Many East Asian language courses in the U.S. have a large proportion of Asian (heritage or international) students, and it is not uncommon that Asian students predominate. This creates a complex learning environment for both Asian and non-Asian students. Asian students have an advantage due to their preexisting linguistic knowledge. To a varying degree, many heritage students already have oral communication skills from the onset of instruction. Asian international students also have an advantage due to the shared linguistic properties among the East Asian languages (i.e., logogram in Chinese and Japanese, syntactic and morphological similarities between Japanese and Korean, and Chinese-origin cognates in Japanese and Korean). While educators are aware of these disparities and strive to create an environment beneficial to all students, the complexity stemming from students’ cultural values or racial profile is often dismissed, if not unnoticed. Students’ experiences differ also due to their cultural perceptions and how others perceive them. Our panel addresses issues concerning learners’ racial and cultural identity from heritage learners’ and non-Asian learners’ perspectives. Lu and Yoon examine the intricate relationship between heritage learners’ language learning and identity reconstruction. Lu reports a study that investigated heritage Chinese learners’ experiences in a study-abroad setting. Yoon demonstrates multiple barriers (logical, socioemotional, and ideological) that demotivate mixed-race Korean heritage learners while studying the language. Nishi discusses how non-Asian students’ learning of Japanese is shaped by their cultural perceptions, focusing on gender identity, and explores the ways in which learning Japanese can serve as an opportunity for self-empowerment.

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