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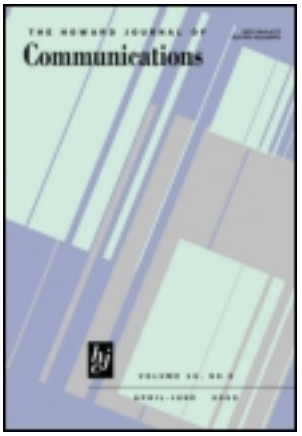

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Revisiting Asiacentricity: Toward Thinking Dialectically about Asian American Identities and Negotiation

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Revisiting Asiacentricity: Toward Thinking Dialectically about Asian American Identities and Negotiation

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This analysis explores the possible communicative themes that those who regard themselves as Asian Americans negotiate in their intercultural interactions. To do so, this analysis first locates the historical and political circumstances in which the discourse about Asian Americans has been socially constructed—that is to say, within the U.S. racialized and gendered context. Then, this analysis revisits Asiacentricity to see if any Asian communicative lives exist, as Asian American identities must be located both in global and local contexts. In this process, contradictory views of Asiacentricity are offered. Lastly, this analysis proposes new possibilities in moving toward thinking dialectically about the communicative themes that pertain to the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation. In so doing, this analysis plays as a critical intervention to further dialogue about what makes Asian Americans Asian Americans in the discipline of communication.

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The label *Asian American* has been historically negotiated and renegotiated throughout sociocultural processes. Omi and Winant (1994) asserted "race is [an unstable and fluid] concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (p. 55). Asian Indians were once considered White, while at the same time Vietnamese were identified in the "other" racial classification in the U.S. census (Hyun, 2005). Previously, Asian Americans and Pacific Americans were in the same category, called *Asian/Pacific Americans*. Such racial labeling was very diverse, and the term included "thirty Asian American ethnic groups and twenty-one Pacific islander ethnic groups" (Wu, 1997, p. 44). Asian/Pacific Americans were separated into two categories (e.g., Asian and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander) in the U.S. Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). According to the U.S. Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010), *Asian Americans* are defined as individuals who belong to the following groups: Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indo-Chinese, Indonesian, Iwo Jiwan, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Maldivian, Nepalese, Okinawan, Pakistani, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and other Asian, not specified.

The Asian American racial labeling includes various types of social identities. The first type is that of the members of the Asian diaspora. They are foreign born immigrants or sojourners who are the first generation in the United States. The Asian American population is mostly composed of foreign-born Asians (Sun, 2007), as immigration is one of the major reasons why Asian Americans are the fastest growing cultural and ethnic group in the United States (J. Lee & Bean, 2004). The second type is that of the second- or third- or more generation Asian Americans, who were born in the United States. They may be marginalized because their hyphenated identity locates them as neither fully Asian nor fully American (Chen, 2004; Kawai, 2005; Nakayama, 2004). The third type is that of Asian Americans who are adopted by non-Asian families. Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Decared, and Petrill (2007) asserted that the internationally adopted children originating from Asia are being adopted mostly into White American families. The last type is that of Asian Americans whose backgrounds are multicultural. As a result of the growth of heterosexual reproductive intercultural relationships and marriages, the number of Asian Americans claiming a multicultural background is increasing (J. Lee & Bean, 2004; Smith & Edmonston, 1997). Thus, multiple types of Asian Americans are included under such racial labeling.

Various identity dimensions contribute to the diversity and heterogeneity of Asian Americans. Hyun (2005) maintained that "at last count, there

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were over 80 distinct Asian languages spoken in the United States" (p. 4). Also, different religious beliefs and cultural values are practiced among various Asian Americans (Wu, 1997). Moreover, "there is considerable variability in education, class, and acculturation level" (Hyun, 2005, p. 4) among Asian Americans. Lastly, difference in gender and sexual identities also exist among Asian Americans. In this view, each Asian American negotiates who he or she is along with other identity positions.

Defining Asian American identities in a single and unified manner is very complicated. Doing so is problematic for both Asian Americans and others as its discursive action co-constructs Orientalism. Said (1979) asserted that Orientalism is the Western imagined idea that homogenizes cultural differences in the East (i.e., Asia and the Middle East) to cocreate the West. This discursive formation differentiates the East from the West to construct the physical and/or imaginary boundary between the East and the West. At the same time, various Asian Americans live in a racialized and gendered Western cultural construct where, as A. G. Johnson (2006) described, privilege and power center on White, heterosexual, and male preoccupations. Especially, the construction of race and gender "becomes 'common-sense'—a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 60). Given the condition, a question emerges. Is there a way to articulate the racialized and gendered knowledge embedded in the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation?

To take a step to answer the aforementioned question in this analysis, I intend to address potential themes concerning the racialized and gendered knowledge by thinking dialectically about the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation. Chen and Starosta (2000) stated, "it is then obligatory for scholars to investigate human interactions in the process of forming a new sense of community that reflects the dialectical relationship between identity and diversity in the global context" (p. 7). To do so, I first provide an overview of the sociopolitical and historical context in which the discourse about Asian Americans became part of the U.S. social fabric. Then, I explore an Asiacentricity as proposed by Miike (2002, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010) to see if there is anything unique about Asia and its communicative life. Moreover, I examine opposing and contradictory views of Asiacentricity. Lastly, I propose a potential direction toward a responsible blending of Eastern and Western notions to think dialectically about the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation.

DISCOURSE ABOUT ASIAN AMERICANS

The discourse about Asian Americans has been rife with prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. Until 1965, Asians were restricted from coming to the United States (Cafferty, Chiswick, Greeley, & Sullivan, 1984; Okihiro,

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1994). During the mid-19th century Chinese immigrants were first brought to the United States to compensate for the shortage of labor in the railroad and mining industries and the Hawaiian sugarcane industry (R. G. Lee, 1976). After the railroad was largely completed, the Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed to control the number of Chinese workers. This was the first law to exclude a national group on the basis of ethnicity and class (Woo, 2000). To replace Chinese labor, in the late 1880s large numbers of Japanese workers were brought into agricultural economies, mainly sugarcane plantations in Hawaii (Conroy, 1953; Takaki, 1990). In 1907, as more Japanese workers relocated to the mainland, President Theodore Roosevelt restricted such migration (Woo, 2000). In the 1907 Gentleman's Agreement, Japan agreed to cease issuing passports to its workers for the purpose of migrating to the United States (Varma, 2004; Woo, 2000). During this time, other Asian cultural and ethnic groups from India, Korea, and the Philippines followed the Chinese and Japanese to the United States (Varma, 2004; Woo, 2000). The immigrants from Asia were mostly men. Okihiro (1994) described how "women were barely present in the bachelor society that typified most of the early period of Asian-American history" (p. 67). In 1924 the National Origins Act was passed to allow immigration only for individuals from the Western Hemisphere (Woo, 2000).

Soon after Japan's imperialism conflicted with the United States in the early 1940s, Japanese Americans were targeted as "the yellow peril" (Kawaii, 2005). Mainstream Americans perceived the yellow peril as "a horde of depraved, uncivilized heathens who threatened to undermine the American way of life" (Suzuki, 2002, p. 21). However, the discourse surrounding the "yellow peril" can be traced back to the late 19th century, when East Asia, particularly China and Japan, really began to develop as military, economic, and imperial powers (Kawaii, 2005). In 1941 Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor, which brought the United States into World War II, had the effect of significantly worsening American's discourse against Japanese Americans (Okihiro, 1994). In 1942, with World War II under way, Japanese Americans were placed into concentration camps in the Western states (Martin & Nakayama, 2004). The Japanese surrender brought about the end of the war; and when the Communists took over China in 1949, Chinese Americans became the perceived yellow peril (Zhou & Gatewood, 2000).

Nineteen sixty-five saw a major dramatic change regarding U.S. immigration policy. The 1965 Immigration Acts "set the numerical limit of 290,000 worldwide and 20,000 per country per year" (Verma, 2004, p. 291). The act "opened the door to new waves of immigration on a scale unprecedented since the arrival of Southern, Central, and Eastern Europeans prior to the Great Depression" (Woo, 2000, p. 92). In addition, the United States began to accept immigrants who were professionals, scientists, or artists with extraordinary ability, in addition to immigrants who were sponsored by family members. In 1990 the United States launched a nonimmigrant temporary

working visa status, H-1B visa, to compensate for the shortage of skilled labor with specialized knowledge (Varma, 2004). As a result, "since 1965, most Asian Americans have been coming to the United States to obtain and finish their graduate education in science and engineering, which has led them to obtain employment in the country and then a permanent stay" (Varma, 2004, p. 292). Today, foreign-born Asians are the majority (two-thirds) of the Asian-American population (Bennett, 2002).

These last few changes in immigration policy coconstructed the discourse about Asian Americans as the model minority (Sun & Starosta, 2006). The model minority discourse suggests that Asian Americans are "successful," "hard-working," "uncomplaining," and "honorary Whites" (e.g., Cheng & Thatchenkery, 1997; Chou, 2008; Dhingra, 2007; Dong & Keiner, 1999; Hyun, 2005; Kawai, 2005; Liu, 1998; Martin & Nakayama, 2004; Sun, 2007; Varma, 2004; Woo, 2000; Wu, 1997). The mainstream media's portrayal of Asian Americans between the 1960s and 1990s promoted the emergence of the model minority discourse (Kawai, 2005; R. G. Lee, 1996; Sun, 2007; Zhang, 2010). Consequently, Asian Americans "are believed to enjoy success in education, rising income, a strong work ethic, and the freedom from problems in mental health and crime" (Sun & Starosta, 2006, p. 120). Today, the model minority discourse is one of the major pervasive stereotypes about Asian Americans (Zhang, 2010). At the same time, the "positive" model minority discourse hides the complex and complicated social realities for Asian Americans. Kawai (2005) claimed:

> The model minority stereotype is constitutive of colorblind ideology in the sense that Asian Americans' "success" is used to deny the existence of institutional racism and to "prove" that U.S. society is reasonably fair and open for racial minority groups to move up the social ladder. (p. 114)

The model minority discourse differentiates Asian Americans from being just "Americans." The model minority discourse defines who the mainstream is and what Western culture. Chou (2008) asserted, "this [model minority] notion is in fact a camouflaged Orientalism" (p. 224). Thus, the construction of White privilege is maintained. Therefore, U.S. racial ideology, which determines that Asian Americans continue to experience the consequences of a long and intense history of racial inequality and prejudice, is hidden under the "positive" model minority discourse.

REVISITING ASIACENTRICITY

In the cultural condition just described Asian Americans negotiate their multiple identities. However, it is unclear what communicative themes various Asian Americans negotiate in social interactions and processes. Thus, I revisit

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Miike's Asiacentric conception of communication theory to understand an Asiacentric worldview and its communicative implications among Asians. Nakayama (2004) maintained "we cannot understand the experiences and histories of Asian Americans outside of the context of both domestic and international contexts" (p. 27). Therefore, examining an Asiacentric worldview may become a critical point of departure to understand what possible communicative themes make various Asian Americans "Asian Americans."

OVERVIEW OF ASIACENTRICITY

Miike (2002, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010) asserted that the Eurocentric scholarly discourse of knowledge dominates the discipline of communication. Asante (2003) maintains that Eurocentricity is "a normal expression of culture but could be abnormal if it imposed its cultural particularity as universal while denying and degrading other cultural … views" (p. 61). This Eurocentricity turns into Eurocentrism when its worldview is universally normalized (Miike, 2006). Inspired by Asante, Miike developed Asian theoretical approaches to human communication as a way of offering alternative interpretations of Asian cultures and communication. Dissanayake (2003) wrote, "a deep understanding of Asian approaches to communication will serve to widen the field of communication and extend its discursive boundaries" (p. 17). As a result, an Asiacentric paradigm of communication theory emerges in the discipline.

Five themes: circularity, harmony, other-directedness, reciprocity, and relationality are central theoretical assumptions in building an Asiacentric paradigm of communication theory (Miike, 2002, 2007a, 2009). The themes of relationality and circularity constitute the first philosophical assumption. Miike (2002) maintained that "human communication for an Asiacentric paradigm is that communication takes place in contexts of multiple relationships across space and time" (p. 6). In the Asian worldview, all human communication events and phenomena are interrelated to one another because they are naturally meant to occur together. Human relationships with other humans, family, nature, and the world of sprit in a particular relational context play a key role. Thus, the web of human relationships is the value needed to look at a dynamic and changing communication processes in the Asiacentric worldview.

The second theoretical assumption of Asiacentricity also clusters around the themes of relationality and circularity. Miike (2007a) maintained, "communication is a process in which we reduce our selfishness and egocentrism" (p. 274). In this sense, human agents intend to eliminate their self-centered ego and to enhance their self-cultivation and self-development in the Asiacentric worldview (Ishii, 2004). In so doing, human agents can develop a sense of who they are in the web of myriad relationships (Miike,

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2009). In this sense, "if communication is highlighted as a process of separating and secluding our world, alienation, loneliness, division, and domination will prevail in our mindset and lifestyle" (Miike, 2007a, p. 273). Thus, the communicative practices of strengthening collectivity and connection must be taken into account when one intends to see human communication from the Asiacentric worldview.

The theme of other-directedness constitutes the third theoretical assumption. Miike (2007a) said that in an Asiacentric world "communication is a process in which we feel the joy and suffering of all sentient beings" (p. 275). Instead of the rationality and reason valued by a Eurocentric world, emotional sensitivity and sensibility play a major role in this Asiacentric vision of humility and communication. Speakers and listeners intend to feel emotions together with "fellow humans, nature, and spirits" (Miike, 2009, p. 43), rather than being speakers who explicitly disclose their own emotions to listeners. Listeners must be able to read and feel the emotional sensitivity and sensibility that speakers verbally and nonverbally communicate. Kim (2001) maintained that "relational emotions that bind and bond individuals together, not the private and narcissistic emotions are emphasized" (p. 67). Thus, communicators must be perceptive, receptive, and introspective in an Asiacentric world.

The fourth theoretical assumption clusters pertains to the theme of reciprocity (or mutuality). In an Asiacentric world, "communication is a process in which we receive and return our debts to all sentient beings" (Miike, 2007a, p. 275). For instance, a human agent can live in the social world as a result of interdependence with other humans, nature, and the spiritual world. In this view, human agents "owe (their) debts of gratitude to our ancestors, parents, neighbors, teachers, friends, animals, mountains, rivers, plants, and so forth and so on" (Miike, 2009, p. 43). Thus, Asiacentric communicators emphasize the process of reciprocity and mutuality to express love and kindness. Therefore, Asiacentric communication cannot be viewed as "a means of gaining our individual freedom and liberating ourselves from oppression" (Miike, 2007a, p. 275).

Lastly, the theme of harmony plays a major role in Asiacentric communication. Miike (2007a) asserted that "[Asiacentric] communication is a process in which we moralize and harmonize the universe" (p. 276). Chen and Starosta (2003) stated that harmony as it relates to Asian approaches to human communication " represents a kind of ethical appeal that can induce a sense of duty for cooperation with the other party, not by the communicator's strategic words but by the sincere display of whole-hearted concern with the other" (p. 6). The process of communication can be positively perceived when a human agent intends to engage in harmony with the universe in an Asiacentric world. At the same time, the process of communication is negatively assessed when a human agent aims to embrace his or her own self-interest. Thus, mutual adaption plays an important role in developing harmonious communication processes and relationships (Miike, 2002).

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EVALUATING ASIACENTRICITY

As I explore Asiacentricity as proposed by Miike (2002, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010), I clearly see the advantage of a theory that may decentralize and destabilize the normativity of Eurocentric discourse of knowledge in the communication discipline. However, I also see some problems in the theoretical assumptions of Asiacentricity. To take a step to think dialectically about the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation, next I offer my perspective on both the advantages and disadvantages of Asiacentricity.

It is my view that Asiacentricity is powerful to critically question the domination of Western thinking in communication theories and research methods. For example, queer theory has become the major critical theory to view gender and sexual identities as dynamic, fluid, and unstable. Scholars such as Butler, Foucault, and Sedgwick, each from Western society, influenced the development of queer theory (Allen, 2006; E. P. Johnson, 2001). Although queer theory has gained widespread acceptance in today's academia (Halperin, 2003), some communication scholars such as Alexander (2003), E. P. Johnson (2001), and W. Lee (2003) perceive that queer theory lacks the racialized and class knowledge embedded in the material realities of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals of color. GLBT of color members who are not White, male, or affluent are still invisible in the discourse of queer theory (W. Lee, 2003). This occurs because E. P. Johnson (2001) claimed that queer theory centers on individual agency and fails to theorize the collective resistance that identity categories promote. From an Asiacentric worldview, as a gay transnational Japanese man of color, I perceive that queer theory implicates the Eurocentric twin biases of individuality and independence because it emphasizes individual agency and does not take collectivity and interdependence into account. Also, queer theory intends to deconstruct identity label boundaries and to embrace individualism. The Eurocentric bias of ego-centeredness and self-enhancement are embedded in queer theory. It does not emphasize relational and collective aspects of identity. Moreover, the Eurocentric bias of reason and rationality center on queer theory as it omits to theorize emotional and sensibility aspects of relational subjectivities as they relate to the social and performative embodiments of gender, sexuality, and body. Queer theory reinforces the Eurocentric bias of right and freedom, because it intends to play as a means of liberating individuals from heteronormativity and obtaining one's own freedom and individualism. Lastly, the goal of queer theory is to resemble what Miike (2007a) stated about the Eurocentric bias of pragmatism and materialism—"communication is thus conceived in the West as a process in which we manage ourselves and manipulate others or environments to achieve our individual goals and material comfort" (p. 276). Thus, I view that queer theory emerges out of Western philosophical paradigm.

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Therefore, the Miike's notion of Asiacentricity can powerfully serve as an alternative approach to make sense of the Eurocentric bias embedded in various theories and research methods.

At the same time, I see a couple of disadvantages of Asiacentricity. In particular, conceptualizing Asia as a single, fixed, and static category is the fundamental problem of Asiacentricity. Miike (2002) clarified that "Asiacentric communication scholarship embraces the diversity of Asia and does not purport to reinforce a monolithic concept of Asia" (p. 3). Miike further explained that Asiacentricity intends to embrace "multiple" Asian voices about communicative experiences of its diverse members (e.g., gays and lesbians, women, cultural/ethnic coculturals, and individuals in the diaspora). At the same time, in exploring Asiacentricity, I question what Asia is from the perspectives of the diverse Asian people.

To justify this point, I will use the Japanese as an example. The Buddhist philosophy was imported to Japan from India. One of the Japanese writing systems, *Kanji*, originated in China. After World War II, U.S. pop culture influenced a way of life in Japan. In this sense, Japanese constantly adapt foreign rhetorical elements to coconstruct their own identity, culture, and tradition. At the same time, Darling-Wolf (2000) observed that Japanese people preserve their own cultural identity as opposed to non-Japanese/foreign cultural elements, regardless of various foreign cultural influences and adaptations. Growing up in Japan, I agree with their observations that Japanese differentiate themselves from non-Japanese cultural and ethnic groups to maintain their identity boundary. In this sense, I am not quite sure if the majority of Japanese people see their cultural identity construction under the heterogeneous concept of "Asia."

I also observe that the rhetorical manifestation of Asia is a Western cultural product. Asiacentricity reconstructs the boundary of East vs. West embedded in the Western illusionary perception of Asia. Yet the purpose of the Asiacentric vision of communication theory is to provide an alternative perspective to the Eurocentric vision of communication theory. Miike (2007) problematized, "Eurocentric theories of communication may not embrace, as they should, individuality and independence within collectivity and interdependence" (p. 273). Then, he enumerates the Asiacentric communicative themes (i.e., collectivity, interdependence, emotion, and sensitivity) to illustrate an oppositional perspective. In my view, this is a major problem. Being from Japan, I observe that some Eurocentric communicative themes (e.g., individuality, independence, reason, and rationality) also exist in the Japanese rhetorical system. Living in the United States, at the same time, I observe that collectivity, interdependence, emotion, and sensitivity coexist within individuality, independence, reason, and rationality. The dialectical relationships of these communicative elements and expression cannot be easily identified because they are considered as oppositional tendencies from both Eurocentric and Asiacentric perspectives of communication. Thus, I consider that the

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theoretical position of Asiacentricity as parallel to Eurocentricity to be problematic. Therefore, the boundary between East and West embedded in Orientalism is still maintained by an Asiacentric worldview.

As a result, the Asiacentric view of communication ignores the multiple realities of Asian communicative experiences. Miike (2009) asserted the Asiacentric propositions "serve as theoretical lenses from which to see an Asian version of humanity and to view Asian thought and action" (p. 45). To create an Asian vision of the communicative life, Miike revisited historical "written" records about philosophical discourses (e.g., Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism). I question if these philosophical discourses mirror ways of life of ordinary people. Do historical "written" records reflect the multiple realities of Asia? I perceive that Asiacentricity is to reform the normativity in an Asian worldview to complement the Eurocentric worldview. The Eurocentric concept of communication, criticized by Miike, which centers on the elite, male, heterosexual, White normative standard of communication style. Then, Asiacentric communication themes (i.e., circularity, harmony, other-directedness, reciprocity, and relationality) identified by Miike (2002, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010) may be "elite, male-centered, heterosexual-orientated, urban-biased, and nationalistic" (Miike, 2010, p. 5).

In this sense, I question whether the concept of Asia that centers on Asiacentricity is "authentic." At the same time, I see that some theoretical sophistication of Asiacentricity contributes to dialectical thinking about the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation. The material reality of Asia is well constructed in the Western cultural structure such as the United States. Thus, I will illustrate how to integrate the discourse about Asian Americans and the theoretical sophistications of Asiacentricity to think dialectically about the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation.

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TOWARD THINKING DIALECTICALLY ABOUT ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITIES AND NEGOTIATION

Since the time of the Ancient Greeks, the concept of dialectics has been embedded across Western cultures. Montgomery (1993) pointed out that the term *dialectics* has historically referred to "a formal structure of reasoning, to a method of rhetorical invention, to a critical approach toward social and political analysis, and to a conception of the nature of social interaction" (p. 206). It is a recent phenomenon that dialectics are used to highlight the relational, process, and contradictory aspects of social interactions (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 1990; Montgomery, 1993).

Dialectical approach became well known in the discipline of communication when Baxter (1988) presented *relational dialectics* to make sense of

relational development process. Other scholars such as Montgomery and Rawlins further promoted the emergence of dialectical approach to relational communication. The major theoretical assumption of dialectical approach is that "social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3). The dialectical approach considers that individuals need to manage the multiple ends of contradictory tensions in order to create and sustain their personal relationships. However, dissolutions in personal relationships occur when people fail to cope with dialectical tensions. This assumption also inspires some scholars to make sense of issues in culture, power, and communication.

According to Cargile (2005), Martin and Nakayama's (1999, 2008, 2010) dialectical approach to intercultural interactions contributes to the field of culture and communication. Martin and Nakayama (1999, 2008, 2010) identified six dialectics embedded in intercultural interactions. The first dialectics, cultural-individual, reminds us that individuals must negotiate aspects of individual identities (e.g., unique attributes) as well as cultural or ethnic memberships (e.g., nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation) to engage in intercultural interactions. The personal/social-contextual dialectic notes that although individuals communicate on a personal level, the context of communication plays a major role in intercultural interactions. Individuals must perform their specific roles appropriately in any given cultural and relational communicative context. The differences-similarities dialectic suggests that what individuals bring to intercultural communication renders them simultaneously similar to and different from one another. The static-dynamic dialectic highlights culture changes over time while some aspects of culture remain the same. In relation to this idea, the history/past–present/future dialectic stresses that the past shapes the contemporary characteristics of intercultural communication, which will also influence the future. Lastly, the privilege-disadvantage dialectic indicates how individuals must simultaneously negotiate their privileges in some contexts and disadvantages in others. Importantly, individuals must simultaneously coordinate the meanings of contradictions constructed by the intersection of these six dialectics in their intercultural interactions (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, 2008, 2010).

This dialectical approach to intercultural communication originates from Western philosophy. At the same time, it is important to realize that the concept of dialectics is also deeply rooted in East-Asian cultures such as China, Korea, and Japan. That is, the dialectics of yin-yang emerged from the ancient Chinese philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism (Chung, 2008, 2011). Chung (2008) explained that "*yin* and *yang* are representations of two opposites of all characteristics, e.g., weak and strong, dark and bright, bad and good, quiets and clamorous, passive and active, disadvantages and advantages, mild and radical, and so forth" (p. 93). Yin-yang must co-exist together despite their oppositional nature (Chen & Starosta, 2005). At the

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same time, the dynamic interplay of yin-yang generates a harmonious atmosphere, chi/qi/ki (Chung, 2008). Chung (2008) asserted, "as far as communication is concerned, yin-yang interplay generates change and creates information—the basic element of communication" (p. 94). In this sense, chi/qi/ki is energy in the constant state of change. This energy may be intensified, decreased, or suddenly dissipated, depending on the dynamic interplay of yin-yang. Thus, the concept of dialectics is not a new ideological phenomenon with regard either to the Eastern or the Western notion. Therefore, I offer a thoughtful and careful integration of both the Eastern and Western notions to think dialectically about the material realities of Asian-American identities and negotiation.

To do so, and understand how a macro-systemic condition socially locates Asian Americans in the intercultural communicative context, I would like to propose four potential dialectics: model minority-yellow peril, racial classification-ethnic cultural background, collectivity-individuality, and harmony-polyphony. First, I examine contradictory identity negotiation themes emerging from the discourse about Asian Americans and the theoretical sophistications of Asiacentricity, discussed in an earlier section of this article, to articulate potential dialectical pairings. Then, I use my performance (auto) ethnographical gaze and explore a mix of previous critical and empirical studies to justify the dialectical parings. My sources originate from various (e.g., social scientific, interpretive, and critical) paradigmatic approaches. This I do because Martin and Nakayama (2010) maintained that "[a dialectical perspective] moves beyond paradigmatic thinking, but is even challenging in that it seeks to find a way to live with the inherent contradictions and seemingly mutual exclusivity of these various approaches" (p. 65). Thus, I intend to use the strength of a dialectical approach as a transparadigmatic way of knowing about the material realities of Asian American identities.

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Model Minority-Yellow Peril Dialectic

Today's rhetoric about Asian American identities mirrors the model minority-yellow peril dialectic (Kawai, 2005; Zhang, 2010). Ono and Pham (2008) asserted that the images about successful Asian Americans as the model minority "are constitutively related to the recurring, episodic, and perennial fears of Asians … taking over" (p. 19) that is Asian Americans as yellow peril. For example, Sun (2007) found that Asian American professionals from diverse ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Cambodian, Chinese, Indian, Korean, and Japanese) similarly perceive that the model minority perception plays a tremendous role in characterizing their intercultural interactions. These professionals perceive that non-Asian individuals use the model minority stereotype to view who these Asian-American professionals are. One Asian American male professional in Sun's (2007) study stated,

> I know the "model minority" myth and I feel it is terrible. It pigeon-holes Asians into being the nerdy, science oriented, and quiet image. As a result, I think a lot of Asians have to face glass-ceilings in the workplace, and suffer in school because they are expected to do well. (p. 53)

At the same time, the professionals in Sun's (2007) study believe that Asians are only celebrated as long as they perform the model minority image. Another Asian American male professional in this study considers that, "Asian's being called model minority is mainly because of their low crime rate and avoidance of conflict" (p. 52). Asians will be penalized when they start to threaten the mainstream culture. Zhang (2010) stated that the model minority and yellow peril perceptions "are inseparable and exist within a dialectic, denoting a circular relationship moving in either direction, with the yellow peril embodying a masculine threat to the White Christian culture, and the model minority symbolizing a feminine docility and passivity" (p. 24). Thus, Asian Americans consistently negotiate the material realities of their identity construction within the dialectic of the model minority-yellow peril.

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Racial Classification-Cultural/Ethnic Background Dialectic

In their relationships with others, Asian Americans may interchangeably identify themselves under their racial labeling and/or under their particular cultural/ethnic labeling. I believe defining Asia in a singular concept to be very ambiguous and problematic. From the Asian American subjective perspective, this umbrella racial labeling implies the Orientalism that homogenizes differences among various Asian cultural and ethnic groups. Chou (2008) pointed out that, "the mainstream's perception of Asian culture has positioned Asian Americans in a racial hierarchy and has fixed a homogenous yet different non-Western culture from the West" (p. 224). The material reality of the Western cultural imagination about Asia, Asians, and Asian Americans plays a strong role in various Asian American subjective positionalities within the U.S. American racialized and gendered context.

For example, several participants in Sun's (2007) study see the "unity" within the pan Asian American communities and view themselves under the pan Asian American racial labeling. Another participant from Singapore in the same study believes that Asian Americans can easily associate with other Asian Americans, regardless of cultural and ethnic differences, because all Asian Americans live in a racialized and gendered society that homogenizes their differences. However, one Japanese American male participant in the same study asserts that "Japanese Americans see themselves as Japanese Americans first, and then Asian Americans next" (p. 60) because of their unique history during the World War II. This contradiction of racial classification vs. cultural/ethnic background can illustrate that identity is a relational

and contextual product by which one views who s/he is in particular interaction with others.

To exemplify this, I will use the constructions of gay Asian American male identities. Phua (2007) described how various gay Asian American men from diverse backgrounds think that non-Asian gay men communicate with them based on the homogenized imagination of Asia. At the same time, Poon (2006) saw that the social condition surrounding gay Asian American men in the West is also changing as a result of a rapid and intensified globalization and transnationalism. The recent phenomenon of celebrating Asian popular cultures in a global capitalist society promotes the awareness of Asian diversity in the West. Accordingly, how non-gay Asian American men relate to gay Asian American men is changing, as they may be aware of cultural differences among Asian Americans. Thus, I view that the ongoing interplay between homogeneity and heterogeneity constructs each Asian American's subjectivity.

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Collectivity-Individuality (or Interdependence-Independence) Dialectic

The contradiction of collectivity-individuality cocreates and coshapes the Western cultural illusion of boundary between East and West. Triandies (1972, 1988) and Hofstede (1980, 2001) consider that the concept of collectivity characterizes a way of life across Asian cultures, while individuality plays a major role in a way of life across Western cultures. Ting-Toomey (1994a) maintained that human agents focus on their group membership identity and their interrelations first in collectivist culture. At the same time, human agents emphasize their own individual identity rather than their group membership identity in individualistic cultures (Ting-Toomey, 1994a). The theoretical foundation of Asiacentricity also reinforces the notion that Asians tend to value collectivity and interdependence highly as opposed to the Western emphasis on individuality and independence (e.g., Miike, 2007, 2009, 2010).

In looking at Asian and Western communicative life, I question this oppositional tendency. I observe that a group identity and a group obligation matter, even in the United States, in which individuality is supposed to be embraced; at the same time, an individual identity plays a role in Japan, where collectivity is supposed to be embraced. Varma (2004) claimed that the leadership positions of power in U.S. organizations are mostly maintained by the "old boys' network." In this view, the collectivist goal of preserving a group membership, value, and belief is maintained through the performative acts of social capital. In another instance, Chen and Isa (2003) studied how Japanese students visiting a U.S. university experience their intercultural interactions and learn about U.S. culture. To preserve their collective "faces" as Japanese visiting students, they are pressured to maintain

certain communication elements (e.g., speaking Japanese and adjusting the Japanese ingroup norms) to interact among themselves during their stay at the U.S. university. At the same time, Chen and Isa (2003) revealed that certain individual personality traits (e.g., being outgoing, easygoing, and independent) play a crucial role in how each Japanese visiting student experience their intercultural interactions. Some may emphasize their individuality in their communications, especially in a context in which individualist traits are celebrated and encouraged. Thus, collectivity and individuality are inseparable. Therefore, Asian Americans may also constantly negotiate the collectivity-individuality (or interdependence-independence) dialectic to co-create who they are.

Harmony-Polyphony Dialectic

Similar to the concept of collectivity, harmony is considered to play a key role in Asian communication processes (Chen & Starosta, 2003; Miike, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010). Miike (2002) asserted that "harmony is vital to the survival of everyone and everything" (p. 7) in Asian communicative life. To understand Japanese cultures and communication, William Gudykunst (2001) states that wa *和* (harmony) can only occur when human agents develop the distinction between tatemae *建前* (public presentation) and honne *本音* (inner wishes). In this sense, Tatetmae becomes a way to maintain wa among human agents. To do so, they may not express their honne in their interactions. In this view, Ting-Toomey (1994b; 2005b) maintained that human agents from Asian cultures who embrace collectivity (and/or interdependence) do not often use the direct confrontation approach to conflicts, because they intend to maintain harmony in their relationships.

Based on my observation of Japanese cultures and communication, however, I view that wa (harmony) cannot occur without the successful coordination of polyphonies that are tatemae (public presentation) and honne (inner wishes). I can see that Japanese people I know use tatemae as a communication strategy to manage conflicts with others with whom they are not close. At the same time, I observe that honne plays a vital role for human agents in deepening the quality of personal relationships (i.e., friendships, intimate relationships, and family relationships) with others they are close with. To exemplify this notion, social interaction with people to whom I am pressured to present tatemae does not usually last longer, because my trust in them does not increase. In my case, the longest friendships that I have are the communicative sites in which my friends and I share honne. At the same time, sharing honne too much can also harm the quality of my friendships, especially when one's inner wishes do not go with those of others. Thus, I see that human agents constantly coordinate the successful balance of tatemae and honne to create wa. Coordinating oppositional independent forces is necessary to construct harmony.

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This philosophy of communication may be similar to the Western communication theory, relational dialectics. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) maintained that human agents face the dialectical tension of what to reveal and what to conceal in their personal relationships. Human agents often disclose their personal information to their relational partners to express who they are in their relationships. At the same time, they often keep silent about particular personal information to maintain their privacy in their relational contexts. Thus, expression (or openness) and nonexpression (or closedness) are inseparable from each other.

For these reasons, Asian cultures may appear to embrace the communication concept of harmony from both the Eurocentric and the Asiacentric perspectives. However, the communicative phenomenon that is coordinating the oppositional tendency of polyphony and thereby creating harmony must be considered. There is an uncertain possibility that the concept of harmony may exist in the Western philosophies of relational communication. It may not be easily identifiable from the Western "elite, male-centered, heterosexual-orientated, urban-biased, and nationalistic" (Miike, 2010, p. 5) perspective. Thus, the ongoing interplay of the harmony-polyphony dialectic may fulfill a role in the site of communication in which Asian American identities are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated by human agents.

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Intersectionality

Lastly, human agents who identify themselves as Asian Americans negotiate this labeling in a social location constructed by the intersectionality of all the dialectics discussed above. Martin and Nalayama (1999, 2008) asserted that multiple dialectics operate simultaneously in a particular context but are not discrete. Thus, exploring intersectionality of all dialectics will help us to authentically make sense of ongoing dynamic processes of intercultural "face to face" interactions in which the material reality of Asian American identities and negotiation takes place.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual exploration has analyzed the discourse about Asian Americans and the Asiacentric world to move toward thinking dialectically about the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation. Martin and Nakayama (2008) maintained that "dialectic offers intercultural communication researchers a way to think about different ways of knowing in a more comprehensive manner, while retaining the significance of considering how we express this knowledge" (p. 81). I find a dialectical perspective useful, because it allows scholars to view the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation in the contingent, open, and

varied nature of social life. A dialectical perspective, which emphasizes understanding unpredictable and indeterminate communication phenomena, is flexible for seeing possible themes that pertain to the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation without essentializing such racial labeling monolithically. Thus, thinking dialectically about intercultural communication presents unexplored possibilities for further examination of the material realities of cultural identity, power, and negotiation in a globalized milieu (Cargile, 2005).

In conclusion, the four dialectics that pertain to the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation discussed in this analysis should play as a point of departure to further dialogue about the unstable and fluid concept of such labeling. As this analysis incorporates the Eastern and Western notions to move toward thinking dialectically about the material realities of Asian American identities and negotiation, intercultural communication scholars from diverse backgrounds should further alter, shape, and modify the central idea discussed in this analysis. In so doing, we intercultural communication scholars can continue to explore what communicative themes make Asian Americans, Asian Americans in this transnational society.

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