

Introduction

Linking Asian American Studies and Language Policy

Asian American Studies

During World War II, my father, Eugene Takashi Morita, a US-born Japanese American was incarcerated in Tule Lake, California and Amache, Colorado prison camps as a young child with his four siblings, mother, and father, all of whom were US citizens or legal residents. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by the Japanese of Japan on December 8, 1941, my dad, and his family were regarded as a suspect class and potential conspirators of Japan along with another 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans. President Franklin Roosevelt quickly created the War Relocation Authority following the bombing and administered Executive Order 9066 on February 21, 1942, requiring that anyone of Japanese descent, regardless of citizenship status, was to be detained in internment camps under authority of the Secretary of War. Dad, his parents and four siblings lived in a barrack with a pot-bellied stove, and ate their meals in a communal cafeteria and attended school during the day. The focus of school was on all subjects, but also had a heavy emphasis on Americanization and loyalty, a consistent reinforcement of the power of English and the evacuation of anything Japanese. With armed guards living among them and guarding them by tower, the message was not lost about what they needed to release: Japanese. Rapid language shift ensued: My dad and most of his siblings have limited to no proficiency in Japanese. My dad and his extended family often said 仕方がない or shikata ga nai: ‘It must be done, it can’t be helped’ to endure events of hardship, even those that were perniciously executed by normalizing the deletion of Japanese language use and ‘reeducating’ them on what was regarded as American ideals. This construct of endurance in large part describes why my father, a second-generation Japanese American, Nisei and his father, an Issei, a Japanese immigrant, and a legal resident largely did not speak of their incarceration. I would learn of his imprisonment after reading books by Yoshiko Uchida when I was in elementary school (Uchida, 1971). Growing up with my father, the construction of shikata ga nai was used as a method to get through challenging times, and to endure. I also recognize how such a construction was subverted and successfully arbitrated

the agenda of those with power, in his case, the US government during his incarceration or what dad calls ‘camp’.

In Chinese, there is a similar construct called *mou de gan* or 冇得拣. *Mou de gan* articulates that persecution was real and for that reason, many Chinese in Southern China had to leave their hometowns. Importantly, the construct details that once a particular threshold is reached, then *mou de gan* should be invoked, but also has allowances for endurance and resistance in the interim. *Mou de gan* can also mean that there is no solution and thus, resignation becomes necessary. Thus, *mou de gan* or 冇得拣 like *shikata ga nai* can be a way of testing the waters of when thresholds of resistance are met or when tinkering can take place. More directly, *shikata ga nai* or *mou de gan* or 冇得拣 depending on social location and power relations, can be a racial project of assimilation and subjugation.

Racial plotting and continuums

Within the racially diverse US landscape, the racial continuum of Black to White positions AAPIs in the perpetual in-between space. Thus, Asian and Asian Americans may experience a racial homelessness where they are not Black, and not White (Alcoff, 2003; Morita-Mullaney, 2014b; Perea, 1997). Asians, Latinos and First Nations people have also described the in-betweeners as perpetual foreigners, as they are ascribed as non-English speaking immigrants or migrants, regardless of language proficiency or generational status (Leonardo, 2002).

The positioning of the Chinese community for whom this book is centered as in-betweeners constitutes a relative comparison across groups of color. The Chinese stand in relationship to the racial ordering instead being fixed between Black and White bookends. Claire Jean Kim (1999, 2000, 2018, 2023) has critiqued and historicized Omi and Winant’s (1986) racial hierarchy recognizing that the subjectivities of different groups of color is dependent on context and social relations. AAPIs are ascribed in relationship to the White/Black binary constructed along two axis points as superior or inferior and another axis being ostracized or valorized. For example, Asians may be valorized as cooperative or preferred immigrants (Hsu, 2015; Morita-Mullaney, 2019; Wu, 2013) and thus are positioned in relative adjacency to Whites, reaching toward superior and marking them as a racial bourgeoisie (Matsuda, 1996). In contrast, the Chinese experienced a different positioning in the 1880s, ascribed as disease-ridden Mongolians and thereby, segregated from White schools or denied enrollment altogether. The enterprise of situating Asians along this continuum of cooperative to barbaric, unassimilable Mongolians is a placement that is reliant on the social conditions that benefit the aims of Whiteness.

The construction of Asian superiority, meriting White adjacency is also a narrative that can be constructed as anti-Black (Kim, 2023). If Asians

have materially and discursively met the conditions of Whiteness, they are constructed as a more willing and able student in comparison to Blacks (Morita-Mullaney, 2019). With such constructions, Asians can be used as pawns to mediate conflicts between Whites and Blacks, a frequent occurrence within integrated schools as Asians are positioned as neutral interlocutors (Morita-Mullaney & Nguyen, 2023). Yet this positioning is always laden with the politics of instrumental versus genuine inclusion. During the mandatory racial desegregation of San Francisco schools, mainly focused on correcting de jure policies of school segregation of Blacks, Chinese and Latino groups also adopted discursive frames that unsettled racial desegregation as solely a Black–White project (Quinn, 2020).

Language policy

The focus of the Lau case was on *positive liberty*: furnishing an accessible education inside the classroom that newcomer Chinese students could understand. Positive liberty is a construct that posits freedom to or freedom toward a given experience (Berlin, 1958; Thompson, 2013). This was the foundational premise on which Lau laid, but it stood in tension with the Johnson v. SFUSD (1971) and SFNAACP v. SFUSD (1978), which contextualized Lau's passage; cases based on racial integration in schooling. Johnson v. SFUSD (1971) dictated mandatory busing to meet racially integrative aims in the schools, and its construct was founded on *negative liberty*. Negative liberty suggests freedom from, or more specifically, freedom from being harmed by an unequal education. These two monikers of equity serve to differentiate how language rights were arbitrated across lines of integration, access and opportunity.

Narrative Policy Portraiture

My early memories of history lessons in school were the discrete memorization of dates and events with a nod to the characters who were wearing old clothes, donning a constricting uniform and bearing arms on some battlefield. Most of them were White faces and did not look like me. Usually during that time, I would daydream about a book I would rather read or when the bell would ring for recess. This exercise of social imagination during history time persisted into my college years until I took the course, Portraits of America, taught by History Professor, Dr Jim Hunt. For my four-week intensive January term, we read a portrait each week and were invited into the historical narratives of one person. Instead of copious lists of dates and events with exhaustive historical depictions, I came to know four characters well as they were foregrounded in the story. Thereafter, the dates and the events were cast in relationship to the person I had come to know more deeply and then the history came into view. Dr Jim Hunt showed me that history can be humanizing. By drawing me

into a relationship with these central characters, my future approach to understanding the past was transformed and any historical resource I would seek out would be narratively expressed either in print or speech.

My father was also instrumental in the formation of the methodology I employ in the book. As a photographer, my father taught me the importance of foregrounding in storytelling, a technique he often uses when he is taking pictures. A photograph using foregrounding places the subjects closest to the camera, where their faces, stances and movements are in sharp focus and the first to grab your attention. Yet, the background contextualizes and humanizes them in a time and place. Metaphorically, I consider the background to be the nauseating locations and dates I had to memorize in school, which meant nothing without the foregrounding. When narrated in first-person, the background, dates and events became accessible, integrated and real; I had a richer and contextualized portrait.

When I learned about narrative portraiture and photographic foregrounding, I was drawn to this as a methodology for engaging with participants. At first, I did comb through primary legal documents on *Lau v. Nichols* and became overwhelmed by the legal discourse of amicus briefs and daunting codes that seemed to have no pattern. I then set such approaches aside and began to speak with the characters of *Lau v. Nichols*. I originally identified five different sets of people to talk to, including lawyers, administrators, teachers, activists and students who lived or worked in Chinatown. The group was quite small and manageable. But as I met each person, they were invariably connected to a larger network, and the list of people grew. This elegant web of narratives then led me back to the primary documents. Then, the dates and events brought the characters into the foreground in the landscape of their past. I thus coin this methodology, *narrative policy portraiture* as it draws from first-person interviews in conjunction with reviews of varied primary documents with participants. On occasion you will see the braiding of my family's language history as it facilitated a deeper shared analysis of our family's language rights.

Narrative policy portraiture is well suited for a study of this scale and depth as it recenters the participants within the retrospective social context and captures 'nuances that are often overlooked' (Rodríguez-Dorans & Jacobs, 2020: 613). Importantly, this narrative portraiture is focused primarily on Chinese and Chinese Americans as they were the original plaintiffs in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and were the unlikely ones. Much pressure came from Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Hispanic legal advocates who claimed it was more politically savvy to have Hispanics lead as plaintiffs given the sizeable representation within the San Francisco Schools and throughout the US. Yet, as you will learn, the legal aid lawyer, Edward Steinman had other ideas about the Chinese community and language education.

Following the Trail

The linguistic landscape of Chinatown, San Francisco sets the stage for this inquiry, beginning in 1882. Chinatown was home to speakers of Cantonese, coming from six different districts in southern China; the Canton region. Cantonese has nine different tones whereas Mandarin Chinese has seven. To speak Cantonese is to use a different tonal repertoire. Functionally however, reading and writing are relatively the same with some variations.

This book is organized by time periods beginning with *Chinese Exclusion* from 1882–1965 to set the historic landscape for policy agents we will meet. *Teaching as activism* covers the period of 1968–1974 in the lead up to the *Lau v. Nichols* case with mandatory busing and the Civil Rights movement at its peak. The years 1974–1985 cover the implementation of *Lau and its remedies*. The section called *Remedial remedies* covers 1986–2018, documenting the lead up to the passage of California’s Proposition 227, diminishing bilingual education provisions. The last section called *Choosing equity* captures a small window of time between 2019–2024 and the state of Cantonese-Chinese bilingual education today. The arc of the Lau case from before, during and after, demonstrates the rise or the *sunrising* of bilingual education and how over time, it began to

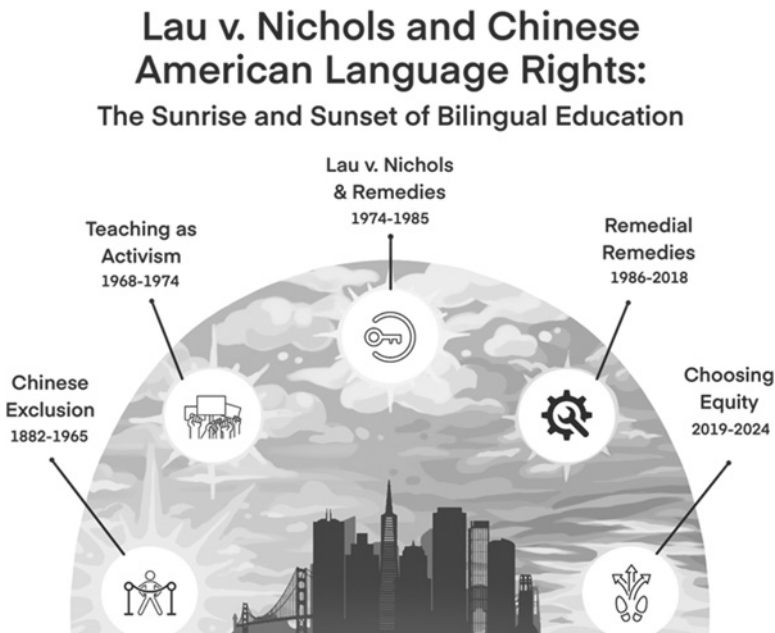


Figure 0.1 History of Chinese Language Rights in San Francisco (Illustrated by Audrey Yeun, 2023)

sunset, moving towards more English-medium models of instruction (Figure 0.1).

Table 0.1 Roadmap for narrative policy portraiture
(Illustrated by Audrey Yeun, 2023)

	Federal or state laws, policies or briefs
	Primary document perspective
	Historical context
	Participant narratives

Icons are furnished to navigate the text. As I toggle between talking with participants and then referencing policy documents or contextualizing the history, the icons will assist in making the mental transitions. This strategy is consistent with the approach of *narrative policy portraiture*, so the threads are braided together into a coherent narrative (Table 0.1). Welcome to the *sunrise and sunset* of the language rights of the Cantonese Chinese of San Francisco, California.