beliefs and teachings in Islam and their similarities and differences from Christianity, and listen to and compare Islam and Christian chanting. Ms. Jin also emphasized advanced scientific, medical, and mathematical developments and inventions of Middle East during the middle age. When one student in her class argued that Islam is a violent religion, Ms. Jin's class had a long discussion about why and how Islam is often perceived as a violent religion, what racial and religious biases Americans have against Muslims, and how Americans understand Islam from culturally and religiously tolerant perspectives.

During a unit on Ming Dynasty, Ms. Jin enthusiastically argued about how rich Asian culture is and how Americans need to understand it with more balanced and respectful perspectives. She problematized limited coverage of Asia and its contribution to the world in history textbooks. In the following quote, Ms. Jin explained why she focused on the region and in what ways she aimed to help students build culturally tolerant perspectives and challenge Eurocentric views:

No one really knows "Asia." It is like a big mystery. If you study World history, and if you listen your professors teach Asian history, they are confused. Because! Americans are very ethnocentric. They think they are number one. But if you study Chinese history, it is so much! They had crazy inventions, crazy arts and crazy about everything. But Americans cannot understand that. Americans are so westernized, so they can't believe that Chinese came out with paper first, writing system. Chinese circled around the globe before the Christopher Columbus. Then kids are like "What? Wow! That is a big deal!"

Her curriculum included ample visual resources and readings regarding China and East Asia and multiple classroom activities to explore them. How she taught these topics and in what ways she tried to challenge Eurocentric worldviews within the unit will be discussed in the later section.

Her Korean immigrant familial background, academic background in Asian studies, and exchange student experience in Korea collectively provided impacts on her curriculum focused on cultural and regional diversity and attention to Asian history (Ng et al., 2007; Sheets & Chew, 2002). During her K-12 education, she noticed that Korean history that her parents often talked about was never seen in school textbooks. Her college professors were not different. Even in global history courses, the professors often underrepresented Asian history and hardly discussed Korea. Most of her knowledge sources of Korean history came from her Korean immigrant parents told her and limited Korean history lessons that she had in Korean weekend school when she was a child. She regretted that she did not have much opportunity to study it and wanted to provide more balanced worldviews to her students.

***Dilemma: Positioning and perspective taking.*** As a teacher of Korean descent, Ms. Jin occasionally felt dilemma of positioning and perspective taking when she taught Asia, in particular complex international relations and contemporary history among China, Japan, and Korea. First of all, Ms. Jin as a Korean American teacher hoped to teach Korea and its dynamic cultural and historical aspects on a deeper level, but felt ashamed of the fact that she did not know Korean history well enough. As discussed in the earlier section, Ms. Jin revealed that there were not many opportunities for her to study it unless she read on her own. As a teacher having

Korean heritage, she wished she could introduce rich history and interesting cultural aspects of Korea within global history contexts in an advanced level.

In the meantime, she was aware of complex relationships between East Asian countries, in particular Korea and Japan, caused by a series of political conflicts between the two nations through the history. In particular, Japanese colonial control over Korea for 30 years during the early 1900s remains as the most critical historical event which still causes Koreans' animosity toward Japan and multiple economic, political, territorial, and diplomatic conflicts between the two nations (Connor, 2009). Ms. Jin revealed her dilemma to teach Japanese colonial control over Korea during the early 20th century as a teacher of Korean descent as follows:

I taught Japanese history the other day. So, a little hard. You know, because I am Korean, Korean people never really got along with Japanese. So you have to suppress that... You know the relationship between Korea, Japan, and China... I mean it's hard. It's tricky.

In the following section, how her global history curriculum was implemented and instructed in her actual classroom and in what ways her personal, social, and cultural contexts and experiences influenced her pedagogical choices will be discussed.

### **Perceptions and Implementation: Social Studies Pedagogy.**

**Figure it out!** "Figure it out!" was one of the most frequently heard words in Ms. Jin's class. As being evident in her daily lesson, Ms. Jin always opened up her lesson with a focus question and motivation and framed her lesson as a pathway to find their answers. On the basis of Ms. Jin's strong belief on students as knowledge constructors, in-class reading, visual source analysis, group discussion, and other classroom activities were designed for students to pose critical historical questions and build their own interpretations of historical events and make

connections with their own lives (Salinas & Sullivan, 2007). She explained her rationale of inquiry-based, student-centered pedagogy as follows:

I always ask “I am not going to tell you. Figure it out!” Students got headache. They were not trained to think. And at their freshman year in high school, they met me. I feel sorry for that. But I can see differences of my students in September and June. At the beginning, they were so quiet. But now they asked me “Why is like this?” They are much better now. I could see their progress since I see them every day. Once they start to think, I think I am done my job.

Ms. Jin often employed Socratic questioning method to help students reflect their own thinking. By asking a series of questions, which mostly continued with how and why, for example “What do you think? Can you elaborate more? Specifically? Why do you think so? For example? What if...?”, thus required advanced reasoning skills, she hoped her students to understand the point she was trying to make. By doing so, she also aimed to let the students recognize what they did not know and to motivate their academic desire (Salina & Castro, 2010).

In particular, she considered research paper projects as important aspects of her inquiry-based learning. After her unit on world civilizations, Ms. Jin gave students research paper assignment requiring a great amount of readings and higher-order thinking skills. Some of the sample topics that students were able to choose are as follows:

1. What roles do geography, climate, and environment play in shaping human societies? How have different societies affected their environments? Pick two civilizations and analyze them.
2. Writing was a key invention of the Sumerians. Explain how it was a key invention to the Sumerians. Do you think writing is still essential to modern civilization? Explain your answer.
3. Traditional Indian views on marriage are being challenged by modern society. How? Why?

Ms. Jin expressed her expectations toward the students and provided very specific guidelines and high standards for students to elevate their papers as analytic and thoughtful academic research

papers. She stressed that “critical as well as creative analysis must be proportionate to the amount of details and facts provided. Do not provide a paragraph on details with only a sentence or two for analysis. There is no point in dumping a bunch of facts without coherence to the thesis.” For the project, she took students to a local college library and taught how to find and cite useful sources. Ms. Jin felt rewarded when her students showed differences and made progress. “Once they start to think, I think I am done my job.”

Ms. Jin did not hide her big frustration when she randomly checked the students’ mid-progress of research paper assignment and figured out that several students did not start to develop its topic yet. She severely scolded them for being lazy and breaking down her trust on them by saying as follows:

Raise your hand if you didn’t start research paper! Keep your hands up! I am going to call your parents! You all will get a phone call. You guys are all underachieving and spoiled students! I must say! You had enough time to get to start, and you wait to the very end! You are being shamed upon your parents! Do you know that? Your parents work really hard. Shame! This is very shameful! You disgrace your family.

Even though she made this statement half-jokingly and aimed to express her high expectations and standards for the assignment, her remarks sounded harsh. She still seemed very upset about the students taking the assignment insignificantly and being unprepared for it.

*Arts in history and history in arts.* Ms. Jin’s global history instruction included ample visual learning sources and critical analysis of primary sources and visual texts (Salinas et al., 2006). Ms. Jin, as a practicing painter, had a great passion for art and in-depth knowledge backgrounds of art history, which led her to utilize ample visual learning sources, including primary sources, pictures, fine arts, and movies, in her global history class. When she used arts, Ms. Jin always asked her students to take time to view and analyze them with the guideline

“Analyze the pictures. What assumptions can you make using deductive reasoning?” before giving background information about them.

For example, in her unit on Byzantine Empire, she added the following three pictures of Byzantine architectures and asked students to hypothesize to what extent those pictures are related to Christianity: Cappadocia (550 AD), Basilica of St. John in Ephesus (6<sup>th</sup> Century), and Cora Church (11<sup>th</sup> Century). She provided guiding questions, such as “What do you see? What imagery or symbols do you recognize? If there are figures, who might they be? What are they doing and why?” Ms. Jin strictly asked her students to elaborate their thoughts about the pictures instead of giving simple, short answers from hasty observation by saying “I want educated guesses! Don’t say I saw this and that.”

Her students’ high interests and active participation in the visual text analysis activity were evident in their thoughtful comments and lived discussions following it. At the beginning of her unit on China, Ms. Jin’s students expressed their perceptions about China as an isolated Asian country during the middle age. However, a world map made by China in 1418 that Ms. Jin introduced her students greatly changed their misperceptions. “This is a world map created by Chinese about 100 years before Columbus. I want you to make four really intelligent assumptions.” Ms. Jin asked her students to analyze the Chinese world map, come up with four critical assumptions about China during the period, and write them down on a big whiteboard in the classroom. The following answers students came up with showed their advanced-understandings about its cultural, geographical, political, and technological aspects:

1. Being able to draw a map of the world at such a time means they have a lot of explorations around the world and are open to new cultures and ideas, also had influence in knowledge and technology from other parts of the world.



2. The Chinese were very good at navigation because they traveled to Antarctica and came back to China safely.
3. They are very advanced and knew that their world wasn't flat.
4. The Chinese established foreign trades and used the map to aid in their travels. Their economy depended on trade.
5. They explored territory that was only later explored in the 1930s-Antarctica.
6. Government was stable to be able to do this.

She also asked her students to compare the map with a world map produced in 1482 by German cartographer Johannes Schnitzer and to see how Europeans and Chinese world views were similar and different. Students found the activity was very interesting and mentioned that it was an eye-opening moment for them to better understand China and that it challenged their own Eurocentric standpoints.

In the meantime, Ms. Jin believed that creating arts was another effective way to help students engaged, develop collective knowledge, and work collaboratively with peers. "BOLLYWOOD" was a featured film-making project in her course. After a unit on India, Ms. Jin's students were asked to create a short movie demonstrating their substantial understanding of Indian culture and religion, creative and rational scripts and acts, and active participation and contribution. Students came up with interesting, humorous musical-style movies with colorful costumes, Indian music, and diverse religious and cultural symbols. Ms. Jin and her students watched the films together and shared their appreciations, thoughts, and critiques on them. All students' active participation and contribution to the project and their collaboration were evident in the movies despite each student's different roles and level of participation. Ms. Jin used "BOLLYWOOD" as a main assessment tool for the unit.

**Personalized global history instruction.** Ms. Jin usually spent the first five minutes of her class for students to share interesting stories and personal lives with the whole class. In

particular, she welcomed stories related to new cultural experiences and exploration. Students actively raised their hands and shared their interesting cultural experiences, such as new dance class in a local college and celebration of religious holidays with their family. Ms. Jin also shared a variety of her experiences of international travels, how she and her Korean family celebrated Lunar New Year, and media reports covering interesting local and global topics that drew her attention. The rationale of this cultural story sharing was based on her firm belief that building a solid rapport between students and teacher is very important and that global history should not be understood as someone else's story but be learned built upon personal experiences. She remarked that "Without personal connections and understanding, ancient civilization or Chinese empires thousands years ago means nothing."

When she taught Byzantine Empire, Ms. Jin created a lesson based on her trip to Turkey with ample photos she took during the trip. Showing dozens of pictures of her in Hagia Sophia, she provided her journey to get there, introduced detailed aspects of the architecture, and shared how and what she felt about it. Then she also showed various pictures of Turkey's geographical characteristics, local markets, foods, spices, restaurants, and many others. Students were very interested in her stories and asked a number of questions about her trip. Ms. Jin was using her personal trip to Turkey as a platform to connect her students with Byzantine Empire. She felt comfortable with sharing her personal stories and attempted to help her students build historical empathy with personalized global history storytelling.

This section explored Ms. Jin's pedagogical choices and practices in her global history classroom. In the following case summary section, I will discuss Ms. Jin's overall teaching

experiences and social studies curriculum and pedagogical choices with the three research questions.

### **Case summary**

This section summarizes and provides a discussion of Ms. Jin's experiences of teaching social studies and her curricular and pedagogical perceptions in relation to the following research questions of this study.

**What are the Korean American social studies teacher's perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?** Ms. Jin chose teaching as her second career with a long-held dream of making a difference. Despite her short teaching experience, she made for herself a place in Excellence High School. Ms. Jin satisfied with academically focused, hardworking atmosphere and culturally diverse educational environment of Excellence High School with motivated students and professional staffs. She was a respected teacher who was also well related and connected to her students, especially those who were from Korean and East Asian backgrounds. Meanwhile, due to her small body and younger looking image as an Asian woman, she faced with racial remarks from the students from time to time. Thus, she built a strong hierarchical relationship while maintaining close rapport with the students in order to secure her authority as a teacher.

**How do the Korean American social studies teachers perceive and implement social studies curriculum and pedagogy in the realities of their classroom?** Ms. Jin's global history and geography curriculum was characterized by critical literacy, hands-on, experiential learning, and culturally diverse and tolerant perspective development. Her curricular positioning came out of her understanding of history as analysis and interpretation. Teaching high-achieving

students having multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds, she advocated global, multicultural citizenship aims of social studies. Unlike typical text-based social studies instruction, she utilized student-centered, inquiry-based pedagogy with ample visual sources and multiple texts which encouraged students' active participation and required higher-order thinking. Art was a significant pedagogical component being used as a mirror of history. Her personalized history teaching attempted to assist her students' development of connections to global history.

### **How do personal biographies and sociocultural contexts shape the Korean**

**American social studies teacher's curricular and pedagogical decision-making?** As a young teacher of Asian descent who had multiple cross-cultural, international experiences and bilingual proficiency, she was a friendly, relatable teacher for her not only Asian students but also students from different ethnoracial backgrounds. Her global history curriculum which emphasized culturally tolerant worldview highlighting previously marginalized regions like Asia was also influenced by her multicultural, global experiences and academic backgrounds. Growing up with Korea immigrant parents who were culturally struggling and thus highly enthusiastic about her academic success, Ms. Jin was well aware of her first or second generation immigrant students' and their parents' academic concerns and needs and maintained high expectations toward the students. In the meantime, she as an American citizen who considered Korea as her mother land and maintained Korean heritage, experienced dilemmas and difficulties regarding perspective taking when she taught complex international relations.

In the next section, I will explore Ms. Young Kim's experiences of teaching profession and social studies curricular and pedagogical practices.

### Case 3: Ms. Young Kim

#### Personal Biography

Ms. Young Kim was a Korea born immigrant woman in her fifties who had been teaching social studies during 18 years in Grandville High School. She studied English literature and history in college and taught social studies at middle schools in Korea for three years. After she came to the United States with her family in her thirties, she studied bilingual education with emphasis on Korean through a master's degree program during the early 1990s and obtained a certificate of bilingual education. She was able to obtain a social studies teaching license at the same time given her academic training and teaching experiences in Korea.

Being a public school social studies teacher as a first generation Korean immigrant had never been easy. When she studied at the graduate school to obtain a teaching license in the early 1990s, there was no one that she was able to get advices about how to be a certified teacher as an immigrant and what it is like being an Asian American public school teacher. She could not find any who she could rely on in her communities or graduate school, and church. She was the one who figured out all processes and requirements. She recalled the experience lonely and painful.

As a first-generation immigrant, it was not easy to become a teacher. Most Korean immigrants do their own business, like laundry or deli. When I met Korean people, I couldn't be in the mainstream within the Korean community because I am doing something unusual. I work with American mainstream people and taught American students. I did not have many things to share with other Koreans because of my different career path. I could not find any role model. I could not complain about my hardships because there was no one who can understand how I feel. I was isolated.

She often cited the pervasive model minority myth harassing her saying that Asians who choose teaching as a career within the mainstream American education system are often viewed strange or even less desirable (Nguyen, 2008; Park, 2009).

Later she was able to join Korean American Teachers Society (pseudonym), a non-profit organization for Korean American teachers in New York metropolitan area, and meet people who spoke Korean and pursued the same career with her. She was glad that she found a place that she felt comfortable around and had friends that she could share her concerns.

### **School Context**

Grandville High School was a big urban high school having more than 100 years history, serving more than 4, 000 students. Student population of the Grandville High School was diverse. Students were from approximately 100 countries and spoke 59 languages, including 31 percent of English language learners. Hispanics were the most dominant student population (61%) followed by Asians (24 %) and African Americans (8%). Its class size was relatively big with 28 to 32 students. A majority of the students were from urban, low income families.

Grandville High School was one of ten high schools the state education department had deemed persistently lowest achieving. Because of its poor performance and low graduation rate, the school was at risk to be shut down by its state educational department. After several years of attempts to survive the school by teachers, students, alumni, and community members, the state department decided to keep the school's door open.

During the data collection period, the Grandville High School was preparing to launch a new program called "Small Learning Community" in order to create more academically focused, learning community and to improve students' academic achievement and engagement. The vision of the program was to provide a personalized learning environment for all of our students while maintaining the benefits of a large high school.

**Perceptions and Experiences: Teaching Profession.**

**Why is her teaching social studies experience toilsome?** As a veteran teacher with 18 years of teaching experiences in the Grandville High School, Ms. Kim thought that teaching was a good career that she chose to do. Not only Ms. Kim herself but also people who knew her agreed that her straight forward and diligent personality perfectly matched with teaching. As a first generation immigrant woman, Ms. Kim was proud of becoming a public school teacher, having a career, and working in a mainstream American system.

Meanwhile, teaching social studies in her big urban high school serving multiethnic students including immigrants was still not an easy job for her. She described her overall experiences of teaching profession at the Grandville High School as “toilsome.” During her interviews and classroom observations, there were three major issues that she described to make her life as a teacher toilsome: School environments with low achieving students and bureaucratic administrators, cultural mismatch, and racial biases toward Asians.

**School environments with low achieving students and bureaucratic administrators.**

Ms. Kim was not happy with her school environments which she thought made her teaching experiences toilsome. Overall, Ms. Kim argued that her social studies class could not be interesting due to her students’ low literacy skills and prior knowledge. She often criticized that her students were too lazy to build descent literacy skills required in high school during their prior schooling and complained that there was no way that she could make them academically successful. Due to the students’ low academic performance and lack of interest in learning, Ms. Kim said her dream to create a good social studies lesson had been deferred by saying:

Social studies is fun. It is an interesting and dynamic subject. But, teaching social studies in my school is not fun. My students are ignorant. They do not know how to read and write. So, interesting lessons here can't be possible.

During the entire research period, Ms. Kim maintained her pessimistic views on her teaching experiences and low expectations to her students.

Bureaucratic administration creating a rigid, test-drive school culture was another reason that Ms. Kim believed to contribute to her difficult teaching experience (Amabisca, 2006; Yee, 2009). Given the long-lasting low performance of the school, administrators at the Grandville High School had tried varied curricular and instructional reforms and policy changes in order to improve their students' state-mandated test scores, and thus kept the school's door open. She believed that her school administrators changed school policies and mandated curriculum too often which caused a great deal of confusion to teachers and limited individual teacher's capabilities and freedom to design curriculum. Given the school atmosphere, she hardly felt to be connected with her administrators.

**Cultural mismatch.** Ms. Kim expressed cultural mismatch with her students (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Mabokela & Madsen, 2007). As a straight A student who valued formal education highly under a competitive Korean educational system and a rigid teacher who taught under strict disciplines in Korea, Ms. Kim was not able to understand her low achieving students who "consider homework as an option" and "dare rebel against teachers" (Chen, 2009). Drawing upon Confucian philosophy regarding teachers as professionals with high authority (Gao, 2010; Pang, 2009), she as a teacher expected to be respected as a master with authority by her students who are supposed to be humble disciples by saying that:



I was not like this when I taught in Korea. There are some common grounds between students and teachers there, you know. And we were culturally related... But here, kids are different. They do not have the basic mindset.

Ms. Kim shared her particular difficulties with Hispanic immigrants and African American students. She identified that Hispanic and African American students “with their victim mentality” did not make their utmost efforts to excel and were poorly disciplined to succeed in American school. She felt pitiful for those who were from low-income, minority families who do not try hard enough to succeed. Drawing upon her beliefs on the model minority myth and her journey to become a teacher as an Asian woman in the U.S., Ms. Kim argued that minority students should work harder, go to college, and pursue social mobility, rather than resisting against the system, no matter what circumstances they are situated within, in order to overcome their minority status. Citing Confucian philosophy on the parent-child relations, she also argued that parents are supposed to support their children’s education and be ready to sacrifice the rest. However, what she believed was not the same as what she experienced in her actual classroom. According to Ms. Kim, her students wanted their teachers, school, and the whole society to treat them equally and respectfully before they made their best effort to fit into it. Their parents did not show up at parent-teacher conferences and rather blamed her failure of in attaining academic success for their children. Ms. Kim considered it as a significant cultural gap and had a hard time to close the gap for the last 18 years.

Her experiences of teaching profession at the Grandville High School can be identified as her journey to negotiate her teaching philosophies (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). The following quote well shows how she negotiated and compromised her philosophies and tried to better understand students:

After many conversations and discussion with other colleagues, I figure out that I was too strict. You know, like a young, novice teacher who just graduate from college. I figure out that maybe in that way, I might not be able to get along with anyone. I might fail everyone. So I have negotiated with myself and adjusted my ideas.

Despite continuous dilemmas and challenges, Ms. Kim demonstrated her desire to be better connected and related to her students. It will be further discussed in the section of her pedagogical practices.

**Racial biases against Asians.** Ms. Kim believed that being an Asian female teacher who is not a native English speaker gave her a “handicap” to function as a good teacher (Goodwin et al., 1997). She explained how she was viewed and how she perceived her own position as an Asian teacher at the school as follows:

I am an Asian female teacher who looks small and weak. I think that is my handicap...It is not just my personal story but a concern that most Asian teachers have. I am nothing. I am Asian, female, short, with soft voice. None of my conditions overpower students. Students do not respect me, and I cannot take a control. I believe it is a kind of students' racism.

She felt she lost her authority as a teacher due to the pervasive racial biases against Asians while she did not consider her own curricular or pedagogical aspects as potential factors.

Language was another barrier. Despite her descent English speaking flow and pronunciation, Ms. Kim presented Korean accents and made a number of grammatical errors when she was teaching and speaking. A couple of students frequently made fun of her accents repeating “What?” several times and giggled. She did not like the fact that students laughed and teased her English skill when she made mistakes, thus pretended not to see or ignored their responses (Subedi, 2008).

Drawing upon her own educational backgrounds, teaching experiences in Korea, and Confucianism oriented educational philosophies, Ms. Kim argued that teacher should be highly respected by and hold authorities over students. She perceived that her authority as a legitimate teacher had been challenged due to pervasive racism against Asian women. When her students and colleagues asked her about Korean culture, including Lunar New Year, her life experiences in Korea, or contemporary issues in Korea such as the relationship between North and South Korea, she often ignored the questions or roughly answered “I don’t know” or “How do I know?” As Vietnamese American teachers felt from their racialized teaching experience in Nguyen’s (2008) study, Ms. Kim thought that they tried to make fun of her. She felt she did not have colleagues or students to share her cultural identity in the school, thus refused to reveal it.

In the following section, I will discuss how her multiple personal, social, and cultural backgrounds and current school contexts shaped her social studies curricular choices.

### **Perceptions and Implementation: Social Studies Curriculum.**

**Advocacy of culturally conscious global history curriculum.** During multiple interviews and observations, Ms. Kim articulated that social studies education is not just “having academic knowledge on global history” but also nurturing global citizens “making informed decisions”, learning how to solve problems in our times,” and “broadening cross-cultural perspectives.” She added that not every student has to be a great historian, but students “at least need to know how the society does work and what is going around the world” because “the knowledge helps them communicate with others and analyze given information critically.”

Current official global history curriculum was “global enough” to Ms. Kim. She argued that the state curriculum standards and textbooks are Eurocentric and White, American-centered

which marginalize non-European regions, particularly Korea. Ms. Kim wished Asian countries receive more attention in textbooks so that students have a chance to learn that “these regions actually built and strengthened their own culture for a long time.”

In particular, she disliked the newly adopted school-mandated global history and geography curriculum that she should follow reluctantly (Moore, 2003; Yee, 2009). Due to the low student academic performance, lowering school reputation, and pressure of school close, the Grandville High School and its social studies department had tried many different curriculum reform attempts. The mandated global history curriculum that her department head newly brought this year was a part of a larger school reform project. The curriculum with a great amount of emphasis on the state test preparation was highly Eurocentric and provided very specific guidelines for time schedule and topics to be covered and required all teachers to teach the same contents under the same aim given each day. The following interview quote shows her frustrations with the new curriculum:

The curriculum does not make any sense. According to the curriculum, I should teach the whole ancient civilization for only one period because in the state test, questions about ancient civilization are not that much. Then what about Ancient China, India, Europe, South America, Africa, Middle East? How can you teach everything in 40 minutes? I think that we spend at least a week to briefly introduce about the ancient civilization. Now, what I should do is to teach like “There were ancient China, India, and South America, and I will explain details later when we have extra time.”

**Standards-based and accountability-driven curriculum.** Contradictory to her advocacy of culturally conscious and regionally balanced global history curriculum and critique to the mandated school curriculum which reinforces Eurocentric views, Ms. Kim’s enacted social studies curriculum was geared toward standard-based and accountability-driven curriculum. She confessed that global citizenship, inference, critical thinking, and application that college

professors talk about “sound good, but not practical and inapplicable to the actual classroom.” She described that her students had significantly low literacy skills, thus need strong knowledge backgrounds as a premise for global citizenship. Ms. Kim added that American high school students in general seriously lack knowledge about other parts of the world and their history, thus teachers should provide stronger knowledge base first by saying “Students should know facts first, and then they can do critical thinking or analytic thinking.”

It seemed natural that Ms. Kim chose textbooks as a major source of her global history curriculum. She believed that textbook, although boring, contains all topics and contents students should know and well organizes them in a chronological order. For each lesson, she used a copy of worksheet, which included selected readings out of the main textbooks she used and several questions following the readings. Then lecture followed to summarize the contents in the reading and check answers for the follow-up questions. She explained that she aimed to simplify the overwhelming contents in the official curriculum standards and textbooks and deliver them to students in a simple, easy way so that her “low achieving students can digest.”

**Let’s just say African languages.** Ms. Kim’s efforts to simplify the overwhelming amount of contents occasionally caused culturally unconscious curricular choices. During the first lesson of a unit on Africa, Ms. Kim aimed to teach dynamic geographical aspects of Africa. She asked students to draw a large map of Africa on their notebook and marked major rivers, deserts, mountains, and other geographical features. However, her guidelines for the activity failed to address culturally conscious global perspectives. The following quote shows how she gave instructions about this activity toward her students:

Today, I want you to draw a map of Africa. I will give you a tip, how to draw Africa very nicely. I want you to draw big in your notebook. One trapezoid and one triangle! That makes Africa, OK? One trapezoid and one triangle. Trapezoid on the top and upside down triangle on the bottom!

Although her original intention was to teach geography of Africa in an easy way, Ms. Kim failed to teach dynamic geographical aspects of Africa by presenting its map as a featureless figure. This activity also failed to draw students' attention to the topic, and rather caused their resistance to learning. A couple of African American students, looking at each other, frowned upon her remarks and hesitated to draw the map.

Moreover, her enacted curriculum did not reflect her beliefs and advocacy of social studies education for global citizenship and cross-cultural perspective development, and rather presented culturally unconscious views toward other parts of the world. During her lesson on Columbian exchange, Ms. Kim mostly focused on teaching how European exploration led to a global exchange and provided positive influences on less developed regions like Africa and South America. While Ms. Kim explained the influences of European goods and trades on the life styles of Africans, she had an argument with an African American student:

Student: Ms, why do you just say African language although there are many different languages?"

Ms. Kim: Because there are thousands of languages, we just call it African language.

Student: But there are so many languages in Africa.

Ms. Kim: Let's just say African language.

Describing Swahili as a language used in East Africa, she portrayed Swahili as the language that people might see in the Disney animation movie like Lion King not something they could normally hear from their friends. Her vision of teaching for global citizenship and cultural

consciousness were confined to Korea where she was from, but not necessarily expanded to other cultural and geographical regions that she was not familiar.

This section focused on Ms. Kim's understandings and practices of the social studies curriculum. I will explore her pedagogical decision-making and teaching practices in the next section.

### **Perceptions and Implementation: Social Studies Pedagogy.**

**Five minute review, twenty minute reading, twenty minute lecture, and tests.** During the period of research, Ms. Kim maintained a consistent instructional format: five minute review, twenty minute reading, and twenty minute lecture. For the first five to ten minutes, Ms. Kim reviewed what students learned previously. Then 15 to 20 minutes of reading followed. Ms. Kim gave a handout to students and asked them to read it and answer the following questions on their notebook. As introduced earlier, most of her in-class handouts contained selected readings and discussion questions from the textbooks she used.

After 20 minutes of reading and writing time, a lecture of the day's topic followed. Ms. Kim summarized the assigned readings and gave an extensive lecture on the topic. She wrote a great amount of notes on the blackboard with key bullet points that students were supposed to know and a few graphics organizers including van diagrams and tables that showed the contents in a simplified, organized way. Recalling her K-12 schooling and teaching experiences in Korea, Ms. Kim believed that lecture was the most effective ways of content knowledge delivery given a large amount of contents she was supposed to cover and limited time given to her. She illustrated that she as a master of content knowledge should deliver the complex and massive contents in the official curriculum in an organized way through lectures (Pang, 1998). Chances

of student participation and engagement seemed very limited. She doubted her students' capabilities of knowledge construction and limited their chances of participation.

Ms. Kim offered multiple tests, including quizzes, mock-tests, diagnostic tests, midterm, and final, throughout the semester. According to Ms. Kim, the whole purpose of multiple tests was to improve students' academic achievement, specifically the state exam passing rate. Her department head asked teachers to give a lot of tests in order to better prepare students for high stakes test. Meanwhile, Ms. Kim was pessimistic about the anticipated results of the tests. She expected that only several students out of 30 might be able to pass. What made her more frustrated was that she was "the only one who is dangling" while students themselves did not care.

Her classroom settings also seemed to provide influences on her pedagogical styles. Given her classroom without technological support, she seemed to have limited options to incorporate other learning sources, for example pictures, movies, or other multimedia learning sources. In addition, desks bolted to the classroom floor facing toward the front of the classroom made Ms. Kim difficult to rearrange classroom settings and to utilize diverse classroom activities such as discussion or group projects, other than lecture.

**This is enough for you.** Ms. Kim occasionally prepared two different kinds of handouts as a part of her differentiated instruction strategies. Mostly one version had longer readings and included advanced discussion questions and activities while the other had shorter readings and contained simple short-answer questions. When she gave the handouts to students, she walked around the classroom, gave the more challenging version to a selected group of students, and provided the simple type to the rest of the group.



During her lesson on Crusades, Ms. Kim prepared two kinds of handouts, one with a short reading titled “Results of the Crusades” without follow-up activity and the other kind with a longer reading including maps, pictures, and several follow-up questions. Shortly students noticed there were two types of handouts that looked significantly different. Students asked why they received a shorter one while others had a longer one. Ms. Kim answered “For some people, the long one is too difficult. The short one is enough.” Several students responded sarcastically “Yes, because I am dumb.”

These embarrassing moments repeated several more times during the semester-long classroom observation. Ms. Kim’s misguided understandings about differentiated instruction which turned out to be discriminatory acts caused academic resistance from some of her students. Ms. Kim also acknowledged that these situations made her very embarrassed and uncomfortable. However, she said it was beyond her power because her administrators pushed her to employ differentiated learning strategies considering different levels of learning abilities of the students. The two handout strategy seemed to be the best way Ms. Kim thought of as a differential learning strategy.

**Toward more dynamic social studies classroom.** Interestingly, Ms. Kim exhibited attempts to change her routines and to try new teaching methods to make her classroom more dynamic during the later period of observation. As she knew that I observed two other teachers teaching the same grade level global history, she sometimes asked me how other teachers teach and expressed her desire to learn if there are good methods that the other teachers used so that she could include them in her own class.

During the second half of the semester, Ms. Kim showed her slow, but gradual changes by bringing visual teaching sources and by opening rooms for student participation. During her lesson on the influence of reformation on Europe, she used a large colorful map of Protestant reformation in Europe which she designed by herself. “Can you recognize that this is Europe? I know. I am sorry. It is ugly.” Ms. Kim seemed unsecure of her self-designed map at the beginning. However, her students looked surprised at the new material she brought in and seemed to like the map by saying “Ms, wow! That’s cool!” Only then did she showed a hint of smile and continued her lesson as follows:

Ms. Kim: You know? Who is the first one broke away from Catholic Church?

Students: Martin Luther!

Ms. Kim: So, Germany, this part became protestant (Ms. Kim put a small blue paper map of Germany put on the large white map). And Scandinavia, this part also became protestant (Similarly, Ms. Kim picked up a shape of Scandinavia blue paper and put it on the map, which fitted perfectly with the borderline of the peninsula).

Students: Wow! Cool!

Ms. Kim seemed to find her own ways to incorporate different teaching methods in her classroom given the limited technological access during the later half of the semester.

In this section, I discussed Ms. Kim’s experiences of teaching profession at the Grandville High School and her curricular and pedagogical decision making in her global history classroom. The following case summary will summarize her case sketch in relation to the three research questions.

### **Case summary**

This section provides a discussion of Ms. Kim's experiences of teaching social studies and her curricular and pedagogical perceptions in relation to the following research questions of this study.

**What are the Korean American social studies teacher's perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?** Ms. Kim's 18 years of teaching social studies was a lonely as well as toilsome experience. As an Asian immigrant woman having limited English proficiency, it was not easy for her to become a school teacher and to make for herself place in the school. Devoted her 18 years of career to teaching at the Grandville High School, she was not happy with her low performing school, cultural mismatch with her students, and bureaucratic administration. She had hard times to connect to her students who were dominantly Hispanic immigrants and African Americans from low-income families and to improve their academic achievement and engagement. She believed that her being an Asian woman with small and weak body images and soft voice became a handicap of her to function as a legitimate teacher for them.

**How do the Korean American social studies teachers perceive and implement social studies curriculum and pedagogy in the realities of their classroom?** Despite her perceptual advocacy of social studies education for citizenship education and teaching for global, multicultural perspectives, her enacted curriculum demonstrated strong content knowledge acquirement as a premise for her global history curriculum. She prioritized that her low-achieving and less-motivated students should memorize content knowledge first in order to pass the state-mandated high stakes tests. Her instructions were characterized with reading, lecture,

note-taking, and test-preparation which created uninviting, even hostile, learning atmosphere for the students.

**How do personal biographies and sociocultural contexts shape the Korean American social studies teacher's curricular and pedagogical decision-making?**

Drawing upon Confucian educational philosophy, her experiences of being a respected teacher in Korea, and model minority myths, she expressed a significant level of cultural mismatch with her students who often misbehaved, resisted learning, and disrespected her and their parents who always blamed her as a problem. As a first-generation immigrant who came to the U.S. in her thirties and had limited English proficiency, she had difficult times to understand, interact, and relate to her students of color and their cultural frames of references. Her curricular and pedagogical practices did not resonate with her students, thus failed to encourage their academic engagement. However, she as a teacher and “master” felt strong responsibility for her students and broader educational communities, demonstrated care for their academic achievements, and expressed her desire to transform her pedagogic style.

**Chapter Summary**

I began this chapter by describing an overview of each case sketch. For each case, I provided information about (a) Personal biography, (b) School contexts, (c) Perceptions and experiences: Teaching profession, (d) Perceptions and implementation: Social studies curriculum, and (e) Perceptions and implementation: Social studies pedagogy. Then I provided a discussion of each case in relation to the research questions of this study in Case Summary.

As the findings suggest, the three Korean American social studies teachers had diverse, complex, and contextualized experiences of teaching social studies in their schools. Data shows

that each teacher's curricular and pedagogical choices were varied depending on their personal, social, and cultural backgrounds and experiences. Similarities as well as differences between the three teachers' social studies teaching experiences were evident.

In the next chapter, I will analyze the similarities and differences of the three Korean American teachers' experiences in relation to this study's research questions. Then I will discuss implications of this study. I follow this discussion with an explanation of my future research agenda as based on this study. Lastly, I will conclude the dissertation.

## V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I analyze across the three cases, Mr. Moon, Ms. Jin, and Ms. Kim, and discuss their similarities and differences in their overall teaching experiences and social studies curricular and pedagogical positioning by presenting cross-case themes. I examine the three teachers' social studies teaching practices and the impacts of personal, social, and cultural context and experiences on their teaching. Then I discuss the implications of this study in research and practice in social studies teacher education. I follow this discussion with recommendations for future research. Lastly, I conclude the dissertation.

[Figure 5] Overview of Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	
Cross-Case Analysis	
	Complex experiences of being a racial minority social studies teacher
	Distrust of the official social studies curriculum
	Toward a truly global, multicultural social studies curriculum
	Dynamic pedagogical practices: Socioculturally situated and autobiographical acts
	Section Summary
Implications	
Future Research	
Conclusion	

### Cross-Case Analysis

I analyze across the three cases, Mr. Moon, Ms. Jin, and Ms. Kim in this section. I examine similarities and differences in the three Korean American social studies teachers' curricular and pedagogical decision making and discuss four cross-case themes: (a) Complex experiences of being a racial minority social studies teacher, (b) Distrust of the official social studies curriculum, (c) Toward a truly global, multicultural social studies curriculum, and (d)

Dynamic pedagogical practices: Socioculturally situated and autobiographical acts. In these sections, I discuss the connection between the theoretical framework, sociocultural theory in this study including previous research on teachers of color framed by the framework, and the findings of this study. Then I summarize the cross-case analysis in relation to the research question of this study in Summary.

### **Complex Experiences of Being a Racial Minority Social Studies Teacher**

All three Korean American social studies teachers in this study were ethnoracial minority teachers in their schools. Mr. Moon and Ms. Kim were the only Korean American teachers in his/her school respectively while Ms. Jin was one of the two Korean American teachers in her school. The three Korean American social studies teachers had dynamic experiences of being a Korean American social studies teacher and negotiating their personal and professional identifications in different school contexts. The three teachers commonly shared racism and racial remarks against Asians, including the model minority myths and multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization caused by the intersectionality between race, gender, immigration status, and language as the most significant factor shaping their being a Korean American teacher. Meanwhile, drawing upon their own personal biographies and sociocultural experiences, each teacher showed unique, yet complex strategies to cope with the multiple types of racism. This section discusses how the three teachers experienced racism and racial stereotypes against Asians and how they coped with the stereotypes in their school settings.

**Racism, model minority myth, and intersectionality.** The common experience of teaching profession that all three teachers shared was pervasive racism and racial biases against Asian Americans or Asian immigrants in their schools as well as broader society, which often

questioned their identity as a legitimate teacher or American citizen (Quioco & Rios, 2000; Nguyen, 2008). A number of students at the Millenium High School perceived that Mr. Moon was not American due to his Asian racial background and Korean ethnicity although he was an American citizen who was born and raised in the local communities. The two Korean American female teachers, Ms. Jin and Ms. Kim, were exposed to racial biases and remarks based on the intersectionality of race and gender in their schools (Chandler, 2007; Subedi, 2008). Due to their physical appearance as short and thin Asian women, Ms. Jin and Ms. Kim often had students, mostly male, who acted up by teasing their body images or even rebelled against their teacher authorities. In particular, Ms. Kim who was an Asian immigrant woman, non- native English speaker with accents having weak body image felt vulnerable to students' insulting remarks on her race, ethnicity, and language. She argued that many other Asian American or immigrant teachers shared similar racialized teaching experiences which were paralleled to hers. The three Korean American social studies teachers in this study felt bitter about the reality that people judged them by their race not by who they are and how they teach. They also felt uncomfortable with the fact that their legitimacy and authority as teachers were often contested, thus fragile due to the pervasive racial stereotypes against Asian Americans and immigrants.

As Ms. Kim asserted, this finding is consistent with previous research indicating that teachers of color, in particular Asian American teachers often faced with racial biases which is frequently represented as the model minority myth or forever foreigner stereotype (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Pang, 1998; Subedi, 2002). Studies show that Asian Americans are often viewed as unable or unwilling to assimilate into American culture and society, thus perceived as "others", "aliens", or "strangers from a different shore" while never accepted them as authentic American citizens



(Okihiro, 1999; Takaki, 1989; Pak, 2002). The three Korean American social studies teachers in this study similarly reported the racial stereotypes made them othered and largely defined their being of Korean American teachers not only in their current school contexts but also broader society (Burant, Quioco, & Rios, 2002; Ng et al., 2007). Moreover, the discriminatory remarks and stereotypes which were often associated with their dual or multiple minority group memberships regarding gender, immigration background, and language, made the teachers' experiences of teaching profession in American public schools more complicated (Ozbalas, 2008; Subedi, 2008).

**Coping strategies.** How each teacher responded to the stereotypes, defined his/her own personal and professional positions, and shaped relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, and other school personnel varied depending on each teacher's personal and sociocultural backgrounds and current school contexts. Working in an Asian dominant high school having a number of Korean student population as well as students from diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, Ms. Jin, despite her racial minority status within the broader society, was not othered in her school. Ms. Jin easily opened up and shared her origins, cultural heritage, family backgrounds, language, and cultural frames of references with students and teachers not only of Asian descent but also from diverse ethnoracial backgrounds at the Excellence High School. Despite occasional racial remarks, she was happy with the culturally diverse nature of her school, which was unlike the exclusively White dominant environment at the government office that she worked and felt marginalized, and made for herself a place in the school. She promoted the idea "It is OK to be different" in her school and culturally diverse and tolerant perspectives through her global history class.

Facing with the “forever foreigner” stereotype against Asians within and outside his school, Mr. Moon decided to selectively choose and present his racial and ethnic identifications. Being the only Korean American teacher in his school, Mr. Moon purposefully presented himself as a Korean nationalist who supported Korean power and pride in order to teach his students to accept and appreciate their own cultural origins and heritage. At the same time, he was a teacher who was well connected and respected by newcomer ELL students regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Based upon his childhood background of growing up in a Korean immigrant family and long-held academic struggles during K-12 schooling, Mr. Moon was cognizant of cultural and academic hurdles that his students experienced and sought to better support academic interests and cultural needs of new immigrant students. Also he tried to celebrate ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity among his students and challenge any type of oppression or stereotypes against them. Not only his cultural consciousness but also multilingual abilities and in-depth understandings of diverse ethnic groups and their religions made him a cross-cultural agent who spoke for multiculturalism and social justice, and challenges racial stereotypes (Lynn, 2002).

On the other hand, Ms. Kim who was also the only Korean American teacher in her school had racialized, marginalized, and lonely experiences of being a Korean immigrant teacher in her school for the last 18 years. She was not able to find someone to share her difficulties and concerns of being a racial minority teacher or to discuss her cultural or educational perspectives, which eventually caused her isolation and marginalization in her school. The isolation and marginalization widened the gap between Ms. Kim and her students, which eventually contributed to her disclosure of cultural identity and closed relations with students and school

personnel. Like immigrant teachers in Feuerverger's (1997) study, Ms. Kim's isolation from colleagues and communication gaps with students became a source of stress and cultural mismatch with them that caused lonely and toilsome experiences of teaching.

In sum, the three Korean American social studies teachers in this study faced with racial biases and stereotypes against Asian Americans and immigrants while each had different approaches to cope with the racism and multiple forms of marginalization and to shape their positioning and experiences based upon their personal and sociocultural backgrounds and current school context. In the next section, I will discuss how three teachers conceptualized the official social studies curriculum.

### **Distrust of the Official Social Studies Curriculum**

The three Korean American social studies teachers poignantly criticized Eurocentric perspectives of the official social studies curriculum standards, state-mandated tests, and textbooks, thus exhibited strong resistance to them. The teachers agreed that the current global history curriculum standards marginalize people's lives, rich cultural heritage, and diverse cultural frames of references of the non-Western regions while highlighting European history and its contribution to the modern civilization. Their oppositional stance to the official knowledge in global history textbooks and the state mandated standards led to their advocacy of a truly global, multicultural global history curriculum.

Working with newcomer ELL students for eight years, Mr. Moon understood that the current social studies curriculum which largely marginalizes non-European cultures from which most of his students emigrated and reinforces narrowly-defined national citizenship without consideration of globalization and cultural diversity in the U.S. is not going to work in his

classroom. Once being a truant minority student who felt never connected to the school curriculum, Mr. Moon was cognizant of his immigrant students' discomfort and resistance toward social studies textbook within which their culture is ignored. His distrust of the official curriculum generated his advocacy of social justice education and teaching for multicultural, global perspectives.

Given her belief that history textbooks are often biased and present limited perspectives to understand history, Ms. Jin avoided teaching out of textbook and using it as a major source of global history education. Citing her previous knowledge on Korean history and culture from her immigrant family and ethnic school, she pointed out the marginalized coverage on non-Western countries like China and Korea in global history textbooks and revealed that it is unfair for students to study only with the limited sources. She placed significant emphasis on multiple perspectives and sources to critically analyze and interpret global history which have greater academic appeal to her students.

Similarly, Ms. Kim criticized the Eurocentric state standards and high-stakes tests which dominated the official school curriculum that she had to adopt in her lessons. Ms. Kim strongly argued that the mandated-curriculum fails to present truly globalized as well as balanced views on world history. Ms. Kim added her discomfort to adopt the new curriculum which had her attempts to teach more globalized and balanced social studies lessons differed and limited her autonomous curricular choices.

Taken together, the three Korean American social studies teachers in this study agreed that the current global history curriculum is not truly global enough to present world history in a balanced way, thus argued for the need of more regionally balanced and culturally tolerant

perspectives and multiple sources within global history class. In particular, the three teachers, drawing upon their childhood learning on Korean history, academic struggles with the culturally disconnected school curriculum, familial/immigration background, international experiences, and/or previous knowledge on Asian history, commonly pointed out the limited portrayal of Asia, its rich history and cultural heritage, and contribution to the modern civilization in the official curriculum. All three teachers emphasized that previously marginalized religions should receive more attention with more culturally diverse and tolerant perspectives in the official global history curriculum.

This finding is in line with previous research articulating that teachers of color having multicultural backgrounds and experiences of minority status are cognizant of the complexities of race, ethnicity, gender, and class issues and tend to present multicultural, socially just perspectives in school curriculum (Burant, Quijano, & Rios, 2002; Carr & Klassen, 1997; Gay, 2004; Ng et al., 2007). In particular, social studies teachers of color who had personal experiences with discrimination or sociocultural oppression are reportedly well aware of the issues of equity, social justice, and multicultural perspectives in the social studies curriculum and carefully consider how diverse learners see themselves in history class (Fickel, 2000; Pang & Gibson, 2001; Salinas & Castro, 2010). Like the social studies teachers of color in the previous research, the three Korean American social studies teachers, based upon their understanding about the diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, social, economic, and linguistic characteristics of their school contexts, communities, the U.S., and the world, exhibited critical stance on the narrowly-defined citizenship aims and Eurocentric perspectives dominating the current official social studies curriculum. Despite differences in their personal biographies, sociocultural backgrounds,

and academic experiences, the three teachers who commonly shared immigrant family backgrounds and racial and cultural marginalization confronted the official social studies knowledge found in textbooks and stated-mandated curricular sources (Salinas & Castro, 2010).

However, the Korean American teachers' critical views on the Eurocentric worldviews and underrepresentation of the non-European history pervasive within the official curriculum were not necessarily reflected in the realities of their classroom. In the following section, I will discuss how the three Korean American social studies teachers designed and taught their enacted global history curriculum differently and what personal and sociocultural factors shaped their curricular and pedagogical decision making in line with sociocultural theory.

### **Toward a Truly Global, Multicultural Social Studies Curriculum**

Although the three teachers aimed to challenge Eurocentric worldviews dominating the official social studies curriculum, how they approached to the aim and implemented social studies curriculum in their actual classrooms varied. Mr. Moon's and Ms. Jin's enacted curricula were characterized by a constructivist lens to understand history which promotes the idea of history as interpretation and analysis, instead of a series of factual knowledge, and teaching with global, multicultural perspectives which supported culturally relevant global history lessons. Meanwhile, Ms. Kim's global history curriculum focused on textbook-defined, test-driven approaches.

Mr. Moon's semester-long World Religion curriculum and Ms. Jin's global history curriculum with emphasis on interpretation and analysis both created meaningful curricular spaces which enabled students to critically think and analyze global history and resonated with their diverse young learners in culturally relevant and tolerant ways. Both teachers designed their

curriculum through a constructivist lens (Salinas & Castro, 2010) by resisting one-sided historical narratives, but embodying multiple, sometimes competing views to interpret history and privileging the historical and cultural relevance of the students in their class (Branch, 2004; Fickel, 2000). Each teacher's curriculum design targeted his/her students who had diverse demographic characteristics, literacy skills, and achievement levels respectively and drew their academic interests and participation successfully.

After rigorous discussions and long-term collaborations with his colleagues, Mr. Moon reconstructed global history curriculum and created World Religion curriculum by placing religion at the center of the global history curriculum. The curriculum focused on world religions and perspectives and origins out of them. Throughout a semester, students learned Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and compared their religious beliefs, world views, rituals, and the lives of people influenced by the religions. As discussed in the earlier chapter, it was evident that his World Religion curriculum incorporating diverse religions and their historical backgrounds and paying attention to the previously marginalized regions and religions had great academic as well as emotional appeal to his newcomer ELLs, thus improved their academic interests and engagement.

Mr. Moon's curriculum reconstruction stemmed from his experiences of boring "chalk and talk" style, textbook-driven high school social studies which was never connected to him and Freirean notion of social justice education and critical pedagogy by which he was largely impressed during his teacher education. Despite some limitations and soft-touch approaches, he tried to incorporate the issues of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and gender and promote social justice agenda throughout his curriculum. The Millennium High School's cluster system and

alternative academic and assessment approach enabled Mr. Moon to design his curriculum with autonomy and creativity, and his colleagues and administrators were supportive to his curricular decision making.

Ms. Jin's global history curriculum aimed to help culturally diverse youth to develop critical thinking and literacy skill, and cultural diversity and tolerance. On the basis of her strong belief on students as knowledge constructors, Ms. Jin required a great range of advanced reading and writing to her students and provided ample hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, which elevated the students' academic participation. She also placed significant emphasis on cultural diversity and tolerance by revisiting previously marginalized regions and investigating how people's lives are interconnected with and influenced by them. As the only ninth grade global history teacher who was well-respected in her school, she was able to make autonomous curricular choices with support from her administrators.

On the other hand, Ms. Kim's enacted global history curriculum was contradictory to her curricular beliefs and unsuccessful to address her culturally and linguistically diverse students' academic needs. Contrary to her advocacy of culturally conscious and regionally balanced global history curriculum, Ms. Kim's enacted global history curriculum was geared toward content knowledge delivery and high-stake test preparation. She confessed that global citizenship, inference, critical thinking, and application sound good, but are neither practical nor applicable to her school's test-driven curricular approach and rigid school culture. In order to cover the overwhelming contents in textbooks, Ms. Kim sought to simplify the content knowledge and deliver them in a simple, easy way.



In addition, Confucian philosophy regarding teachers as masters with high authority (Gao, 2010; Pang, 2009) and her teaching experiences driven by the Confucianism emphasizing hierarchical teacher-student order in Korea seemed to provide impacts on Ms. Kim's teacher-centered, textbook-based curriculum with emphasis on content knowledge coverage (Pang et al., 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Her misguided attempts at the content simplification and cultural values often generated culturally unconscious curricular choices which caused students' disengagement and even resistance to her global history lessons.

Taken together, the three Korean American social studies teachers advocated teaching for global, multicultural perspectives in their global history class given their criticism and distrust of the official social studies curriculum while how each teacher approached to the global, multicultural social studies curriculum in their actual classrooms differed. For the three teachers who maintained critical views on the Eurocentric focus of the official social studies curriculum and attempts to promote teaching for global, multicultural perspectives in their enacted curriculum, their teacher education, cultural and philosophical backgrounds, and current school contexts including school mission, colleagues, and administrators served as critical factors either to support their curricular beliefs or to hinder their attempts.

In Mr. Moon's case, his teacher education background, especially Paulo Freire and his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, provided powerful influences on his curricular beliefs and practices on teaching for global/multicultural perspectives, social justice agenda, and equity issues. The Millennium High School's advocacy of interdisciplinary curricula, less pressure from the state mandated tests, and alternative assessment programs also supported his curricular practices. Likewise, Ms. Jin's global history curriculum focusing on critical literacy and

culturally diverse and tolerant worldviews was empowered by supportive school administrators, teacher autonomy, and academically focused learning environment at her school. Meanwhile, rigid school culture, bureaucratic administrators, and curriculum guidelines heavily influenced by the state standards and high-stakes tests in Ms. Kim's school largely shaped her textbook-centered global history lessons which seemed contrary to her beliefs and advocacy of the regionally and culturally balanced global history curriculum. Her firm beliefs on Confucian philosophy defining hierarchical teacher-student relationship and views on formal schooling did not resonate with her ethnoracial minority students either.

Sociocultural theory conceptualizing teachers as cultural selves (Jones et al., 2001) and teaching as a situated autobiographical act (Costigan et al., 2004) resonates with this study's finding on the three social studies teachers' curricular choices and practices. As previous research on social studies teachers' curricular positioning (Evans, 1989; Grant, 1996), this finding underscores that the intersectionality of the teachers' personal theories and sociocultural experiences play a central role in determining the global history content, knowledge, and broader learning experiences to which students are exposed. Specifically, the Korean American teachers' teacher education, cultural and philosophical backgrounds, and current school contexts including school mission, colleagues, and administrators were influential in if and how they realize their curricular beliefs and implement truly globalized and multicultural global history curriculum in their actual classrooms.

This finding is noteworthy because it challenges the assumption that teachers of color have a racial match and/or cultural congruence with their ethnoracial minority students and better support their academic and cultural needs. As discussed in the literature review chapter, previous

research reports that such a match may support minority students in crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries in school and foster culturally relevant teaching for diverse students' learning in high-minority urban schools (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Quijano & Rios, 2000). This assumption has often been used as a key idea that drives a call for teachers of color (Chong, 2003; Park, 2009). As the finding of this study exhibits, however, the three Korean American social studies teachers, despite their advocacy for culturally relevant global history curriculum infused with global, multicultural perspectives, were not always able to implement their curricular perspectives given their complex sociocultural contexts (Au & Blake, 2003; Salinas & Castro, 2010). Their commonly shared curricular beliefs on truly globalized and multicultural social studies education were mediated through multiple personal backgrounds and sociocultural influences, thus created many different approaches to their enacted curriculum (Maboleka & Madsen, 2007). The three Korean American teachers in this study also found themselves challenged by students due to conflicting views on the contents that they taught and cultural values that they maintained.

This finding supports the idea that just being a teacher of color does neither necessarily assure culturally conscious and relevant curriculum for minority students nor guarantee the racial/cultural match teaching (Agee, 2004; Gordon, 2002; Moore, 2003). Although Mr. Moon's and Ms. Jin's curricular practices indicated meaningful potentials for students' academic engagement and success and commitment to socially just and multicultural perspectives, Ms. Kim sometimes maintained highly assimilationist views, lost her passion for culturally relevant teaching due to institutionalized racism or test-driven school contexts (Amabisca, 2006; Mabokela & Madsen, 2007; Quijano & Rios, 2000). The complexity of the curricular practices

of teachers of color, particularly Korean American social studies teachers in this study, were mediated and challenged through the intersectionality of multiple personal backgrounds and sociocultural contexts and its implication for teacher preparation and retention will be discussed further in the following Implication section. The following section discusses how the three teachers implemented pedagogies different in their realities of classroom.

### **Dynamic Pedagogical Practices: Socioculturally Situated and Autobiographical Acts**

The three Korean American teachers argued for the need of global history instruction based upon diverse teaching methods which serve the complex academic interests and needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students. Meanwhile, specific pedagogical approaches and instructional methods that each teacher adopted in his/her classroom differed depending on personal pedagogical beliefs, teacher education background, current school contexts, and many other inner or outer circumstances.

Mr. Moon's instruction can be characterized by literacy-driven social studies lessons with emphasis on student-centered learning, interdisciplinary pedagogies, and differentiated instructions supported by multiple visual texts and technology for newcomer ELLs. Based upon his social studies and TESOL dual degrees, Mr. Moon was skillful in employing TESOL strategies while teaching global history contents and developing newcomer students' literacy skills through group activities and discussions. Recalling his childhood struggles of English only policy in his schools and dilemmas of being a bilingual, Mr. Moon valued bilingualism and allowed students to communicate in their native language when they worked in pairs or in small groups. Unlike typical text-dependent social studies courses, Mr. Moon's class included ample visual resources and graphic organizers, including maps, video clips, cultural artifacts, and

graphs, which made social studies contents as well as English language learning more comprehensible and drew student attention and participation (Salinas, 2006). His pedagogical practices are parallel with the effective social studies teaching methods demonstrated in previous studies on teaching social studies for ELLs (Cruz & Thornton, 2008; Salinas et al., 2008).

Ms. Jin's global history instruction stressed inquiry-based, student-centered learning and critical analysis of primary sources and visual texts (Salinas et al., 2006). Ms. Jin, as a practicing painter, had a great passion for art and in-depth knowledge backgrounds of art history, which led her to utilize ample visual learning sources, including primary sources, pictures, fine arts, and movies, in her global history lessons. Her students' high interests and active participation in the visual text analysis activity were frequently evident in their thoughtful comments and lively discussions. She also prioritized personalized global history instruction which allowed students to attach significance in learning history.

Unlike the two other teachers, Ms. Lim has had difficulties in employing instructional strategies that engaged her students with global history learning in a meaningful way. Ms. Kim perceived that lecture, note-taking, and memorization are the most effective way to deliver maximum knowledge within a given amount of time and to improve students' academic achievement. Her typical lesson was composed of 5 minute review, 20 minute reading, and 20 minute lecture. Although she recognized that her teaching style lacked academic as well as cultural appeal to her students, Ms. Kim, citing Confucian value on formal education and schooling, conceptualized formal schooling as a serious procedure of learning and a pathway to social mobility, not an entertainment, and thus maintained her knowledge-delivery pedagogic style. Due to the overly packed mandated curriculum schedule and numerous tests that her

department required, she was not able to find many chances to use the alternative sources and make differences in her class. Her classroom settings with bolted-down desks and limited technological support made Ms. Kim difficult to rearrange classroom settings and to utilize diverse classroom activities other than lecture.

As previous research on teachers of color, how each teacher understood the social studies contents and curriculum shaped the way he/she developed and implemented pedagogical practices (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Evans, 1989; Grant, 1996). Mr. Moon's and Ms. Jin's enacted curriculum based upon constructivist orientations and multicultural perspectives understanding global history fostered dynamic pedagogical strategies which provided multiple sources and method to explore history. Both teachers' student-centered instructions challenging traditional textbook-defined social studies lessons resonated well with their students who were from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, thus exhibited great academic appeal to them. Their lessons were alive and active with abundant discussions, projects, visual sources, and group works which provided students with spaces for engagement and participation.

This finding argues that the two teachers' personal and sociocultural experiences influenced their pedagogical beliefs and implementation of teaching of global history. Grown up as second generation Korean Americans in urban, multiethnic areas where they were currently working, they possessed good understandings about their multicultural school culture, student population, and local communities and adopted them to their pedagogical practices. At the same time, each teacher's unique childhood background, personal interests, cross-cultural experiences, and teacher education background generated his/her unique pedagogical approaches, such Mr.

Moon's bilingual policy and Ms. Jin's multiple usage of visual arts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Kanpol, 1992; Rhee, 2008).

However, I also acknowledge that not all Korean American teachers, more broadly teachers of color, necessarily adopt oppositional stance to the traditional instructional methods or utilize culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse learners (Agee, 2004; Mabokela & Madsen, 2007; Salinas & Castro, 2010). As I discussed in the findings chapter, Ms. Kim maintained values and beliefs associated with traditional teaching and assimilating norms of the dominant culture such as the model minority myth, which were manifested in her teaching practices. Her classroom was a site of cultural conflicts where Ms. Kim constantly confronted cultural conflicts and academic resistance from her students (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008).

I explored the three Korean American social studies teachers' socioculturally situated pedagogical beliefs and implementations in their global history classrooms in this section. In the following section, I will summarize the three teachers' experiences of teaching social studies responding to the research questions of this study.

### **Summary**

In this section, I examined the cross-case themes across the three Korean American social studies teachers' teaching experiences: (a) Complex experiences of being a racial minority social studies teacher; (b) Distrust of the official social studies curriculum; (c) Toward a truly global, multicultural social studies curriculum; and (d) Dynamic pedagogical practices: Socioculturally situated and autobiographical acts. I discussed the cross-case themes in light of the theoretical framework, sociocultural theory in this study including previous research on teachers of color. In this summary section, I summarize the three Korean American social studies teachers'

experiences of teaching profession in American public schools and their curricular and pedagogical beliefs and practices in relation to the following research questions of this study.

**What are the Korean American social studies teacher's perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?** All three Korean American social studies teachers were ethnoracial minority teachers in their schools. The ethnoracial minority teachers had dynamic experiences of being a Korean American social studies teacher and negotiating their personal and professional identifications in different school contexts. The three teachers commonly shared racism and racial remarks against Asians, the model minority myths, and multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization caused by the intersectionality between race, gender, immigration status, and language as the most significant factor shaping their being a Korean American teacher and negotiating their personal and professional identifications (Burant et al., 2002; Kang, 2009; Newton, 2008; Ng et al., 2007).

Meanwhile, drawing upon their own personal biographies and sociocultural experiences, each teacher showed unique, yet complex strategies to cope with the multiple types of racism (Pang, 2009; Ramanathan, 2006). Mr. Moon, based upon his cross-cultural and multilingual backgrounds, acted as a cross-cultural agent who celebrated cultural diversity and challenged the pervasive stereotypes against racial minorities. Ms. Jin was able to openly expose and celebrate her cultural backgrounds with other school personnel and students in culturally tolerant atmosphere. Meanwhile, Ms. Kim, due to her isolation and marginalization caused by racism in her school, decided to close her cultural identities.

**How do the Korean American social studies teachers perceive and implement social**



**studies curriculum and pedagogy in the realities of their classroom?** The three Korean American social studies teachers poignantly criticized Eurocentric perspectives of the official social studies curriculum standards, state-mandated tests, and textbooks, thus exhibited strong resistance to them. The teachers agreed that the current global history curriculum standards marginalize people's lives, rich cultural heritage, and diverse cultural frames of references of the non-Western regions while highlighting European history and its contribution to the modern civilization. Their oppositional stance to the official knowledge in global history textbooks and the state mandated standards led to their advocacy of a truly global, multicultural curriculum (Branch, 2004; Subedi, 2008).

Meanwhile, how each teacher implemented their curricular beliefs and made social studies curricular and pedagogical choices in their actual classrooms varied. Mr. Moon's and Ms. Jin's enacted curricula were characterized by a constructivist lens to understand history which promoted the idea of history as interpretation and analysis, instead of a series of factual knowledge, and teaching with global, multicultural perspectives which supported culturally relevant global history lessons. They incorporated multiple instructional methods with emphasis on student-centered, inquiry-based approaches utilizing diverse visual texts and primary sources. Their instructions were well resonated with students and improved their academic engagement. However, Ms. Kim's curricular and pedagogical choices focused on textbook-defined, test-driven approach, which was contradictory to her curricular views. Textbooks, note-taking, memorization, and lecture were mostly characterized her pedagogical styles which limited student participation.

**How do personal biographies and sociocultural contexts shape the Korean**

### **American social studies teacher's curricular and pedagogical decision-making?**

Sociocultural theory conceptualizing teachers as cultural selves and teaching as a situated autobiographical act resonates with this study's finding on the three Korean American social studies teachers' curricular choices and practices (Costigan et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2001). This research underscores that the intersectionality of the teachers' personal theories and sociocultural experiences play a central role in determining the global history content, knowledge, pedagogy, and broader learning experiences to which students are exposed (Achinstein et al., 2010; Agee, 2004; Chandler, 2007). Specifically, the Korean American teachers' K-12 schooling experiences, teacher education, cultural and philosophical backgrounds, and current school contexts including school mission, colleagues, and administrators were influential in if and how they realize their curricular beliefs and implement truly globalized and multicultural global history curriculum in their actual classrooms. The racial minority teachers' experiences of racism and academic struggles during K-12 schooling and cross-cultural experiences served as a springboard for them to have better understandings of their culturally and linguistically diverse students and to develop commitment to teaching for global perspectives, diversity, and social justice (Gay, 2004; Lynn, 2002; Quijano & Rios, 2000). Powerful teacher education programs infused with social justice perspectives and supportive and cooperative school atmosphere aided them to implement their curricular and pedagogical beliefs in their actual classroom with autonomy and creativity. Meanwhile, misguided curricular beliefs and philosophical stance, rigid school culture, bureaucratic school personnel, pressure from high-stakes tests, test-driven contexts, and racism pervasive in school culture became barriers for the teachers to design truly global, multicultural

global history curriculum and to implement culturally relevant and meaningful pedagogy in their classrooms (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Moore, 2003; Yee, 2009).

This cross-case analysis expanded the case-by-case findings described in chapter four and addressed the major research questions of this study. In the next section, I describe this study's implications for social studies teacher education research and practice.

### **Implications**

I discuss tentative implications for research and practice in teacher education and in particular social studies teacher education in this section.

### **Intersectionality**

The investigation of the three Korean American social studies teachers' diversified experiences of teaching profession and curricular and pedagogical decision making demonstrates that teachers of color, their personal and professional identifications and teaching practices need to be viewed with much more complexity and understood within their given sociocultural contexts. A number of previous research on teachers of color suggest that the ethnoracial minority teachers' teaching experiences and practices cannot be simply captured by looking at race and/or ethnicity dimensions (Amabisca, 2006; Chandler, 2007). In particular, research on Asian American or immigrant teachers warned that the teachers of Asian descent's diverse racial, ethnic, social and cultural identifications have frequently been interpreted in an undifferentiated manner and homogenized under the category of Asian American and the false stereotypes against them (Nguyen, 2008; Subedi, 2007). This research reveals that the three Korean American teachers' experiences of teaching profession in American public schools and social studies teaching practices are situated autobiographical as well as sociocultural acts which were

shaped by various ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, immigration background, language, teacher education, current school contexts, and other contextual circumstances interact.

Given the multiple intersectional contexts, the three Korean American teachers and their teaching experiences demonstrated intragroup diversity within Korean American and more broadly Asian American teachers (Nguyen, 2008; Pang, 2009; Quicho & Rios, 2000; Subedi, 2007). Each teacher conceptualized his/her own beliefs on the social studies curriculum and pedagogy, practiced the curricular and pedagogical beliefs in unique ways in classrooms, and formed unique relations and interactions with students, colleagues, and administrators. The three teachers' experiences of racism and academic struggles during K-12 schooling and cross-cultural experiences served as a springboard for them to have better understandings of their culturally and linguistically diverse students and to develop commitment to teaching for global perspectives, diversity, and social justice. Powerful teacher education programs infused with social justice perspectives and supportive and cooperative school atmosphere aided them to implement their curricular and pedagogical beliefs in their actual classroom with autonomy and creativity. Meanwhile, misguided curricular beliefs and philosophical stance, rigid school culture, bureaucratic school personnel, pressure from high-stakes tests, test-driven contexts, and racism pervasive in school culture became barriers for the teachers to design truly global, multicultural global history curriculum and to implement culturally relevant and meaningful pedagogy in their classrooms. That is, each teacher's diverse aspects of racial, ethnic, class, religious, or linguistic identities within the same ethnic group shaped his/her curriculum meanings differently.

Teachers' personal, historical, social, and cultural conceptions and previous experiences and how those multiple backgrounds provide impacts on their curricular and pedagogical

understanding has been one of the most significant research areas in social studies scholarship, particularly teacher education (Adler, 2008; Salinas & Castro, 2010). This study underscores intersectionality, which informs our understanding of the complexities of how the three teachers of color experienced social studies teaching based on their mixed group memberships, and calls for more research on teachers of color and their experiences framed by the intersectionality.

### **Challenging the Cultural Match Teaching**

The juxtaposition of the rapidly growing non-white student population with diverse cultural backgrounds entering schools and the lack of teachers of color brought the issue of teacher of color recruitment, preparation, and retention to the foreground of teacher education (Quioco & Rios, 2000; Ramanathan, 2006). In particular, given the burgeoning immigrant students of Asian descent during the recent decades, there has been the need to recruit more teachers of Asian descent (Arun, 2009; Pang, 2009). Based upon racial match teaching or cultural congruence between teacher and student, some policy makers and educators argue that more teachers of color should be recruited to diversify American teaching force and to better serve increasingly diverse student population (Chong, 2003; Park, 2009). Teachers of color have often been considered to have great potential to related and engage their students of color, be good role models based on their cross-cultural experiences and bi/multilingual abilities, and promote culturally relevant pedagogies addressing their students' needs (Chen, 2009; Yee, 2009).

This study challenges the oversimplified notion of cultural match teaching by arguing that the complexity of teacher-student match is mediated through race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, and multiple other sociocultural contexts, thus should be understood with much more complexity and personal biographies as well as sociocultural contexts framing them.

It is true that the three Korean American social studies teachers, drawing upon their cross-cultural backgrounds and experiences of minority status, exhibited much potential to play a significant role in assisting minority students' academic engagement and challenging the official discourse of global history which previously marginalized their students' origins and perspectives.

However, just being a teacher of color does not guarantee their effectiveness with minority students and culturally meaningful and engaging curricular and pedagogical choices (Achinstein et al., 2009; Agee, 2004; Moore, 2003). Throughout the three teachers' cases, it was evident that their social studies classrooms and broader school settings that they interacted with students were sites of many cultural conflicts. Mr. Moon's World Religion curriculum which had a great deal of academic appeal to his newcomer ELL students who have diverse religious backgrounds was faced with disagreements and conflicts from some students. Ms. Kim's text-dependent, test-driven pedagogy, especially her misguided practices of differentiated instruction, caused her students' distrust and even resistance to her lesson. What made the two cases different was how each teacher responded to the conflicts. Mr. Moon used the cultural conflict as teachable moments and addressed the issue with open discussion and conversations with students so that he was able to help students broaden tolerant perspectives and build multicultural understandings. However, Ms. Kim often blamed her low-skilled, less motivated students, their parents, and school contexts and gave up hopes and expectations to them.

Taken together, teachers' effectiveness with minority students and culturally relevant and meaningful teaching practices for them are not necessarily based on the race and ethnicity of the teachers but in their curricular perspectives and pedagogical practices in actual classrooms

(Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay et al., 2003). Moreover, multicultural resources, critical stances toward the official knowledge, and culturally relevant pedagogical practices of teachers of color should not be simply taken for granted, rather must be valued, revisited, and discussed through teacher education and with teacher educators, colleagues, and school personnel. In the next chapter, I will discuss this study's implication for teacher education, in particular social studies teacher education.

### **Teacher Education**

This study provides meaningful implications for teacher education, particularly social studies teacher education. The findings of this study indicate that teachers of color' effectiveness with minority students and culturally relevant and meaningful teaching practices for them are not always originated from their ethnoracial backgrounds but shaped by multiple personal biographies and sociocultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study argues that multicultural resources, critical stances toward the official knowledge, and culturally relevant pedagogical practices of teachers of color should not be taken for granted, rather must be valued, revisited, and discussed through teacher education and with teacher educators, colleagues, and school personnel. That being said, the role of quality teacher education and teacher educators that can carefully address these teachers' cultural values and help them develop meaningful curricular and pedagogical positions is significant. Especially, social studies teacher education, whose goal is to educate teachers who will teach social studies, one of the most controversial curricular area where teachers' gatekeeping role matters due to its focus on American history and citizenship, has an important duty to prepare knowledgeable and responsible teachers.

Teacher education should create open spaces for critical reflection for teachers from ethnic minority communities. Previous literature on teachers of color indicate that teachers, particular those who are from ethnoracial minority backgrounds, benefit greatly from having opportunities to reflect on their practice and their own personal experiences that have influenced their decision to become and remain teachers (Amabisca, 2006; Branch, 2004). It was also evident in Mr. Moon's case that his experiences of teacher education infused with social justice agenda had him reflect upon his own personal biography and sociocultural contexts, develop commitment to global history education for diversity and multiculturalism, thus helped him to become a teacher for underserved students. Likewise, teacher education can provide pre- and in-service teachers the opportunity to reflect on and analyze their own experiences as students and teachers, resolve personal and professional struggles, and in doing so become agents of change in their school and communities (Agee, 2004; Pang, 2009; Sheets & Chew, 2004; Yee, 2009).

Teacher educators should also guide those teachers with multicultural backgrounds to revisit own racial, ethnic, cultural, and other types of biases, previous knowledge, cultural frames of references, and curricular and pedagogical beliefs stemmed from their origins, so that they can critically conceptualize how to utilize, challenge, or transform these ideas in a culturally relevant way for students. As Ms. Kim's case articulated, unvisited cultural and philosophical positions and misguided pedagogical interpretations provided a source of academic resistance and disengagement of her students. During her teacher training and the last 18 years of teaching experiences, she barely had a chance to present, discuss, and reflect her own cultural identity or curricular and pedagogical beliefs with colleagues, teacher educators, and school administrators, which also became a source of her isolation in her school. For pre- and in-service teachers like



Ms. Kim or those who have similar concerns, teacher education can provide spaces for critical reflection and create networks of support as they develop as engaged and capable social studies teachers.

### **Future Research**

In this section, I describe recommendations for future research that might continue along the line of inquiry followed in this dissertation study.

This study explored the three Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching professions and social studies curricular and pedagogical decision making through in-depth investigation of the three teachers' rich voices and actual teaching practices in their classrooms. Future research can include the perspectives and actual learning process of students in their classrooms who can possibly be critical informants in providing complementary information about in what ways the teachers' curricular and pedagogical choices provide impacts on their students' learning. Scholars suggest that there is often a gap between how teachers perceive their own practices and students' learning and how students understand their teachers and classrooms, thus researchers should understand the complex relationship among teachers' beliefs, their practices, and adolescents' learning in order to generate more balanced understandings (Adler, 2004). Future research incorporating student interviews and classroom observation would address the suggestion.

This study chose three Korean American social studies in urban public schools as bounded-cases of Asian American social studies teachers and examined the influences of unique ethnic, cultural, philosophical, educational, and linguistic backgrounds on their teaching practices. Future research can examine social studies teachers of color who are not only from

other Asian ethnic groups but also from different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, or linguistic backgrounds and conduct a comparative study on the social studies teaching practices of the teachers from diverse ethnoracial backgrounds. The findings of this study demonstrated that the three Korean American teachers' overall experiences of teaching profession and curricular and pedagogical choices exhibited a great range of similarities to and differences from those of teachers of color introduced in previous research (Ng et al., 2007; Quirocho & Rios, 2000; Salina & Castro, 2010). And the intersectionality of multiple personal and sociocultural backgrounds and inner and outer factors influenced their teaching practices. Given the findings, I would like to continue exploring how teachers from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and class backgrounds perceive and implement social studies curriculum and pedagogy and in what ways personal, social, and cultural experiences of the teachers shape their teaching practices. It would also be of interest to examine the research questions for this study in monocultural educational environments in suburban or rural areas and investigate how social studies teachers of color serving students in monocultural suburban/rural settings negotiate their professional identities and curricular and pedagogical positioning. By doing so, I would provide meaningful insights into the current scholarship of teacher identity and practical implications for teacher preparation.

Future research can also address the practices of teacher training and preparation programs and the experiences of pre-service and student teachers who are from ethnoracial minority backgrounds within the settings. How the pre-service and student teachers selected teaching profession, what personal stories and sociocultural experiences they bring into their teacher education programs, and how they conceptualize personal and professional identities throughout the programs and field works will be interesting future research agendas. The

investigation of these inquiries will contribute to our better understanding about how teacher education can better prepare and support pre-service teachers of color to be capable and caring social studies teachers.

Lastly, I recommend more research about social studies teachers of color and their curricular and pedagogical positioning. This study focused on the Korean American social studies teachers and shed light on their teaching experiences through in-depth investigation of their authentic narratives and daily teaching practices. However, voices of teachers of color, their concerns and difficulties to negotiate their cultural and professional identities, contributions to teaching for diversity and social justice, and multiple concerns and dilemmas in curricular and pedagogical choices have still been underrepresented in educational scholarship (Achinstein et al., 2010). More research is needed to gain deeper insight into the experiences of teachers of color, their possibilities and challenges of teaching for diversity and social justice, the influence of sociocultural backgrounds and contexts for their teaching experiences, and the role of teacher education to prepare caring and committed teachers of color (Pang, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

This study explored three Korean American social studies teachers' experiences of teaching social studies, focusing on their social studies curricular and pedagogical perceptions and practices. Framed by sociocultural theory, this study aimed to shed light on the heterogeneous stories and socially and culturally contextualized experiences of Korean American social studies teachers, which have been largely undocumented in the social studies scholarship. The major research question for this study is: How do three Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of their

classrooms? Subsidiary research questions are: (a) What are the Korean American social studies teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching profession in American public schools?; (b) How do the Korean American social studies teachers perceive social studies curriculum and implement pedagogy in the realities of classrooms?; and (c) How do sociocultural experiences of the teachers influence their curricular and pedagogical practices?

Findings indicate that the three Korean American teachers exhibited diverse, complex, and contextualized experiences of teaching social studies in their public schools. The teachers criticized Eurocentric worldviews and narrowly defined national citizenship aims of the official social studies curriculum. All three teachers emphasized that previous marginalized religions should receive more attention with more culturally diverse and tolerant perspectives in the global history curriculum. They argued that social studies education must promote global, multicultural perspectives in order to better serve culturally diverse students' academic needs and interests in this globalized, multicultural society.

Meanwhile, no single set of practices and beliefs capture how the three Korean American social studies teachers experience teaching profession in American public school or teach global history in the realities of their classrooms. While being a racial minority teacher, each teacher formed different positions and relationships with students and other school personnel. Familial/immigration backgrounds, cross-cultural/international experiences, minority status experiences, K-12 schooling experiences, college/teacher education, current school context, and many other personal and sociocultural backgrounds shaped how each teacher made curricular and pedagogical decision making differently.

This study will provide meaningful insights into the current scholarship of teachers of color and their professional identity and practical implications for teacher preparation.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The questions suggested below will serve as a guideline for interviews with Korean American social studies teachers. The interview questions are based on survey questions and seek to understand preservice teachers' (a) personal backgrounds and history, (b) beliefs on teaching and education, (c) perceptions of social studies curriculum, (d) practices of social studies pedagogy and assessment, and (e) experiences of being Korean American social studies teachers in American public schools.

Date	
Place	
Interviewee	
Time of Interview	

#### I. Personal backgrounds and history

- 1) Tell me about your personal, social, and cultural backgrounds and history (e.g. family backgrounds, immigration/cross-cultural experiences)
- 2) How did you become interested in teaching, particularly social studies?
- 3) How were your experiences of learning social studies in middle school and high school?
- 4) How did you experience learning social studies education in college (teacher education program)?
- 5) Tell me about your school and students.

#### II. Beliefs on teaching and education

- 1) What is your ideal image of a good teacher, particularly social studies teacher?
- 2) What is your philosophy of teaching and learning, especially social studies education?
- 3) How do you see yourself as a social studies teacher?
- 4) What personal as well as sociocultural biographies/experiences influence your beliefs?
- 5) What experiences in your teacher education program (e.g. course work, student teaching, etc) has had the most influence on your philosophy about teaching social studies?
- 6) How has your philosophy and beliefs on teaching social studies changed since you began teaching? What explains the stability and/or change?
- 7) What do you believe is the most significant challenges facing social studies teachers?

#### III. Social studies curriculum

- 1) What are your goals and purposes for teaching social studies?
- 2) How does the teaching of social studies connect to citizenship education?
- 3) What do you think about the social studies official curriculum (state and local curriculum guidelines, textbooks, etc)?

- 4) To what extent does the official social studies curriculum address the purpose of social studies that you think?
- 5) How can the social studies official curriculum be improved?
- 6) How do you plan your own social studies units and lesson plans?
- 7) What role does your personal, cultural, and social experiences and identities play in your understanding about the social studies curriculum?

#### IV. Social studies pedagogy

- 1) What instructional strategies do you think are the most effective for social studies teaching and learning? Why?
- 2) What instructional strategies do you often use in your social studies classroom? Why?
- 3) How do you conceptualize the role of the teacher in the social studies classroom?
- 4) How should social studies learners be assessed?
- 5) What role does your personal, cultural, and social experiences and identities play in your teaching practices?

#### V. Experiences of being Korean American social studies teacher

- 1) How do you define your racial, ethnic, and cultural identities?
- 2) What is it like to be a Korean American social studies teacher in American schools?
- 3) What are the benefits/disadvantages to be social studies teachers of color?
- 4) Have you experienced racial, ethnic, or cultural discrimination?
- 5) What type of institutional support do you think are necessary for teachers of color?

#### VI. Issues of multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching

- 1) What did you learn about teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classroom settings in your teaching education program?
- 2) What experiences have you had teaching with racially, ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse students? What lessons have you learned as a result of those experiences?
- 3) How prepared do you feel to work with students from culturally diverse backgrounds?
- 4) Some believe that teaching about the oppression of different cultural groups in U.S. history takes away from a sense of American unity. What is your position on this? Please provide specific examples from your experiences.
- 5) Does knowing about issues of racism, discrimination, oppression, and inequities play in the development of good citizens? If so, how?
- 6) How should social studies teachers respond to the increasing student diversity in their teaching?

**APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

Date:	Subject:	Topic:
Time/Duration:	Teacher:	
School:	# of Students:	
Observation #:		
Sketch of Classroom:		
Time	Descriptive Field Notes	Reflective Notes
Questions & Comments		

## **APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE**

Teachers College, Columbia University

### INFORMED CONSENT

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:** You are invited to participate in a research study on Korean American social studies teachers' experiences on teaching social studies in American public schools. Specifically, I will explore how sociocultural experiences influence Korean American social studies teachers' positioning of social studies curriculum and pedagogy. You will be asked to participate in interviews which will possibly be audiotaped. I will also observe your social studies classroom and collect your classroom materials or other documents and artifacts during the Spring and Fall 2011 semester. Electronic files of audiotaped interviews, filed notes, and artifacts will be stored in a locked USB, and printed versions of these data will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. Your real names or school identifications will be removed and replaced by pseudonyms. Collected data will not be used in a way that would identify you personally. After data analysis, data including your personal information will be shredded and destroyed. Yoonjung Choi, a doctoral student in social studies education at Teachers College, Columbia University will conduct this research. Yoonjung Choi can be reached at yc2415@columbia.edu or (1) 646-884-4205. This study will be conducted in New York metropolitan area. I will mainly focus on classroom observation, but I will also meet and interview you other places in your schools including conference room, teachers' lounge, or playground.

When you participate in interviews, you will have a chance to choose interview language you feel most comfortable and familiar with, either English or Korean. Interviews conducted in Korean will be translated into English during transcribing process. As a native Korean and a former social studies teacher who has been studying in the U.S. for 5 years, I will be a bilingual interpreter.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risks and possible benefits associated with this study are minimal. Meanwhile, specific identification of any one person by colleagues, management, or outside parties is unlikely, but could be possible because this research will be conducted with a relatively small group of Korean American teachers in New York metropolitan area. To minimize the risk, researcher will not present personal information or data which may have a chance to identify a certain participant. All identifying information will be kept in a secured place (locked USB with passwords and locked file cabinet) and destroyed after data analysis.

There are no direct benefits to participants anticipated. However, the result of the study will be able to provide you with information about your own perceptions about the social studies curriculum and practices of social studies pedagogies. You will be able to reflect your own personal, social, and cultural backgrounds influencing on your practices and improve your pedagogies based on the data and self-reflection. I will open all the information that I will collect from the participants and share them if you want to. In addition, the result of this study will be able to contribute to research on teachers of color and social studies teacher education. This study will be able to provide insights into the teacher preparation and education and how teacher education programs can better prepare teachers of color.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. There will be no coercion or involuntary aspects during participant recruiting and data collection process. You can simply notify to

**PAYMENTS:** There will be no payment for your participation.

DATA STORAGE TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY: Data collected during the study and participants' confidentiality will be protected safely by the following plans. Digital audio files of interviews, classroom observation, or artifacts will be kept in USB or one removable data storage device which can be locked by researcher using passwords. Participants' real names or school identifications will be removed and replaced by pseudonyms. Printed version of interview transcripts, field notes, artifacts, and consent forms which will be signed by you will be kept in a locked file cabinet in researcher's home. The information collected here will not be used in a way that would identify you personally. After data analysis, data including your personal information will be shredded and destroyed. Based on these privacy protection methods, data will not be able to be viewed by unauthorized person. Individuals will not be identified as having participated in this particular study.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: This study will be conducted during the Spring and Fall 2011 school semester. The expected duration for the study is approximately 11 months, from February 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011. During the period, I will conduct classroom observation and interviews. Each classroom observation will take about 50minutes, and I will conduct classroom observations at least 3 times a week for each participant.

Interviews will also be conducted. First, I will conduct three formal interviews with each Korean American social studies teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of a semester. First formal interview session will focus on life history of Korean American social studies teachers, including their or their families' immigration history, and personal backgrounds, such as general experiences of public school teaching and teacher education. Second formal interview will focus on their teaching philosophies, perceptions about social studies curriculum and pedagogical and assessment styles. Third formal interview will explore self-evaluation of their social studies teaching during the semester and additional information which is not captured during the previous interviews and observation. Each formal interview will take approximately 1 hour.

I will also have informal interviews and casual conversations with participants besides three formal interview sessions in order to investigate Korean American social studies teachers' experiences, perceptions, and practices within more casual settings. There is no time limitation for informal interviews and casual conversations, but I guess those informal talks will take about 5 minutes to less than 1 hour.

HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: The results of the study will be used for my dissertation. This study may also be published in professional journals or presented in conferences. Since all study participants will be given pseudonyms, there will be no way to identify the subjects in the publication of the research data.

Teachers College, Columbia University

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Yoonjung Choi \_\_\_\_\_

Research Title: \_\_\_Are They American Enough to Teach Social Studies: Korean American Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Social Studies \_

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is (\_646\_)\_884 - 4205\_\_\_\_\_.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
- If video and/or audio taping is part of this research, I ( ) consent to be audio/video taped. I ( ) do NOT consent to being video/audio taped. The written, video and/or audio taped materials will be viewed only by the principal investigator and members of the research team.
- Written, video and/or audio taped materials ( ) may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research ( ) may NOT be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



Teachers College, Columbia University

Assent Form for Minors (8-17 years-old)

I \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) agree to participate in the study entitled: \_\_\_\_\_ . The purpose and nature of the study has been fully explained to me by \_\_\_\_\_ (investigator's name). I understand what is being asked of me, and should I have any questions, I know that I can contact \_\_\_\_\_ (investigator) at any time. I also understand that I can to quit the study any time I want to.

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to \_\_\_\_\_ (participant's name) in age-appropriate language. He/She has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e. assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_