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Rice to Biscuits: An In-depth Look at China-born Chinese Teachers' Experiences in American  
Classrooms

by  
Xiaoman Zhang Cook

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

St. Paul, MN  
2018

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## Abstract

Schools in America need Chinese teachers with experience and cross-cultural aptitude. The increasing rate of globalization and the rapid increase in the number of Chinese guest teachers teaching in the United States points to the need for continued study concerning teachers who can exhibit a more cross-cultural approach. A phenomenological approach was deployed in this qualitative study to explore the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms by looking deeply into the impact of culture and context on those teachers' experiences in the United States. Data collection was achieved by conducting in-depth interviews, and data was analyzed using a version of Hycner's five-step method. By exploring the essence of the lived experiences of China-born teachers doing the work of teaching American students Chinese, headway can be made to expand the knowledge base of Chinese teaching in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, William.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people during the process of completing this dissertation. I am most especially grateful to my husband, Billy Cook, for his love, support and extraordinary patience. I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Mary Michener, for her unending encouragement and guidance. Mary supported me every step of the way and answered all my questions, some did not even make sense. I would also like to thank my dissertation readers, Dr. Erica Hering and Dr. Michael Lindstrom, for spending time reading and re-reading my dissertation. Finally, I want to thank the passionate and devoted China-born Chinese teachers who sacrificed time with their family to teach Chinese to American children.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

The economic globalization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century resulted in an urgent call for American citizens to be highly proficient in communicating with people of other cultures (Jackson & Malone, 2009). According to numerous business organizations, Chinese is one of the most prominent languages essential for participation in overseas markets (Chemlynski, 2006). In a report released by Asia Society in 2010, Chinese was listed as a critical language under the National Security Language Initiative because of the political and security interests between the United States and China. To partner with China and to collaborate with its people as well as to negotiate and to work through conflict, Americans need to know its culture and language in order to effectively communicate. As “globalization” became a household word, China’s political and economic prowess was persuading more Americans to learn Chinese (Asia Society, 2005).

According to data collected by Asia Society in 2016, there were more than 550 K-12 schools in the United States that offered Chinese language programs, a 100% increase in four years. Also in 2016, the U.S.-China Institute cited a report that 227,086 students had enrolled in Chinese language courses at the K-12 level, and Chinese had been the most popular dual-language education program implemented by individual states since 2013.

The first Chinese language school was established in San Francisco in 1886 (Pan, 1997). In 1908, a Manchu official toured the U.S. and established more Chinese schools with the help of local community leaders in several cities, including San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. The purpose was to reinforce sentiments of patriotism toward China and to ensure a smooth transition when Chinese Americans returned to China, and the main task daily was to teach Chinese language (Wong & Lopez, 2000). As a result of this, by the end of the 1920s, there were over

fifty Chinese-language schools (public schools and community-based) established in the western part of the United States, and those type of schools were mushrooming ever since (Chang, 2003). And in the year 1986, the number of students learning Chinese was more than three times higher compared to the 1920s (Liu, 2010). Besides the efforts to propel Americans to learn the Chinese language by Chinese language schools, many American school districts recognized that learning Chinese not only provided students the opportunity to be proficient in another language and cultivate interest in the Chinese culture, but also benefited them to see the world from a global point of view (Hsiao, 2010).

In order to meet the imperative for American citizens to be highly proficient in communicating with people of Chinese, interest and efforts were growing rapidly in statewide Chinese language learning (Jackson & Malone, 2009). The push, led by the U.S.-China Strong Foundation, aimed to increase the number of American students studying the Chinese language to one million by the year 2020. The effort not only recognized the growing importance of U.S.-China relations and aimed to prepare a new generation of American citizens to engage with China through commerce and culture, but also created the high demand for qualified Chinese teachers who were well equipped to teach American students (Mitchell, 2016).

The demand for Chinese teachers prompted the College Board and Hanban, a language council affiliated with the Chinese Education Ministry to send more than 5,000 Chinese language and culture “guest teachers” to work in American classrooms across the nation in the past decade (Hanban, 2015). The Chinese Guest Teacher Program was designed to help U.S. schools develop Chinese language and culture study programs and promote international exchange between the United States and China. Made possible through this collaboration, the program had grown to be the largest Chinese visiting teacher program in the United States (Hanban, 2013). Each year, the

program served hundreds of K–12 schools and districts nationwide and reached tens of thousands of U.S. students. Additionally, Asia Society was committed to promoting the teaching and learning of Chinese in American schools as an integral part of the broader agenda to build students' global competency. One of the newest efforts of Asia Society to support the growth of Chinese language programs at the K-12 level was the building of the Confucius Classrooms Network. In 2009, the Network included 20 pioneer schools, and by 2013 there were 100 exemplary Chinese language programs. Each Confucius Classroom was partnered up with a school in China to enhance opportunities for language learning and to provide students, teachers, and administrators with opportunities to conduct exchanges and joint projects (Livaccari & Wang, 2009). The increasing number of new Chinese teachers entering the field each year made them an integral part of the United States education system (Robelen, 2010).

Although the demand for Chinese teachers brought many to teach in the United States, it was obvious that many were facing considerable intercultural adaption challenges (Welch, 2011). Aside from the external pressure generated from school districts and parents' speculation over the true purpose of this Chinese government funded program such as spreading the Chinese harmonious culture or even the Chinese Communist Propaganda, those challenges, ranging from cultural, social, professional, and academic aspects hindered the teachers from integrating themselves into the academic ethos and social fabric of the school community (McCalman, 2014; Romanowski & Nasser, 2015). While some may already had teaching experiences in China, the differences between the cultures and educational systems limited them to have in-depth understanding of what teaching meant in American classrooms (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007). Furthermore, if not enough attention was paid to the problem in order to take action in time, it would cause some other unfavorable results such as ineffectiveness in Chinese language teaching

or unbearable pressure on the Chinese guest teachers (Jia, 2014). Those results could seriously hinder student learning.

Research indicated the upsurge of the lacking of awareness of the various cultural differences, including the Chinese guest teachers (Ramsey, 2010). Therefore, great recognition needed to be given to the need to study cross-cultural understanding and competency for anyone who was living in a culture other than one's heritage. Because intercultural exchanges connected the world in ways that were not possible before, a review of nations would readily reveal countries with unique cultures, histories, economics, and obstacles (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2010). Additionally, more employment opportunities created the need for more teachers to teach globally (Swagler & Jome, 2005). Culture's significant impact on people's experiences and behaviors propelled the exploration of what culture meant to an individual. The amalgamation of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) was discovered upon this exploration.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980) discussed five dimensions that laid in a culture that could profoundly affect one's experiences and behaviors. The five dimensions were *Power Distance (PDI)*—the degree of inequality between the people that was assumed to be a natural state of affairs, *Individualism Verses Collectivism (IDV)*—the relationship between the individual and the group, *Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)*—how people in a culture coped with the unpredictable and ambiguous, *Masculinity (MAS)*—care-oriented societies versus achievement-oriented societies, and *Long Term Verse Short Term Orientation (LTO)*—a society's attitude towards time and traditions (Hofstede, 1980). In China, where Confucianism exerted a strong influence over society, teachers were considered as sole providers of knowledge, and students as receivers and were urged not to challenge what was being taught. Conversely, in the United

States, a society that highly valued self-learning and proactive learning, teachers would struggle if they did not possess a deeper understanding of patriarchal views and the local culture (Adler, 1993).

Although great strides had been made regarding the profound impact culture had on one's everyday living, the ripples of cross-cultural competency remained. Therefore, a China-born Chinese teacher in an American classroom needed full awareness of his or her traditional background and its impacts on daily educational practices as well as an in-depth knowledge of American teaching pedagogy. Likewise, if culture and context were not fully understood and respected, impactful teaching would be hindered in this international environment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The United States, the biggest Chinese language “consumer” in the world, had received more than 1,400 Chinese guest teachers since 2007, and the number was increasing every year (Hanban, 2017). If the goal of enrolling one million American students to learn Chinese originally initiated by U.S.-China Strong Foundation were to be reached by 2020, the United States would be hosting over 4,000 Chinese guest teachers by then (U.S.-China Strong Foundation, 2014). For Chinese guest teachers in the United States, intercultural adaptation was quite a difficult matter. It could be more urgent than the language barrier as it became confusing to adapt to a foreign culture and communicate effectively with the locals. It was inevitable that those teachers felt more pressured and threatened by unforeseen circumstances and consequences (Jia, 2014).

The main task for Chinese guest teachers here in the United States was to promote Chinese culture and Chinese language. In order to teach Chinese effectively, Chinese guest teachers needed to learn about all students' aspects and find out their learning habits such as



learning method, preference and psychology, so that one could select an appropriate way of communication and teaching method for better result. (Liang, 2008).

Prior research confirmed the profound effects cultural differences on teachers' classroom experiences using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980) as a foundation. Skinner and Abbott (2013) contended the profound impact of different cultural values on teacher education of Chinese teacher trainees. The study used Hofstede's theory to examine the challenges that occurred between teacher educators and trainees during their six-week overseas teaching practice, and argued that perceptions and experiences were due to the different cultural orientations at play in this context. McLean (2007), in the study of Asian-born teachers establishing credibility in American classrooms explored the effects of each Hofstede's cultural dimension on teacher credibility in the classroom. He further emphasized that knowing how to establish teacher credibility in the United States was a key element in increasing effectiveness.

In the 1960s, modern languages other than Spanish, such as French or Italian, were 58% more popular than Spanish (Modern Language Association, 2006). By 2006, Spanish, however, was 15% more popular than other modern languages (Modern Language Association, 2006). This shift began in the mid-1990s, but it was not until 2006 that the number of Spanish language learners pushed into a strong majority over every other foreign language. This phenomenon could still be true nowadays—although Chinese had become an increasingly popular language for students to learn, the number of students selecting Spanish as their foreign language choice was still much higher. Therefore, in most cases, while there were multiple Spanish teachers in each school, there was only one Chinese teacher, usually part-time (Gearing, 2010). Many of those teachers struggled with intercultural challenges, therefore, lacking confidence in asserting

themselves into the school system in order to voice their opinions, not even involved in discussions to be influencers of policyholders (Moloney & Xu, 2015).

The significant growth in Chinese language programs over the past five years presented an unfathomable gap between meeting student demand to learn Chinese and the lack of trained and certified teachers. For programs to be vital and sustainable, teachers must be able to engage and motivate students over the long term, incorporate best practices in the teaching and learning of world languages, and connect the Chinese language program to other academic subject areas and aspects of school life and community (Asia Society, 2018).

In February of 2010, Asia Society convened a meeting on Chinese language teacher preparation and certification in the United States to address the urgent need for a long-term supply of effective Chinese language teachers. The meeting brought together 50 leaders from the United States and China to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the field of Chinese language teaching and learning (Asia Society, 2018). The outcome was a set of targeted recommendations for the field going forward. Those recommendations were also individualized for the schools, the states, and the government (Asia Society, 2010).

If one were to look closely at China-born Chinese language teachers as an integral part in the American education system, it was easy to recognize that “simply hiring a large number of Chinese teachers didn’t meet the demand of growing interest in learning Chinese” (p. 37, An Asia Society Report, 2010). The challenges and limitations of these teachers prevented them from establishing rapport with students, enhancing credibility, and creating a productive learning environment (Zhang, 2014). With the upsurge of Chinese language market in the United States and the need for Americans to communicate with the Chinese people efficiently and culturally, little was known about the lives and experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United

States. More specifically, the literature on the essence of Chinese language teaching among China-born teachers was almost non-existent.

There was a genuine need to go into the lived experiences of the China-born Chinese teachers in order to discover culture bumps, improve cross-cultural competence and effective teaching pedagogy, and eventually contribute greatly to the global competitiveness of the United States. One could not and should not overlook those teachers' experiences because without it, their needs would not be recognized, acculturation adaption challenges would continuously be encountered. As a result, the gap between the intellectual and the practical worlds would continue to enlarge, and the competitiveness of the Americans would seriously be compromised.

In summary, the increasing rate of globalization and the rapid increase in the number of Chinese guest teachers teaching in the United States pointed to the need for continued study concerning teachers who could exhibit a more cross-cultural approach. Globalization moved people across borders in a rapidly changing world (Goh, 2009). Having experienced the effects of globalization, it resulted in more teachers teaching in the United States. By exploring the essence of the lived experiences of China-born teachers doing the work of teaching American students Chinese, headway could be made to expand the knowledge base of Chinese teaching in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms by looking deeply into the impact of culture and context on those teachers' experiences in the United States.

Phenomenological study entailed investigating the lived human experience and the structure of human science research to uncover deep understandings of experiences from the viewpoints of

individual participants (Van Manen, 1990). Since qualitative research was designed with the premise of evolving methodology to produce themes for inquiry and explorations, the current research study dug deep into the impact of culture and context on the China-born Chinese teachers' abilities and experiences to teach in the host country of the United States.

### **Research Questions**

During the course of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

1. How do China-born Chinese language teachers describe their classroom experience in the United States?
2. How do China-born Chinese teachers understand and make sense of their experiences in American classrooms?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study was noteworthy in terms of bridging the development of the intellectual knowledge for further research and implications on educational practices. As the tide of Chinese guest teachers teaching overseas grew higher each year, expressing the aptitude of an international perspective and sensitivity is especially important (Sinden, 2014). The essence of teaching and the teaching of Chinese language varied by culture; therefore, it was presumptuous to believe that the challenges teachers face in China were the same as in other countries such as the United States (Confucius Institute-Michigan State University Report, 2014). Researchers such as Qi Wang and Qiancai Liu (2014), recommended that further studies related to culture, teaching, and teaching overseas should be conducted to unlock the reason for marked barriers China-born Chinese teachers faced when teaching in the United States. Understanding the reasons for those barriers not only provided entrance avenues and competence examination for

guest teachers, but also promoted effective teaching strategies for China-born Chinese teachers in the United States.

Prior researchers attempted to interpret and understand the profound effect culture has on one's behavior; however, this topic was mostly approached using a quantitative design (Gianesini, 2015). The vivid picture of culture shock ranging from various aspects needed to be painted in detail to demonstrate the negative impact a growing number of immigrants initially experience and how the impact caused great concern (Xia, 2009). Although the initial advantage of "foreignness" could include positive questions and interests due to curiosity, but also called for unfair stereotyping (Zhu, 2016). Therefore, it called for a need for alternative approaches of study when considering the essence of those personal experiences to gain deeper understanding, which inferred a qualitative approach (Kark, 2004). A more comprehensive, qualitative study could provide an explicit rendering of cultural patterns and structures that lead to enculturation barriers by gaining first-hand information from the Chinese teachers (Dillon, 2010)

Coming from China, those teachers are laden with the traditional Chinese perspective, which values harmony, righteousness, courtesy, and loyalty while the American students are laden with consumerism, individualism and competitiveness (Goh, 2009). In addition to this cultural encounter, William Harms (2017) contended that a very small number of research articles were based in nations outside the United States, which suggested a gap in knowledge. The vocabulary "Americentrism" was also generated from that gap, concurring that research outside the knowledge base was slim. Others had also expressed dissatisfaction regarding the narrow focus of Western theories of culture and culture differences (Peet & Hartwick, 2009).

Not only does each culture differs significantly, teaching pedagogy also lacks universality in application across cultures (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). For example, American

educators highly value students' ability to work efficiently, to think independently, and to demonstrate passion towards the learned subject; conversely, Chinese educators view extreme individualism with great disapproval (Signorini, Wiesemes, & Murphy, 2009). One of the most common phenomena in an American classroom is when students ask the teacher to clarify the taught knowledge, but many China-born Chinese teachers view that type of scenarios as disrespectful, and label the encounters as "misbehaviors" (Ding, Li, & Kulm, 2008). Chang (2010) suggested that China-born Chinese teachers needed to consider both the Western and Chinese values when teaching and living in the United States. Teasing apart the many facets of teaching, the influence of Confucius and the Chinese culture displayed profound effects on how China-born teachers saw and made sense of their experiences. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Americans challenge the status quo while the Chinese consider perseverance and rule following highly respectable. In addition, China, a highly collectivistic society, considers success and professional drive extremely important because work overrides family and leisure time. Therefore, the presumption that universal teaching pedagogy and techniques would apply could be flawed (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).

The significant purpose of the current research was to find out what it was like when two different cultures met and what kind of phenomenon that encounter created. The findings not only gave respect to the organic experience of those teachers as lived, but also brought out a circle of knowledge that would hopefully be used to improve practical implications. By exploring the varied experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States, the researcher recovered and expressed the ways teachers like her experienced as they lived it.

A greater significance of this research was to encourage China-born Chinese teachers to ultimately act practically in their work and daily lives with greater thoughtfulness and tact.

Additionally, the Chinese teachers are not the only audience that could benefit from this study. In order to hire competent foreign language teachers, school administrators need to overcome many barriers, such as difficulty in understanding the background of the teachers, communicating expectations, and evaluating the qualifications of these teachers (Bayuk & Bayuk, 1978). Conducting this phenomenological study also raised awareness among school administrators of the potential challenges Chinese teachers faced and helped them to recognize the characteristics of enculturated teachers, so they were able to identify and select foreign language teachers who are well versed in proven language teaching methodology. Because the need to hire foreign-born language teachers continues, administrators must focus attention on improving those teachers' communication and teaching skills (Neves & Sanyal, 1991). The common themes that arose from the interviews provided insights of the possible sources to potential problems, so school administrators could view these teachers from an intercultural perspective, address those problems early in the school year, and provide professional learning opportunities to support these teachers in and outside of the classroom.

Ethnocentric views hinder effective teaching practices because of the belief that the way one culture thinks or feels is the right way to think and feel (Barger, 2018). Liu & Qi (2006) presented the vast differences between China in teacher preparation programs and the United States such as preparation practices and characteristics of teachers, and the impact Chinese and American educational thought and philosophy had on those differences. The research demonstrated that education directly served or reflected the values of a society in which it was rooted, and those differences could present significant barriers to classroom success to teachers who teach overseas. For Hanban and other language councils that affiliate with the Chinese government, the findings of this study also provided insight to create a systematic teacher

preparation program before they send teachers to the United States. The program needs to take into consideration the differences in cultures and education systems between China and the United States, and provide conceptual and practical training in social, professional, and academic areas. Scrimgeour & Wilson (2009) presented a significant initiative by the International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education (ICCLE) and the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) for a standardized Chinese language curriculum around the world. Wen & Lin (2015) sought the appropriate ways for Chinese-born teachers to teach Chinese well in American Schools, but those schools were only limited to American Chinese schools— schools were organized by Chinese and most of their enrollments were Chinese heritage students. One could imagine the Chinese teaching pedagogy was deeply rooted in those schools and would possibly work well for that group of students. However, the percentage of non-heritage students learning Chinese is growing (Robelen, 2010). By emerging into the lived experiences of the teachers, the common barriers that prevented some of them from enculturating into American classrooms surfaced.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms. The context or setting for the study resided in American schools that offered Chinese language as a course. Although there are so many Chinese teachers that teach and reside in the United States, their experiences and how they make sense of those experiences remains underrepresented. The phenomenological study of the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States offered the opportunity to gain deeper understanding of the impact of increased interactions between China and the United States to add to the field of knowledge. Knowledge were gained from understanding what China-born Chinese teachers needed to do to obtain teaching positions and effectively teach in an ever-



changing world. Packevicz (2012) called for more research on the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers, conjecturing about their lived reality in regard to culture as participants of a fast-paced globalized world.

### **Definition of Terms**

*China:* The People's Republic of China (PRC) is commonly referred as China; while the Republic of China is Taiwan.

*Chinese Americans:* Chinese who possess citizenship in the United States.

*Chinese language:* In this dissertation, the Chinese language refers to a specific dialect—"Mandarin." Mandarin is the official language in China, and it is a group of related varieties of Chinese spoken across most of northern and southwestern China. Although the spoken form varies from region to region in China, the written form is the same—Simplified Chinese.

*Chinese Communist Propaganda:* Propaganda in the People's Republic of China refers to the use of propaganda by the Communist Party of China to sway domestic and international opinion in favor of its policies. Domestically, this includes censorship of proscribed views and an active cultivation of views that favor the government. Propaganda is considered central to the operation of the Chinese government.

*Confucius and Confucianism:* Confucius was a Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history. Confucianism is the philosophy of Confucius, and it emphasized personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice and sincerity. Confucianism is often characterized as a system of social and ethical philosophy rather than a religion. Confucianism built on an ancient religious foundation to establish the social values, institutions, and transcendent ideals of traditional Chinese society.

Confucianism was part of the Chinese social fabric and way of life; to Confucians, everyday life was the arena of religion (Asia Society, 1975).

*Confucius Analects*: is a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to Confucius and his contemporaries, traditionally believed to have been compiled and written by Confucius' followers. It is believed to have been written during the Warring States period (475–221 BC), and it achieved its final form during the mid-Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). By the early Han dynasty the Analects was considered merely a "commentary" on the Five Classics, but the status of the Analects grew to be one of the central texts of Confucianism by the end of that dynasty.

*Confucius Concept of "Si"*: It is a concept in Chinese philosophy that is usually translated as "reflection" or "concentration." It refers to a species of attentive, non-rational thought that is directed at a specific subject.

*Confucius Classroom Network*: Asia Society's Confucius Classrooms are a United States national network of exemplary Chinese language programs selected through a competitive application process. The network currently comprises more than 35,000 students studying Chinese in more than 100 elementary, middle, and high schools located in 27 states and the District of Columbia. These schools all have a strong commitment to making their Chinese program a core part of a larger mission to help students become globally competent. These schools not only have effective Chinese language instruction, but also strong local leadership and support, and a demonstrated commitment to international exchange and collaboration. As Confucius Classrooms, they act as resource centers for other schools in the region (Asia Society, 2018).

*Confucius Education*: A hallmark of Confucius' thought is his emphasis on education and study. He disparages those who have faith in natural understanding or intuition and argues that

the only real understanding of a subject comes from long and careful study. Study, for Confucius, means finding a good teacher and imitating his words and deeds. A good teacher is someone older who is familiar with the ways of the past and the practices of the ancients. He taught his students morality, proper speech, government, and the refined arts. While he also emphasizes the “Six Arts” — ritual, music, archery, chariot-riding, calligraphy, and computation.

*Hanban:* The Office of Chinese Language Council International, which is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. Hanban is a non-government and non-profit organization, and is “committed to developing Chinese language and culture teaching resources and making its services available worldwide, meeting the demands of overseas Chinese learners to the utmost degree, and to contributing to global cultural diversity and harmony" (Hanban, 2018). Generally, the Council is charged with cultivating knowledge and interest in the Chinese language and culture in nations around the world whose residents are not native speakers of Chinese.

*Hofstede’s culture dimension theory:* Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist well known for his pioneering research on cross-cultural groups and organizations. His most notable work has been in developing the Cultural Dimensions Theory. The five dimensions are *Power Distance (PDI)*—the degree of inequality between the people that is assumed to be a natural state of affairs, *Individualism Verses Collectivism (IDV)*—the relationship between the individual and the group, *Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)*—how people in a culture cope with the unpredictable and ambiguous, *Masculinity (MAS)*—care-oriented societies versus achievement-oriented societies, and *Long Term Verse Short Term Orientation (LTO)*—a society’s attitude towards time and traditions. Hofstede's model explaining national cultural differences and their consequences, when introduced in 1980, came at a time when cultural differences between societies had become increasingly relevant for both economic and political reasons.

*Manchu*: a member of a group of people originally living in Manchuria who formed the last imperial dynasty of China—Qing Dynasty (1644–1912).

*The Chinese Guest Teacher Program*: The Chinese Guest Teacher Program is designed to help U.S. schools develop Chinese language and culture study programs and to promote international exchange between the United States and China. Made possible through a collaboration between the College Board and Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters, the program has grown to be the largest Chinese visiting teacher program in the U.S. Each year, the program serves hundreds of K–12 schools and districts nationwide and reaches tens of thousands of U.S. students (The College Board, 2018).

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

While this study focused on the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms, it was important to explore a plethora of related but wide-ranged viewpoints and theories in order to provide a thorough and in-depth review of scholarly literature.

The chapter first offered a glimpse of Chinese culture by examining literature pertaining to Confucius' teachings and influence on the Chinese society and its education, and traced back to related literature concerning culture as the importance of culture surfaced. Then literature were presented to support answering three essential questions—what culture is, why culture is important, and what role culture plays in one's life. By unveiling the essence of culture, Hofstede's cultural dimensions were highlighted, followed by the notable cultural differences between the United States and China (Hofstede, 1986).

Following Hofstede's cultural dimensions and how culture affects value and behavior in a given society, the "culture shock" phenomenon emerged; thus, literature on cross-cultural living was presented. The reviewed literature offered a candid look on Chinese people living in the United States, including the benefits and their struggles, covering stories of new immigrants and those who supposedly enculturated into American society. The focus then narrowed to shine light on China's education—past and present, and how those realities helped to shape the teacher preparation programs and China-born Chinese teachers' perceptions today. Finally, research on China-born Chinese teachers' challenges in enculturation to the American society especially the educational world were examined, opening the discussion on the research topic and providing hope in celebration of both cultures.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Creswell (2013) firmly believes the influence that philosophical worldview has on the practice of research. Researchers often identify their philosophical worldviews and explain how such worldviews shape their approaches to research. Guba (1990) defines the term worldview as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p.17).

The worldview the researcher identifies in the current study is social constructivism. According to Creswell (2013), social constructivists develop “subjective meanings of their experiences” (p.8). The beauty of this worldview is that it leads the researcher to explore the complexity of views generated from various philosophies rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas.

The current research sought to penetrate into the real lives of China-born Chinese teachers, and to allow the vocative expressivity of writing to bring out the essence of the lived experiences. Van Manen (2016) describes phenomenological pathos as “the loving project of bringing all the living of life to meaningful expression through the imageries and languages of phenomenological writing, composing, and expressing” (p.18). Hence, a phenomenological approach in this study was the most appropriate for the researcher to gain information, build understanding, extract meaning, and eventually capture the essence of the central phenomenon.

The reviewed literature took shape by analyzing and synthesizing published articles examining culture and cross-cultural living as it pertains to teachers who teach overseas. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies were presented and carefully examined to set the foundation for the study.

### **China and Confucius**

One cannot fully understand China, a collectivistic society, until first examining the historic influences on its society by the teachings of Confucius. Gu (2009) suggests that the

seeming absence of the underlying psychological themes in Chinese literature only serves to highlight the differences between Chinese culture and its Western counterpart and confirms the greater emotional repression in Chinese culture founded on the deep-rooted Confucian moral system.

That moral system guides the Chinese people view their world through a cultural map that is built on a set of core assumptions, and the tradition that has been generated from that system has been a strong force in shaping the foundation of Chinese culture for over 2300 years (Cook, 2001). Confucianism sets forth four principles as guides to proper human behavior that later became rules for Chinese people to follow every day: humanism (jen), faithfulness (i), propriety (li), and wisdom (chih).

This collection of pragmatic rules of daily life was first referred as “the Confucian Dynamism,” and it has been the core to Chinese values. Bond (1971) conducted a survey called the Chinese Value Survey by asking a number of Chinese social scientists to create a list of at least ten basic values for Chinese people. It was given to a number of people in 22 countries including China. To many Westerners, some of the questions were quite strange such as filial piety—honoring ancestors, being obedient to parents, and providing financial support to parents. The characteristics demonstrated by Chinese are perseverance, ordering relationships by status, having a sense of shame, steadiness and stability, protecting your face, respect for tradition, reciprocation of favors and gifts. Bond further realized that all the characteristics were taken straight from the teachings of Confucius. Bond’s study demonstrated appreciation for the values that are deeply rooted in the Chinese society based on Confucius’ teaching and avoided a deliberate Western bias; however, it did have a Chinese culture bias.

The Chinese values not only guide Chinese people's day-to-day living, but also are reflected in the daily practices of Chinese educators. Under traditional Confucianism, China-born Chinese educators can be authoritarian, rigid, and undemocratic; and it is not until the recent decades had China developed an un-unified curriculum with varied set of textbooks (An, 2000). According to Confucius, education was the monopoly of government because it was identified with the ruler as its source. The commoners were taught to be strictly obedient to the state, and the educational principle being to suppress independent thought and action (Brown, 1978). Confucius' educational philosophy had rote-memorization deeply rooted in Chinese educator's teaching pedagogy by sheer repetition of facts with no or little understanding of the content learned (Tan, 2015).

Although there is no denying in Confucian education's association with rote-memorization, there is very little literature on Confucius' promotion on that educational concept. On the contrary, much literature has recorded Confucius' drive for active knowledge inquiry. Based on Confucius' concept of "si" (thinking) from a textual study of the "Analects," it is argued that Confucius' concept of "si" primarily involves an active inquiry into issues that concern one's everyday life, promotes inferential thinking, and facilitates self-examination (Kang & Chang, 2016).

Other literature also confirms Kang and Chang's (2016) finding on Confucius. Far from advocating rote-memorization, Confucius highlighted the need for us to take ownership of our own learning, engage in higher order thinking, and reflectively apply the lessons learned in our lives; and that concept should apply to all people in China. Wang & Ma (2006) revealed the realistic significance of Confucius' Fair Educational Concept on China's education. Confucius once said, "Education should be done without the difference between the rich and the poor, or



the noble and the mean" (Waley, 1938). The true meaning of that statement is to provide education to all people in China, but in a highly collectivistic society like China, that statement can be easily misinterpreted as having an equal or the same education to all. It is undeniable that this misunderstanding shifts teachers' pedagogy to educate students using a "one size fits all" approach. That might explain why special education is such a scarcity in China. With the mindset and the habitual approach of "one size fits all," China-born Chinese teachers face many challenges in understanding and implementing individualized learning to their students in the United States. Such mindset directly results in the violation of the essence of education.

Not only does Confucianism advocate education for all, but as a master teacher, Confucius also has had many educational thoughts that positively shaped China's educational system (Cummins, 1983). First of all, a plethora of some of the staples in American educational concepts such as teacher-student relationship, curriculum development, and teaching and learning can also be discovered through reviews and examination of Confucius' thinking (Kang & Chang, 2016). Second, the theme of moral education emerged. Confucius' insightful thinking about humans' strong innate nature of irrationality out of their physical needs calls for the indispensable moral education (Xi, 2015). Confucius taught his students Six Classics— Shijing (classic of poetry), Shujing (classic of history), Lijing (book of ritual), Yijing (classic of changes), Yuejing (classic of music) and Chunqiu (annals of spring and autumn). By mastering these classics, a person could inculcate in himself a rational character through self-discipline and self-indoctrination. Xi's study further reveals humans have great potentials to redirect their innate irrational behavior towards a rational state through moral education. Third, Confucius promoted lifelong learning and lifelong education (Sun, 2008). Confucius presented us an ideal model of humanity, a model that uses lifelong learning as its method and processes through his

concepts of "Sage"—an ideal human model, and "Jun Zi"—a Confucian realistic educational result. Sun's study provided an alternative lens through which to view and ponder Confucius as a true advocate for lifelong learning, and presented the limit of current educational practices in China.

One of the most modern and controversial views on Confucius' influence on China's education is distinguishing Confucius as a critical thinker—vastly different from the thoughts from prior studies on Confucius' emphasis on rote-memorization and self-discipline. Zhao's study (2013) on Confucius as a critical educator conducted a cross-cultural comparative examination in educational philosophy. From the texts of "the Analects," connections between Confucius and ideas of critical educators were discovered. Furthermore, four common threads between Confucian concepts of education and critical pedagogy were revealed: mutual learning, integration of theory and practice, importance of reflection in teaching and learning, and democratic purpose of education.

One of the connections withdrawn from "the Analects" is with John Dewey. Tan's study (2016) challenged our traditional discourse that Dewey advocates learner-centered education whereas Confucius privileges subject matter via textual transmission, and argues that both Dewey and Confucius reject an "either subject matter or learner" thinking that recognizes no intermediate possibilities in between. Instead, both thinkers emphasized the importance of both subject matter and the learner, and maintained that educators needed to guide student learning by integrating appropriate content into the learner's total experience.

To further shift from the misunderstanding of Confucian education often being characterized by sheer repetition of facts with little or no understanding of the content learned, Tan (2015) intended to discover what Confucius himself had to say about education by

examining Confucius' concept of "si" (thinking) based on a textual study of the "Analects." It is argued that Confucius' concept of "si" primarily involves an active inquiry into issues that concern one's everyday life, promotes inferential thinking, and facilitates self-examination. Confucius highlighted the need for us to take ownership of our own learning, engage in higher order thinking, and reflectively apply the lessons learned in our lives. Those concepts are integrated not only in Chinese education but are demonstrated in the teaching pedagogy of American teachers. Tan's study spoke clearly to a Chinese classroom's power distance: The teacher is of power, no one else is equal to him or her, and that inequality is accepted. Students are influenced by their teacher and they follow the initiatives of him or her leadership. Students should not have aspirations beyond their rank; therefore, they are not allowed to challenge or question the teacher.

The concept of the teacher being considered the supreme giver of knowledge in a society of China can take time for Western educators to be accustomed to. A study done by Melby, Dodgson, and Tarrant (2008) researched on the lived experiences of Western expatriate educators teaching in East Asian countries. The study acknowledged the expectation of differences in cultural beliefs extending to the classrooms when working in Asia, and gave respect to the profoundness of how these differences felt when living every day in Asia. The American premise of "liberty and justice for all" has explicit emphasis on equal rights in all aspects of American society and government, which extends into the classroom. Western educators encourage students to ask questions while Asian students feel uncomfortable challenging their teachers can create some very quiet and awkward moments in the classroom. With the deep impact Confucius has on China, Chinese culture, China's education, and the vast

cultural difference between China and its Western counterparts, it is crucial to examine the topic of culture.

### **The Definition of Culture**

Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) believe that the culture of a nation influences patterns of thinking which are reflected in the meaning people attach to various aspects of life; and in return, those patterns become crystalized in the characteristic formation of that nation. Culture is defined by Hofstede as the “collective mental programming of the human mind which distinguishes one group of people from another” (1984, p.51). Damen defined culture as "learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day- to-day living patterns” (1987, p. 367). According to Jervis (2006), culture is a very inclusive term, which covers the thoughts, behaviors, languages, customs, the things we produce and the methods we use to produce them. Each individual’s culture has arisen out of the genetic heritage, temperament and individual history. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction, and it is primary in our nature to adapt to a culture.

Proposing the flexibility perspective of culture, Bodley (1994) believes that culture can be shared, learned, symbolic, adaptive, and integrated. Thus, there should be a common agreement on what things mean in each culture; for instance, brides wear white as a symbol of purity in the United States, while red is a celebratory color for brides to wear in China. However, even within the national border there is much cultural dissonance such as the language. Gao (2015) reports that although Mandarin Chinese is widely spoken in Mainland China, each region’s dialect is closely related to individual user’s identification with particular social groups. Those regional dialects and the culture each relates to have profound impact on a person. This dissonance extends into today's classrooms. Teachers who teach cross-culturally will

increasingly need to find ways of enculturating into the multicultural classroom or community in which they teach (Adler, 1993).

### **The Importance of Culture**

Hofstede argues that culture can often cause conflict instead of synergy, and it can be “disastrous if not dealt with appropriately” (1984, p.52). Hofstede further highlights that in fact, most of us are not aware of other countries' cultures; therefore, we tend to minimize cultural differences. This unawareness leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people from different countries. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory shed light on these differences. Since it is crucial for teachers of cross-culture to have an understanding of other cultures, using Hofstede's theory as a tool in the classroom will broaden cultural perspective, which in result leads to more positive classroom experiences.

Cultural differences and the impact on classroom experiences are further addressed by Ramsey (2010). The researcher proposes how teachers can use the different cultural elements found in their classrooms including the instructors themselves as starting points to discuss the basic concepts of culture: language, intergenerational transmission, and cultural artifacts. She further draws attention to the unconscious reactions of inter-cultural teachers to unfamiliar behaviors of children in a foreign classroom. Ramsey (2010) warns that those unconscious reactions can often be misinterpreted, in which case, creates barriers between the teacher and the students.

When dealing with cultural barriers, one can choose either to feel frustrated or to embrace and celebrate both cultures. When conducting interviews with managers responsible for Australia's provision of transnational higher education in Thailand, Eldridge and Cranston (2009) used Hofstede's national cultural value dimensions as an analytical tool to examine how the

managers understood national cultures and their impact on work and working environment. The study found that even the workers' awareness of the potential hunches and barriers can provide support in an inter-cultural setting. That awareness is essential as internationalization is non-ceasing (Nathan & Ruggieri, 2009). The scholars believe that one of the most important lasting legacies of the 20th century is globalization and the increased integration among countries and economies, as a result leading to more interactions among the peoples of different cultures. This phenomenon has also percolated into the field of education. With the mushrooming of students studying abroad and teachers teaching abroad, awareness and appropriateness in cross-cultural environments are crucial. Nathan and Ruggieri also used Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory to identify the characteristics of teacher-student relationships from different cultures, and explored the potential conflicts that may be created from those relationships, and offered suggestions for teachers to become globally competent.

Echoing prior research, several other studies that used Hofstede's (1980) theory as a foundation also confirmed the profound effects of cultural differences on classroom experience of teachers. Skinner and Abbott (2013) conducted a study on the impact of different cultural values on the teacher education of Chinese teacher trainees examined the hunches that occurred between teacher educators and trainees during their six-week overseas teaching practice; and argued that perceptions are due to the different cultural orientations at play in this context. McLean (2007), in the study of an Asian-born female teacher establishing credibility in American classrooms, used Hofstede's theory to explore the effects of each dimension of teacher credibility in the classroom. McLean further argues that knowing how to establish teacher credibility in the United States is a key element in increasing effectiveness. Alberts (2008) supports McLean's study by addressing the main challenges foreign-born instructors face in

adjusting to the United States educational system and classrooms, and argues that while instructor's "foreignness" can be an important teaching resource, there are concerns about their impact on students' educational achievement. With the profound effects cultural differences on classroom experiences, it is important to have an accurate understanding of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and where China and the United States differ most prominently.

### **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and US VS. China**

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980) outlines five dimensions that lie in a culture that can strongly impact one's experience and behaviors. Those five dimensions are: Individualism Verses Collectivism (IDV)—the relationship between the individual and the group, Power Distance (PDI)—the degree of inequality between the people that is assumed to be a natural state of affairs, Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)—how people in a culture cope with the unpredictable and ambiguous, Masculinity (MAS)—care-oriented societies versus achievement-oriented societies, and Long Term Verses Short Term Orientation (LTO)—a society's attitude towards time and traditions (Hofstede, 1980). According to Hofstede (2001), because this theory describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior, it can be used as a framework for cross-cultural communication.

Hofstede's model explaining national and cultural differences and their consequences came at a time when cultural differences between nations had become increasingly relevant for both economic and political reasons. Hofstede (1986, 1991) further argues that cross-cultural perspective and competency are necessary for one to be accepted and become successful in the international context.

In the Cultural Dimensions Theory, Hofstede (2001) uses scores to represent each dimension of each country derived from the data using comparative academic research. The

scores of each dimension represent the level of each index; for instance, the United States scores 91 out of 100 on the Individualism Versus Collectivism Index (IDV), while China scores 20 out of 100. By comparing the scores of each dimension between China and the United States, it is apparent that the two characterize the most differences in the dimensions of Individualism Verses Collectivism (IDV), Power Distance (PDI) and Long Term Verses Short Term Orientation (LTO). This implication guided the researcher to review literature that specifically focuses on factors which are in the domain of the three dominant dimensions that influence classroom experiences of the teachers.

### **US VS. China and Vast Cultural Differences**

We should take culture seriously. Tapanes, Smith, and White (2009) conducted a study of the effects of dissonance in levels of Individualism Versus Collectivism Index (IDV), and found that both instructors' and students' experiences are influenced by their cultural values. This study collected survey data to analyze the effects that Hofstede's IDV cultural dimension exert on individual's perspective, and the results revealed that the students' cultural dimensions relate significantly to some of their perceptions of culture in the classroom. Contrary to their individualist peers like the United States, collectivist learners like the Chinese feel that their individualist instructors are not usually aware of cultural differences in the classroom and that their culture is not being considered to make learning relevant to their cultural context.

Ladeira-McCalman (1995) went further than noticing the importance of Individualism Versus Collectivism Index (IDV) differences in the classroom, and posed the question of how we can find an optimal way to match expectations according to our cultural traits and reality according to perceptions of our students. The study used Hofstede's theory to assess cross-cultural differences in classroom interaction. It was noted that cultural background would



influence an individual's style of interaction when relating both to classmates and instructors. The assessment of differences in students' perceptions was made by comparing two groups of students. Except for Hofstede's IDV dimension, results indicated that these two groups did not differ significantly. The results contributed greatly to intercultural communication theory and communication education theory; furthermore, it supported providing cultural sensitivity and awareness to inter-cultural educators regarding behaviors of their students from highly individualistic cultures such as the United States.

Many China-born Chinese teachers cannot fully and accurately comprehend the emphasis on academic honesty in the United States, partly due to Chinese preferring “ambiguity” instead of “truth” (Li & He, 2016). Payan, Reardon, and McCorkle (2010) conducted a study of the effect of culture on academic honesty in schools. This study surveys students from 13 different countries about their perceptions of questionable behaviors concerning academic honesty and measures against Hofstede's commonly studied cultural dimension of IDV. As predicted, collectivistic students such as the Chinese are more tolerant than individualistic students such as the United States consider questionable academic behaviors concerning. Those behaviors can be unilateral such as copying material or papers from the Internet or looking at another student's exam without the knowledge of the other student, collaborative such as getting exam questions and/or answers from others or free riding in a group, and delaying such as requesting due date delays or assignment extensions with false information.

Another dimension that China and United States differ vastly is Power Distance (PDI). Yoo (2014) explored the role that culture plays in the classroom setting through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, focusing on the PDI dimension, which Hofstede describes as the phenomenon in which less powerful members of a society accept inequality in power as a

societal norm. This study discussed the effect power distance has on student-teacher interactions in a collectivist society specifically among South Korean University students and an American teacher. While Yoo's study explored the experience of an American teacher in a collectivist society, the current study intends to explore the experience of Chinese teachers in the United States, an individualistic society.

One of the most notable differences between the United States and China is Hofstede's Long Term Versus Short Term Orientation (LTO) dimension, which was first referred as "the Confucian Dynamism"—a collection of pragmatic rules of daily life. Merkin (2004) conducted a research to investigate the relation between cultural long-term orientation or Confucian Dynamism and conflict solving strategies. Studying intercultural communication is particularly vital at this time given the increasing global nature of today's communication interactions. Results showed that LTO culture members were more likely to use harmonious and cooperative strategies than their short-term orientated counterparts. This finding brought into question the assumption that "culture" could be classified by country and advocated the use of Hofstede's theory for determining culture change.

The short-term orientation is often identified as the "truth," while the long-term orientation is identified with "virtue" (Fang, Grant, & Xu, 2013). On the other hand, Confucius dealt with "virtue" but left the question of "truth" unanswered. China scores 87 in the LTO dimension, which means that it is a very pragmatic culture. In China, people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time; and they show an ability to adapt traditions easily to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, and perseverance in achieving results. In America, people believe that truth is absolute. One would imagine this difference of orientations causes barriers in the classroom: The Chinese teacher values students'

perseverance in learning the language, while the students struggle to find the absolute correct answers to a given problem. Another indication of this cultural conflict in the classroom is the Chinese teacher seeks delayed satisfaction of students' material, social and emotional need by urging them to work hard; while most students are only willing to accept short-term gratification, such as a good grade on the next quiz. (Meng & Muñoz, 2016).

It is crucial to use Hofstede's theory to understand the vast cultural differences between China and the United States due to China's strong economic and political status shifts as it pertains to global influence. Chinese immigrants are now the largest group to reside in the United States, and the areas of study such as Chinese American identity development, cultural psychology, and mental health are increasingly becoming burning issues among research psychologists (Hooper & Betalova, 2015). Seto (2009) echoes this dynamic shift in immigration patterns and raises concern for the Chinese people's struggle to acculturate to Westernized beliefs. With the urgency of this constant shift, the examination of the realities and challenges of cross-cultural living is crucial.

### **Cross-cultural Living**

International mobility is common today. According to Bierwiazzonek and Waldzus (2016), living abroad requires adaptation to the new culture, and adaptation outcomes are influenced by various socio-cultural factors. Bierwiazzonek and Waldzus' study explored socio-cultural factors as antecedents of cross-cultural adaptation in several socio-economic groups such as expatriates, international students, and migrants. The study revealed that each group conceptualizes adaptation in a different manner—expatriates are pragmatically oriented and centered on the work context, international students feel they lack a common direction, and

migrants focus on psychological outcomes of adaptation and tend to understudy factors related to the overall efficacy of migrants' functioning within the host society (2016).

Other literature has also highlighted the need to gain insight in experiences of cross-cultural living. Knauer's work (2017) on international intellectuals living in New York City highlights perspectives on cross-cultural teaching and learning. The study explores the ideals and practices of international intellectuals in New York City who were not born in the United States by aiming to answer how cross-cultural intellectuals understand and make decisions about their work across nations. Through a grounded theory inquiry, the study investigates a cross-cultural intellectual perspective to explain how ideals about intellectual work are influenced by, and shape practices in particular contexts. This study has implications for imagining how cultural and intellectual institutions should support cross-cultural educators and scholars, leading to more intellectually rigorous and equitable teaching and learning communities. Perhaps the most notable contribution of the study is that it helps to explain how a cross-cultural perspective can contribute to the development of international educational scholarship.

Knauer's work came at a time when the number of Chinese international students attending American universities was increasing rapidly, and inspired many significant studies to consider problems arising during these students' transitional period prior to them acculturating into the American culture and educational system. Li (2017) conducted a qualitative study on the lived experiences of a group of Chinese students' initial transitional period in the United States. Conversations shared during interviews with those students indicated specific experiences in regard to their initial and ongoing adjustment to the United States, such as how they described their experiences and how their ways of thinking and behaving changed as a result of being influenced by their experiences interfacing with a completely different culture. Themes that

emerged while reviewing participants' interviews include: (a) difficulties and challenges they faced as new immigrants; (b) differences they encountered in respect to their homeland and the new environment, including language/communication, culture, academic study and learning, living in the US, and psychological adjustments; (c) positive growth they acknowledged from facing challenges and adapting to their new environment; and (d) acknowledging the need to accept help and how to more proactively seek and receive help as needed. Pan (2016) conducted a similar study on the lived experiences of Chinese international graduate students in the United States. The themes in the study revolved around students getting acclimated to a new environment, both academically and socially; finding familiarity in the midst of unfamiliarity, while living in between two languages and two cultural worlds, both literally and metaphorically. The study also emphasized with the students' transformed identities, having lived in the United States for over two years. Students struggle with self-doubt, identity navigation, and life satisfaction while still making an effort to maintain their "Chinese-ness."

Encumbered by the struggles international students experience and the urgency in understanding the true essence of those experiences, much scholarly literature surfaced. Coward's study (2014) describes the earnestness in knowing how Chinese international students who complete their graduate programs in the United States and become academic scholars adapt and acculturate into American life. The study found that less than one-fifth of the studies on international students' cultural adjustment processes and issues between 1990 and 2009 employed a method that record those students' lives long-term. Consequently, although this body of work provides a limited review on the beginning stage of cultural adjustment, it lacks examination of the process and challenges for one's extended adjustment into a new culture.

Cross-cultural living represents a transition that entails significant psychological “*disequilibrium*”—an imbalance between what is understood and what is encountered (Ying, 2002). According to Piaget, “the individual acts only if he experiences a need, i.e., if the equilibrium between the environment and the organism is momentarily upset, and action tends to re-establish the equilibrium, i.e., to re-adapt the organism (Claparède)” (1936). Ying’s study recorded stories of 97 Taiwanese young adults studying in the United States and revealed that living cross-culturally creates a state of “*disequilibrium*.” The study further argues that people naturally try to reduce such imbalance by using the stimuli that initially caused it to a new context or adapt to a former one until equilibrium is restored. The study aims at the psychological perspective of internationals living in the United States; however, it cannot be generalized to the Chinese internationals as Taiwan and Mainland China are vastly different culturally. Therefore, the need to discover the underlying cause for such imbalance is urgent.

### **Cultural Shock**

Culture shock is “an experience a person may have when one moves to a cultural environment which is different from one's own; it is also the personal disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life due to immigration or a visit to a new country, a move between social environments, or simply transition to another type of life” (Macionis & Gerber, 2010, p.54). Oberg (1960) outlined the four stages of culture shock—fascination with novelty, hostility, beginning of adjustment, and acceptance of the customs of the host country; noticeably indicating the high probability that an individual who lives in a foreign environment can commonly be prone to cultural shock. These reactions occurred when one is confronted with a foreign culture. Feichtinger and Fink’s study echoes this well-known and evidenced phenomenon and further describes cultural shock as “the psychological and physical

reactions of a person staying abroad” (1998, p. 1). This study drew our attention to East Asian countries such as China as Feichtinger and Fink suggest that cultural processes and features in countries that are usually attributed to the communist heritage are the result of collective culture shock and this shock influences relations and causes problems (1998).

Keeping the focus on cultural shock that pertains to East Asian countries, Henderson, Milhouse, and Cao (1993) described the experiences of 150 Chinese students attending an American university and presented that cultural shock caused them to act as though they were normless and powerless in a new cultural environment. The study suggests ten culture shock management skills that might help Asian students make a new cultural experience constructive and enjoyable; however, there is little evidence on how those suggestions might become effective largely due to the lack of depth of the study in investigating the causes of those experiences.

Kwan and Sodowsky (1997) took a different angle and explored the correlation between internal and external ethnic identity of 224 Chinese American immigrants. Their experience of salience of ethnicity, fear of loss of face, and cultural stress were also examined. The study found that internal ethnic identity significantly predicted salience of ethnicity and loss of face; and income, ethnicity salience, external ethnic identity, and loss of face were significant predictors of acculturative stress.

A different perspective on the factors that influence intercultural experiences is approached by Van Oudenhoven (2013). Instead of using generalized social-economic features as attributing factors to acculturative stress, the study emphasizes the role of personality as a determinant of intercultural competence, and provides a basis for the empirical link between traits and intercultural success. The study further notes that stress-related traits may help

individuals refrain from sticking to one's own culture, social-perceptual traits reinforce identification with new culture. Michael Winkelman's study on causes and strategies for management of cultural shock and adaptation provided guidelines for managing cultural shock using strategies that foster awareness, learning, and adaptation (1994). Winkelman (1994) further investigates the causes of cultural shock—stress reactions, cognitive fatigue, role shock, and personal shock—all factors that challenge one's emotional and psychological being.

The topic of cultural shock can also be applied to the popular concept of academic psychology (Furnham, 2011). Perceptions of culture shock of international students at Tennessee State University were described by Wingfield (2001). The study involves 99 students, all of whom identified the development of cultural shock when placed in a new country while attending a new school with unfamiliar symbols of identification. The study also identifies the significance in grades and emotional symptoms, satisfaction with American life and emotional and physical symptoms, having a counselor and behavioral symptoms, English-speaking skills and behavioral and attitudinal symptoms, and religion and attitudinal symptoms—all can become acculturation barriers.

### **Cultural Shock and Identity Formation**

Cultural shock and psychology are intertwined tightly. The trends in the study of the mental health of Chinese immigrants to the United States are set following Feichtinger and Fink's emphasis (1998) on "collective cultural shock"—cultural shock experienced by people originated from a collectivistic society (Cheung & Dobkin, 2012). The effects migration has on one's mental health were explained in the study, with a focus on the Chinese who have migrated to the United States in large numbers since the 1965 Immigration Act. Bearing the vulnerability of the migrating population in mind, the study reviewed the emotional state of Chinese



Americans, and raised discussion on some of the important mental health problems such as dealing with racism, underemployment or unemployment, maladjustment and stress, and culture shock.

Part of making a life overseas is making a living. The intricacies of a host community can certainly present challenges on securing mentally and financially satisfying employment. Drenth et al. (1989) posed three central questions on the above topic in a cross-cultural context: “what are the individual definitions of working, which position does the work role take vis a vis other life values, and which normative views are held with respect to working” (p. 478). Holt and Keats posed deep emphasis on the influence of cultural interaction on finding work-related identity (1989). A cross-cultural study was undertaken in Nigeria and Australia to examine working women's perception of their role and status having experienced loneliness and psychological adjustment (Stone, Feinstein, & Ward, 1989). The research examined a range of clinical, cognitive and behavioral variables frequently cited in the “culture shock” literature as predictors of cross-cultural adaptation, and found out that those women experience all those negativities during the initial stage of cultural adjustment, further highlighting the need for research.

Although prior study has employed the concept of stress's influence on behavior, differences in the events perceived as leading to culture shock is seldom studied. Spradley and Phillips (1972) suggest that not only are there universal stressors encountered by those who experience culture shock, there are also culture-related differences in the definition of stress. Taking the cultural population of international students as an example, literature suggests that this cultural group are more likely to experience high levels of acculturative stresses hence are more prone to psychological distress (Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Sam & Eide, 1991). Hahn

(2011) conducted a study on a total of 648 international students from 74 countries and areas studying in an elite northeastern university in the United States. The study suggests that given this cultural group's peculiar characteristics, there is need to study their cultural orientations to better inform cultural specific practices. One of the most significant findings in the study was that those from collectivistic-oriented countries such as China were more likely to experience stress.

Monger (2014) further describes individual's experience of intense stress and a disjointed sense of self as one attempts to adapt to the demands of a new culture. One's struggles often go unnoticed as one represses differences thought to be inconsistent with the host culture; therefore, presents a challenge on developing an intercultural identity. Monger's study examined a positive side for one to develop a healthy intercultural identity, and proposed that it can be used as an untapped skill for global business. Kim's theory of intercultural communication (2001) suggests that the individuals who simultaneously engage in a search for oneself and decline to be defined by others have the capacity to embrace global endeavors and therefore, experience more fulfillment in their cross-cultural experiences.

With prior study's call on collectivistic cultural group's inter-cultural shock and stress, focus is logically shifted to China. There is an increasing number of Chinese international students studying in the United States; however, Chinese international students are among the group that are least likely to access counseling centers for help. (Jarrahi, 2005). With the high number of Chinese students in the United States and the vital need for psychological well-being, not seeking psychological counseling can become a real danger threatening the emotional being of this group.

## **Chinese in America**

In the past few decades, China has undergone enormous political, economic, and demographic changes that have transformed the realities of migration to and from the country. Census data (2015) shows that there are 4.9 million Chinese currently living in the United States, and Chinese immigrants now make up the largest single group of arrivals a year into the United States (Lee, 2015). The migration of professionals, executives, technicians and other highly skilled personnel seeking better employment prospects and lifestyle in the American labor market is increasing every year (Ip, Hibbins & Chui, 2006; Collins, 2001).

Providing the constant business interactions between the two worlds, there is an increasing need to understand the East versus West culture differences (Adler, 1993). The kind of phenomenon created when East meets West is massively gratifying. Melby, Dodgson, and Tarrant (2008) presented a study on the lived experiences of a group of Western nurse educators teaching in East Asian countries such as Japan between 2004 and 2005. The study demonstrates that the ways that a collectivist-oriented culture may affect nurse educators coming from a Western individualist worldview needs to continue to be researched to develop better mutual understandings that will lead to culturally collaborative models of practice, education and research. In addition, the study highlights both the challenges and the “gifts” of living abroad, and inspired cross-cultural educators to be open-minded and resourceful.

The ideal of the American Dream also attracts many people from collectivistic societies to immigrate to the United States. The definition of the American Dream inspires one to pursue the life that is “better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth (Adams, 1931). Chinese Americans, as the “model minority,” have tried immensely hard to achieve the American Dream (Bligh & Pearce, 2014). The largest two Chinese groups in the United States

are students who seek higher education and China-born Chinese teachers seeking employment through Hanban—a Chinese government affiliated language teaching bureau. With the increasing number of Chinese moving to the United States from different regions of China with various languages, customs, and reasons of why they left China, it is an imperative to take a deep look at their experiences of acculturation and influencing factors to those experiences. (Gordon, 2014). The complexity of those lived experiences present true meanings to the current study.

Many of the Chinese immigrants who seek employment in this country face many career barriers, such as language acquisition, lack of social support, and workplace discrimination. These barriers are not limited to the societal, community, and workplace contexts. (Leong & Tang, 2016). Not only do the immigrant workers face challenges, their families also go through the acculturation process, which in return heaps more stress onto the workers. Liang's study (2016) on the acculturation process in the United States among Chinese and Taiwanese wives highlights that although they felt comfortable adapting to the American way of direct communication styles, easy social interactions, and social equality, all six participants expressed that they still needed to obtain significant emotional support and constant assistance from their spouse in order to feel somewhat "fitted in" to the country.

Migration is a major life event that alters the functioning of individuals, often leading to the disruption of families and other social networks. When adaptation and coping fail, psychological distress may result. (Lee, et al., 2015). Lee et al.'s study on the psychological distress among Chinese immigrants to the United States highlights its prevalence and places a desperate call on routine screening among this cultural group and building capacity for culturally sensitive interventions. The other large group who immigrate to the United States are the Chinese students who finish their graduate programs and stay in the United States to become

scholars and faculty in the academics. We know very little about the students—who became professionals and achieved much success in the American society— how they adapt or acculturate into the American life. Prior study considered the challenges associated with cultural adjustment in a foreign country, but little provides a complete view of the process of cultural adjustment (Coward, 2014).

In order to understand the cohesiveness to the Chinese culture and the elements that support facilitating the culture as a whole, one must take an in-depth look into the lived experiences of Chinese people in the United States and recognize that understanding the individual system of Chinese people is vital to the research. Rielly (2017) demonstrates the fascinating and rich texture of emotions in Chinese culture through the lenses of philosophical-religious and poetic classics. Rielly further presents the importance of understanding emotions and how they underpin Chinese cultural norms, challenging the adequacy of some central analyses in what constitutes “mainstream psychology” in western culture. By highlighting a collection of contemporary cultural practices in China, the well-being of one’s psychological state such as identity formation was noted, and the concepts of “Face” and “Guanxi” –elements attributing to acculturation satisfaction only to the Chinese, surfaced.

### **The Concepts of “Face” and “Guanxi”**

Traditional Chinese culture attaches great importance to the family. The ideal family exhibits certain admirable qualities and behaviors, such as respect for elders, familiar loyalty, and other wholesome Confucian traits. Saving one’s “face” is one of such importance. Ho (1976) defined the Chinese concept of face as “the respectability and/or deference that a person can claim for him/herself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in the social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in the position as

well as acceptably in his social conduct” (p. 883). Brown and Levinson (1987) further analyzed the Chinese concept of face (miànzi and liǎn) by focusing on its complexity and later discussed its persistent orientation toward an ideal social identity. Mao (1994) took a different angle and argued that the concept of “face” can mean very different things in different cultures, so one who is used to the certain expected behaviors and thoughts on face in the Chinese culture might be misunderstood in the American society.

Alongside the concept of “face,” guanxi is another important social networking concept embraced by the Chinese people. According to Zhang et al. (2016), one can achieve career advancement, personal life balance, and impression management success all through the route of guanxi. Huang (2000) confirmed Zhang et al.’s findings by expressing guanxi’s importance—the ability to have others at your like professional level to open doors to meet your needs. If guanxi is perceived as the ultimate route to success and for Chinese immigrants, when guanxi is one of the social ties lacking, one’s professional life can be seriously constrained. Therefore, for Chinese teachers who teach in the United States, it can be assumed that saving “face” and having “guanxi” are crucial in professional satisfaction and longevity. To fully understand the essence of the teacher perceptions, it is crucial to trace back on what education is and means in China.

### **Education in China**

Mooney (2007) outlined the chronicles of China’s education:

For more than 2,500 years, Confucian thought held sway in China, advocating a state guided by highly ethical scholar-bureaucrats and a society ruled by morality and a strong emphasis on hierarchical relationships. But by the end of the 19th century, the Chinese state, powerless to fight off foreign encroachment and growing public dissatisfaction, was tottering on the brink of collapse. Leading intellectuals pointed an accusing finger at

Kongfuzi (551-479 BC), better known outside China as Confucius. During the May Fourth Movement of 1919, intellectuals frustrated by China's failures shouted 'Down with the Confucian store!' and called for science and democracy to take the seat of the Great Sage. Confucius was even more harshly attacked when the Communists came to power, in 1949. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Confucian temples throughout China were damaged by rampaging young Red Guards, and Confucian scholars were frightened--and often beaten--into silence. Now, almost a century after Confucianism first came under attack as an obstacle to development, it is being heralded as a solution to the many political, economic, and ethical problems China faces. (p. 53)

With the seemingly strong foundation set by Confucius in each educational period in China's history, it is important to compare China's education in history with its modern reform. Under traditional Confucianism, China's school system was authoritarian, rigid, and undemocratic; but in recent decades China's text publication has become more varied, and curriculum planning and writing more democratic (An, 2000). Wan's study in 1998 draws on postmodern curriculum theories to present a critical analysis of the drastic curriculum changes that took place in China during its Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Although educational reform failed during this period, the study shone light on both sides of the Chinese educational reform and the soundness and the limitations of Mao Tse-Tung's educational theory. Furthermore, it provides a context for postmodern studies and examines educational reforms versus social and political changes in China. The study argues that educational reform moving from one extreme to another in the process led to the disastrous results of the reform, and implies that providing the proper structure for a new system is essential to be successful. In addition, this study encourages

educators to move away from traditional teaching methods and making teaching relevant to students.

Nevertheless, to many scholars, one school of educational thought is no better than the other, and it is only by combining the advantages of both the western and the eastern worlds, can successful educational reform occur. Sheng and Dan (2004) also analyzed the contemporary development of philosophy of education in mainland China and Taiwan by shining light on the revival of philosophy of education that occurred in the 1980s, combining Confucian tradition, western philosophy of education, and a reconceptualization of Marxist educational ideas. Sheng and Dan's study argued that a real marriage between traditional Confucianism and western philosophy of education is needed to understand the complexity of the modern-day education in China. Zhang and Xu (2006) examined the drive to educational reform in the last 20 years in China, and aimed to understand the relationship between educational psychology research and educational reform, and argue that China has committed to serve and expand current educational practices.

With the drive to educational reform in China, one way to access its education is by first studying its teachers. Since teacher quality has been consistently identified as the most important school-based factor in student achievement, strategic examination on and thinking of the systematic reform of Chinese teacher education is foundational in ensuring a successful educational system (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2000; Rowan, Correnti & Miller, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Smith and Pacific's detailed analysis (1983) on both preservice and in-service teacher education in China drew comparisons on the characteristics of education between China and the United States. There was much consideration on the features of Chinese educational and intellectual thought



and philosophy and they argue the Chinese philosophy of education is based to a great degree on the teachings of Confucius. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of the "right" way to education is discussed, highlighting the need for further research on potential barriers for teachers teaching overseas.

Liu & Qi (2006) presented the vast differences between China and the United States in teacher preparation programs such as preparation practices characteristics of teachers, and the impact Chinese and American educational thought and philosophy have on those differences. The research further demonstrates that education directly serves or reflects the values of a society in which it is rooted, and those differences can present significant barriers to classroom success to teachers who teach overseas. Liu and Feng (2015) present an examination of dilemmas that emerge from cross-cultural differences teachers encountered during educational borrowing in the global era. The findings indicate that the main reason for the teacher dilemmas is lack of and different understandings of knowledge production, transmission, and the goal of education in the target country.

One of the ways to educate China-born Chinese teachers preparing to teach and already teaching in the United States is participating in Confucius Institutes sponsored training opportunities. Confucius Institutes are characterized by the outstanding culture of the Chinese nation having been built in a way that sends them abroad, which has been a cultural revival and self-conscious choice of "sending Eastern learning Westward" in the 21st century (Zheng, 2016). The construction of Confucius Institutes and training for educators culturally and educationally have many benefits, such as spreading harmonious Chinese values to the United States, opening dialogues between civilizations, helping preserve thriving cultural vitality, and promoting continual innovation and development in our own cultural construction; however, the differences

of educational beliefs between Chinese educators and American students constantly create clashes in and outside the classrooms (Zhao, 2007). Therefore, the essence of what and how Chinese teachers expect to give and American students expect to receive is essential to understanding the conflicts. Although the culture differences can be barriers in having a fulfilling experience for some teachers of inter-culture, Zhao (2014) believes that having a cross-culture perspective help those teachers to appreciate the characteristics of all cultures, and create a deeper understanding of education. By appreciating all cultures, inter-cultural educators can demonstrate unique views toward academic instruction and the development of the learner.

### **Chinese Teachers' Perception on Education**

According to the College Board and Hanban—a language council affiliated with the Chinese Education Ministry, 325 volunteer Chinese “guest teachers” worked in American schools in the year 2006 alone and the number is increasing each year. The increasing number of Chinese teachers entering the field each year marks them as an integral part of the United States education system (Robelen, 2010). A large volume of prior research has been conducted on the experiences of Western expatriate educators teaching in East Asian countries (Getty, 2011; North & Shelton, 2014; Bu, 2014). However, there is little in-depth research on the experiences of Chinese educators teaching in the United States. Those teachers’ voices need to be heard. While some may already have taught in China, the differences between cultures and education systems swing them to have limited understanding of teaching in American classrooms (Hutchison & Jazaar, 2007).

Prior research has been conducted to investigate the experiences of foreign-born language instructors in the United States (Collins, 2008; McCalman, 2014; Miller, 2014). Implications and recommendations, although not structured, are produced to support foreign-born language

instructors. Most importantly, the finding of the prior research made the profound effect culture has on one's experience less mysterious. Chinese teaching in the United States is not a simple matter of education; rather, it is closely bound up with the blending of political and economic development, culture, and ideology (Luo, 2016). Due to the reform of Chinese teaching in the United States—the learning age has grown younger, the learning regions have expanded, and the learning content and teachers have diversified. China's Confucius Institute Headquarters and experienced teachers in the United States are working in concert to formulate teaching materials and train qualified teachers to resolve issues related to the sustainable development of Chinese teaching in the United States. The need for highly qualified Chinese teachers who have cross-cultural competency places an urgent call for Chinese educators in the United States to understand what constitutes effective teaching in K-12 classrooms (Meng, Muñoz, & Wu, 2016). Meng, Muñoz, and Wu's study compared and contrasted Chinese and American teachers' perceptions on effectiveness of teaching and revealed that the thoughts that were deeply rooted in Confucian cultural tradition are hardest to adapt to the United States education, while others related to China's current educational reform are of much similarity to US education.

In addition to teaching conceptual differences, much research has been done on identity issues and social cultural challenges that many China-born Chinese teachers face in US schools (Hsiao, 2015). As learning Chinese as a foreign language is becoming popular in the United States with the growing Chinese economy and influence, a growing number of China-born Chinese teachers took citizenship in the United States—not without struggles. With the fast growing Chinese and other Asian American population, it is important to have more teachers who share similar backgrounds with their students. Often times, Chinese teachers are hired in schools to teach Chinese as a foreign language. Hsiao's study highlights one teacher, Dr. Lin's

experience with various social, cultural and other challenges in working with students, faculty, staff and parents. The social and cultural challenges that Dr. Lin experienced impacted her personal and professional identities and created certain power dynamics at the school. Lacking familiarity with the school culture and socialization habits with faculty and administrators, Dr. Lin occupied a 'colonized' position with school administrators as 'colonizers.' Flipped over, her strong teacher-centered teaching style made her a colonizer of the students, reluctantly accepted by them, the colonized. Many others can identify with Dr. Lin's experience; however, Dr. Lin is fortunate enough that in the multi-layers of colonization, she was becoming acculturated through mimicking the behavior and language of her American colleagues and friends at work and in life. She continued to become 'the hybrid,' with mixed characteristics shaped by multiple social and cultural influences.

Just like Dr, Lin, many face enormous challenges when teaching in the United States. Tong (2017) conducted a case study exploring how native Mandarin Chinese teachers experienced and adapted to the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical differences in teaching English-speaking students at four-year higher education institutions in the United States. The study found that Chinese instructors faced and coped with four challenges in teaching college level Mandarin Chinese to American students. The challenges included: (1) professional insecurity, (2) understanding and meeting student needs, (3) teaching Chinese language skills, and (4) engaging and motivating students. The corresponding coping strategies adopted by Chinese instructors included: (1) acting at an individual level to maintain and increase intellectual vitality of Chinese instructors, (2) optimizing class time, creating opportunities for students to practice and use Chinese in and outside class, and tailoring teaching content and approaches to the diversified situations and needs of students, (3) employing communicative

approach and student-centered, task-based pedagogies to teach language skills, and (4) making teaching content and approaches flexible, relevant to student life, able to optimize student creativity, and utilizing technologies and jokes to engage students; creating opportunities for students to realize learning Chinese was useful and interesting to motivate students.

Challenges faced by both the Chinese teachers and the Chinese language learners are not by accident. Education in China and the United States has been influenced by their own philosophers, educational theorists, and the government, resulting in the two countries having very different school systems. While each has its own strengths and weaknesses, the globalized economic cooperation and education exchanges require both countries to examine their education systems and learn from one another as well as other sources (Wang, Ma, & Martin, 2015). Acculturation, psychological and social adjustment to the United States present seeming unconquerable barriers to Chinese immigrant educators (Yu, Cheah, & Calvin, 2016).

On the other hand, for China's American counterparts, the United States has placed the urgent call on American schools to re-conceptualize education in order to allow more informal, individualized learning opportunities to achieve highly individualized learning (Spady, 2000). The noteworthiness of the contradiction between "one size fits all" approach from Chinese teachers and the call on highly individualized learning in American education can easily result in the violation of the essence of education.

Most importantly, much writing has focused on the supposedly deficient aspects of Chinese education—rote memorization, large class size, teacher-centered methodology; however, descriptions of Chinese teachers' conceptions of how they conceive what they do are rather few and isolated (Packevicz, 2012). During the era of growing amount of American scholarship directed toward China and Chinese to the United States, the lack of sufficient information on a

deeper look on the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms is unacceptable.

### **Chapter Summary**

The reviewed literature offered a plethora of viewpoints and theories and provided a thorough examination of existent research on related topics of the current study—culture, intercultural understanding and competency, Chinese in America, China’s education and influencing educators.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions perspective surfaced in the process of examination of literature regarding to the essence of culture, followed by the notable national and cultural differences between the United States and China. The unawareness and insensitivity of other cultures can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people from different countries. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers of inter-culture to have an understanding of other cultures. Our cultural values and beliefs manifest themselves through our lifestyles. The importance of culture is the fact that our ways of thinking and living are closely associated. Because differences in cultures affects our perception, influence our behavior, and shape our personalities; it is an imperative to have a deep understanding of the culture we are living in.

Following Hofstede’s cross-cultural theory and how culture affects value and behavior in a society, the “culture shock” phenomenon emerged; thus, literature on cross-cultural living was presented. Chinese people’s struggles first surfaced while covering stories of new immigrants and those who supposedly enculturated into American society. A narrative of China’s education—past and present were described, and how those realities help to shape the teacher preparation programs and China-born Chinese teachers’ perceptions were explored. Finally, research on China-born Chinese teachers’ challenges in enculturation to the American society

especially the educational world were examined, opening the discussion on the research topic and providing hope in celebration of both cultures.

In summary, this chapter summarized and discussed the central themes that emerged from literature and echoed the first chapter in the discussion of similarities and differences in educational theories, teaching practices, learning styles, and educational policies in China and the United States. The current research sought to extract the essence of the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms as their voices had not been heard through prior research. The researcher not only heard about those Chinese teachers' stories, but also explored the potential for them to adjust professional behaviors to adapt to the United States' culture, allowing for more effective teaching in American classrooms. Employing the phenomenological approach opened the dialogue of international and mutual understanding between both worlds, allowing China-born Chinese teachers' voices to be heard in an honest, in-depth, and empathetic manner.

## Chapter III: Methodology

### Introduction

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the experiences of China-born Chinese language teachers in the United States by capturing their day-to-day living and interpreting the meaning of the essences that made up the experiences.

To understand the multiple-layered meanings of those teachers' experiences, the inconsequential details of those teachers' day-to-day teaching, living, and feeling needed to be captured. Therefore, the decision to employ a qualitative approach to facilitate the study seemed most appropriate. According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative research involved investigating the "qualities" of human experiences using philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The study investigated the lived experiences, which included the potential barriers China-born Chinese teachers faced in the United States as well as the contextual perspective to determine the effects context had on the teachers' experiences on feeling success in a host country. Thus, rather than conducting surveys that involved a large number of participants and hypothesizing that all teachers had certain common experiences, piloting a qualitative study propelled the researcher to notice the "particulars" of an experience, made it "visible and conspicuous" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138).

Van Manen (2016) contended that phenomenology gravitated to "meaning and reflectivity" (p. 16). Uncovering the world in which the China-born Chinese teachers taught and lived in the United States required a high volume of recording, interpretation, and extraction of meaning. Therefore, in seeking a suitable and explorative research design that could prevent or restrict the researcher's own biases, a qualitative phenomenological study was the optimal methodology to employ to "penetrate the final matrix of matter" (Van Manen, 2016, p.17).



Scholars recognized the influence philosophical worldview had on the practice of research (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004; Van Manen, 2016). One could identify the philosophical worldview and explain how the worldview shaped his or her approach to research (Creswell, 2013, pp.5-6). Guba (1990) defined the term *worldview* as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p.17). The worldview the researcher identified with in this study was social constructivism. Creswell (2013) explained that social constructivists developed subjective meanings of their experiences, and it led the researcher to explore the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. Thus, a social constructivism worldview was the most appropriate to the conduction of the research.

The phenomenological approach the researcher selected guided the entire research design in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon. To collect and analyze data, the researcher began with broad ideas and general assumptions about the essences of those teachers’ experiences, and then moved onto inquiring about their perceptions of teaching Chinese in the United States to understand and extract meanings of those lived experiences. Creswell (2013) explained that phenomenologists focused on “describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (p. 76). The current study interacted with both the advantages and barriers as phenomena experienced by the participants. The essence of the central phenomenon was generated then from the descriptions of the participants’ experiences.

Van Manen (2016) urged the researcher not to “fall in love with our own fabrications of observable reality”; instead, she needed to observe the realities with a complex view of bringing all the living of life to meaningful expression through “the imageries and languages of phenomenological writing, composing and expressing” (p. 18). In order to gain deep insights into

that phenomenon, detailed description, interpretation, reflection, and critical analysis were necessary in this study (Van Manen, 1990).

The ultimate goal of phenomenology was to return to the concrete and the original form of accounts, captured by the slogan “back to the things themselves!” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56). Therefore, to arrive at certainty, “anything outside immediate experience must be ignored,” and through this route, the external world was reduced to the contents of personal consciousness (Van Manen, 2016, p. 19). Realities were then treated as “pure phenomena” and the only absolute date from where to begin (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). The goal was to determine what the experience meant for each participant within his or her individual cultural background and context of teaching in America, and to gain in-depth knowledge about the experience from each participant.

In order to select purposeful and meaningful interview questions, Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory (1984) was chosen as a foundational knowledge base and a theoretical lens to guide the questioning. The reviewed literature demonstrated the underrepresentation of this group—China-born Chinese language teachers, which continued to be sizeable. With the constantly increasing interactions between China and the United States in various aspects and the growing number of China-born Chinese teachers coming to teach in the United States, the experience of cultural shock and cultural barriers were almost certain. By broadening the scope of inquiry using Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions, deeper understanding of each individual teacher’s experience was gained fruitfully, filled the gap in the study and compensated for their overlooked lives.

This chapter formulated the research design— a plan for conducting the research. The remainder of this chapter presented the methodological procedures and methods that were used

to conduct the study, and was divided into eight sections: Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, Research Design, Participants, Data Collection, Analysis of Emerging Themes, Ethical Considerations, and Limitations of the Study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Cameron, Schaffer and Hyeon-Ae (2001) remarked that the intention of a phenomenological study was to understand the phenomena “in their own terms”—to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself and allow the essence to emerge (p.96). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms by looking deeply into the impact of culture and context on those teachers’ experiences in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

Qualitative research questions needed to articulate what a researcher desired to know about the intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions (Agee, 2009). Creswell (2007) remarked that the ongoing process of questioning was an integral part of understanding the “unfolding lives and perspectives of others” in qualitative studies (p. 43).

During the course of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

1. How do China-born Chinese language teachers describe their classroom experience in the United States?
2. How do China-born Chinese teachers understand and make sense of their experiences in American classrooms?

### **Research Design**

A research design is a plan, which assists the researcher to know how to continue and guide the research direction (Hiteman, 2014). Van Manen (2016) contends that a

phenomenological research design should be inductive in nature, eliciting the feelings, emotions, and experiences of the participants of the study. The current study entailed investigating the lived human experiences to uncover true meanings and gain deep understandings of experiences from the viewpoints of the individual participants—China-born Chinese language teachers in the United States; therefore, phenomenology was the most suitable explorative research design for the research (Groenewald, 2004).

The phenomenon was investigated rather than conceptualized through the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers. For Giorgi (1999), the aim of phenomenological research was to “describe”—to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts. A researcher applying phenomenology should be concerned with the lived experiences of the people (Greene, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Robinson & Reed, 1998). Van den Berg (1961) strongly urged any researcher who conducted phenomenological study to “understand very well their task of sharing, by means of word and image, their insights with others” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 41).

The researcher embarked upon a study of phenomenon that was of interest due to the rapidly changing world and the need for effective China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. The research process started with using the theoretical framework as the backdrop of the investigation, allowing the investigation to unfold inductively versus deductively (Merriam, 2009). Then a reflection of the emerging, recurring themes was explored, which characterized the phenomenon using inductive reasoning. The phenomenon was described by detailed writing and rewriting, ensuring to retain the true meaning of the conversations and interviews of the participants. A strong orientation to the two central research questions were constantly reviewed to avoid drifting and indulging in ineffectual conceptions. The actions of member checking and

theming of experiences were performed to extract the essence of the phenomenon. Finally, the researcher continued to move back and forth to come to the entirety to draw conclusions. The researcher sought “truth” from the participants, aiming to return to the concrete “things themselves” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56).

In addition to Van Manen’s belief that essential activities were central to the methodical structure (1990), Groenewald (2004) emphasized the impact a researcher’s worldview had on research design; thus, the beginning of the research stated the researcher’s positionality.

Due to the nature of the study being phenomenological, the researcher used the method of “purposive sampling” to select the participants as a “representative sample” instead of applying the research findings to a general sphere of the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Once the participants were located, the ultimate goal of conducting interviews was to engage the interviewees in an intentional recollection of personal and professional experiences as China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. The researcher pondered upon the research questions to list items that could be potential biases that might intrude upon the research process. The researcher used words as channels to understand the phenomenon, maintaining a view of unbiasedness. The researcher kept in mind the importance of skillful and purposeful questioning throughout the entire research process. Within the duration of the interviews, the researcher was aware that uncertainty at times might occur, and as information emerging, she upheld an unbiased stance, displaying quiet and active listening. The researcher restated or paraphrased questions in a purposeful fashion according to the context and the direction each conversation was going when the participant needed more clarification. The advice from Bogdan and Biklen (2007) was be taken seriously—both structured and unstructured interview questions were created. During each interview, the researcher encouraged the participant to talk in the area of

study and interest, and left room for additional questions that allowed for deeper understanding of the participant's experience.

The researcher desired to gain access to the pre-reflective experiences as they occurred in the taken-for-granted spheres of the China-born Chinese teachers' everyday lives; therefore, the phenomenological method of *epoché* and reduction were used to get to the deep and meaningful structures of their experiences. According to Husserl, *epoché* means "abstention, to stay away, to suspend from one's belief" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 216). As challenging as it was for a novice researcher, *epoché* allowed her to set aside preconceived notions and freed her to be open to the China-born Chinese teachers' experiences as they occurred unforced. Another method, bracketing is similar to *epoché* but often used when the object that is done within the brackets "can be kept separate from the operations outside of it" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 215). Bracketing means parenthesizing— putting into brackets the various assumptions that might stand in the way from opening up access to the organic and living meaning of a phenomenon. The researcher inspected each of the categorized phenomenon thoughtfully, bracketing the items, and then allowed the feelings held in *epoché* to fuse with the observations as informative conclusions, and then un-bracketing (Hiteman, 2014). Lastly, reduction in phenomenology was not a technical procedure, rule, tactic, strategy, or a determinate set of steps that one should apply to the phenomenon that was being researched; rather, it was "an attentive turning to the world when in an open state of mind, effectuated by the *epoché*" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 218).

The methods of the *epoché* and the reduction were crucial ways to gain access to the meaning and meaningfulness of the central phenomenon. Van Manen (2016) explained that the phenomenological reduction was not a function of facts but rather of essences. Therefore, it was because the researcher held onto the openness—the *epoché*, the insight occurred naturally to the

researcher through remembrances that were held in things and sensory contacts with the participants, although those occurrences were not predicted nor under the researcher's control. The researcher held onto the attitude of the *epoché*-reduction and made contact with experiences as she learned from the participants, and placed herself in the open and the vulnerable, which was the fundamental meaning of the *epoché*.

The hope for the research was to reveal not only the features of teaching in the United States from China-born Chinese teachers' perspectives, but also the personhood of the teachers, especially the sentiments and emotions he or she felt while teaching in the United States. As the researcher constantly pondered upon *epoché*, it was apparent that the *setting aside of a certain set of beliefs* took intentional effort and was challenging at times. Therefore, the researcher displayed two crucial phenomenological practices: a) "doing phenomenology"—allowing the data to emerge and capturing rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings, and b) conducting in-depth phenomenological interviews (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 104).

Prior to the interviews, the researcher revisited the pre-suppositions in hopes of avoiding prejudging the participants' experiences, feelings and emotions. In addition, the interview questions were directed to the participants' experiences, feelings and beliefs about the theme in question. John Kabat-Zinn warned phenomenologists "inquiry didn't mean looking for answers" (cited by Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 39); therefore, the inquiry would be performed from the perspective of the researcher—*bracketing*. Bracketing in the current study asked the participants to "think and feel in the most direct ways" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96). The researcher focused on what went on within the being of the participants, and allowed them to describe their lived experiences in a language "as free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The term "inter-view" meant that both the researcher and

research participant were engaged in the dialogue; therefore, the researcher's ability to display skillful and purposeful questioning was extremely important.

All the interviews were conducted using the web conferencing tool Skype, on a one-on-one exchange, and occurred at two locations—the researcher at her home and the participant at his or her home or office. This strategy afforded the researcher the opportunity to observe the participants directly, during which, the researcher was able to observe the participant's facial expressions and body language. During each interview, the researcher recorded field notes—both descriptive notes as well as reflective notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Field notes were the written account of what “the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bodan & Biklen, 2007, pp.118-119). During the data collection process, one of the most effective avenues for qualitative researchers to guard against their own biases was to record detailed field notes that included reflections on their own subjectivity (Bodgan & Biklen, 2009). It was the researcher's field notes that recorded what the researcher heard, saw, experienced, and thought in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process. The researcher dated all the field notes for the purpose of correlating with data in later dates; furthermore, field notes were used as a data storage method because the human mind forgot quickly. The field notes were written as comprehensively as possible without judgmental evaluation (Groenewald, 2004). Additionally, a research journal was maintained throughout the process. This activity afforded the researcher the opportunity to have thoughtful reflections on one's own subjectivity, to take notes regarding the successes and challenges of each interview, and to determine what type of follow-up interactions may be necessary with the interviewees (Merriam, 2009).



Each of the China-born Chinese teachers was interviewed in a semi-structured fashion via video conferencing tools such as Skype. The interviews were one-on-one exchanges. After each interview, the researcher contacted each participant to check for accuracy regarding the data in order to provide validity (Creswell, 2009).

After collecting information from the rich descriptions of the interviews, the theme analysis process started. The analysis process for a phenomenological research did not mean “a loss of the whole phenomenon;” rather, it was a way of transforming the data through interpretation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 9).

A qualitative researcher’s goal is to better understand human behaviors and experiences, seeking to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are (Bogdan & Biklen, 2009). The researcher concentrated on the fullness of the experience and the personhood of the participants to extract the essence of the phenomenon. The original accounts of stories were acquired through descriptive data from interviews, allowing the viewing of the experiences and behaviors as interconnected relationship of the research subject and the participants. Although the phenomenological research design was a structured plan to guide the researcher to continue to varied phases of each process, the plan was flexible due to the distinct features of phenomenological study—the use of intuition and imagination (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Participants**

The researcher used purposive sampling in this phenomenological study to serve its purpose (Van Manen, 2016). The researcher selected participants for the current study based on her judgement and the purpose of the research, and they were selected because of their “verbal eloquence to describe a group or culture to which they belong” (Van Manen, 2016, p. 353). The

participants selected were those who had experiences relating to the phenomenon that was researched. The research involved rich and deep meaning within a specific subset of a population to examine lived experiences. Participants of this phenomenological study were China-born Chinese language teachers teaching in the United States.

The researcher made use of internet searches and telephonic inquiry to gain the contact information to the president of the largest Chinese teachers' network—Chinese Language Teachers' Association USA (CLTA), Dr. He. In the initial email to Dr. He, the researcher specifically asked for permission to use the member's list to seek potential participants. Three documents were also attached in the email—a. Letter of Participation (Appendix A), b. Informed Consent (Appendix B), and c. Interview Protocol (Appendix C). After receiving permission from Dr. He, the researcher wrote to potential participants seeking interest and consent. The three documents were attached in every email sent to the participants. The purpose for the attachments were not only to explain the study, but to ensure protection over the participants, especially making sure they understood the participation was completely voluntary and their identities and interview data were not to be revealed to anyone other than the researcher. Some follow-up emails were written when the participants needed further explanation or clarification to the research. A personal consent form was distributed, ensuring all potential participants had complete information of all aspects of the study, and that information was explained at the beginning of each interview (Holloway, 1997). Most potential participants that the researcher contacted became participants and signed the agreements, and those who did not were not pressured to participate in the study. All who ended up being participants were in complete agreement with its content before they signed.

Van Manen (2016) encouraged any phenomenological researcher to ask this important question prior to conducting interviews, “How many examples of concrete experiential descriptions would be appropriate for this study in order to explore the phenomenological meanings of this or that phenomenon?” (p. 353). The question did not only imply that the interviewees were the primary units of analysis, but also urged the researcher to ponder upon analysis on emerging themes. Unlike any other type of study, phenomenology aimed at what was singular, and a singular theme or notion that might only be seen once in experiential data (Van Manen, 2016). In order to trace additional participants, the researcher used snowballing as a method of expanding the number of participants by asking one participant to recommend others for interviewing. Because Boyd (2001) regarded two to ten participants as sufficient to reach saturation in a phenomenological study, the researcher selected a range of five to eight China-born Chinese teachers. The final six participants were purposefully selected by the researcher. The participants were from various regions of China, teaching at different states in the United States, possessing at least three years of teaching experience in both China and the United States at the time of the interviews. Two participants were males and four were females as there was a much larger number of female Chinese language teachers in the United States than males.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection procedure progressed through a series of steps to hold true to the phenomenological lived experience research methodology. The accounts of concrete and powerful lived experiences of the China-born Chinese teachers were the objects of the research. In a qualitative research, the term data referred to the rough materials researchers collected from the world they were studying, and data were the particulars that formed the basis of analysis

(Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). In the current study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the China-born Chinese teachers.

The researcher accomplished all interviews in a semi-structured fashion using an interview protocol (Appendix C). The interviews were one-on-one exchanges. The interview protocol was created prior to the interviews to allow for a pre-planned questioning format. The participants were provided with the interview questions in advance to allow preparation on the responses to the questions. The participants had the ability to view all questions, potentially shaping the responses in a very thoughtful fashion. The participants were asked the same set of questions to allow consistency, but the researcher also asked follow-up questions when appropriate. All the questions were open-ended questions, avoiding yes-or-no answers or restricted responses (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007).

In the phenomenological interview, the researcher was fully engaged in absorbing the information from the participant but also was careful to uphold a neutral stance. It was to the researcher's awareness that sometimes a participant might ask her to clarify a question. In the situation when a participant appeared to be confused or unsure, the researcher employed the strategy of practicing patience. In the situation when a participant did not fully understand the question or did not capture the meaning the researcher was attempting to convey, the question was re-stated to prompt the participant. Unprompted questions also evolved within the interview based on individual participant's responses (Van Manen, 1990). In some interviews, responses from the participants moved to more non-specific positions, and the researcher inserted questions to bring the dialogue back to the experiences. At the same time, the researcher was cautious not to disturb the flow of the descriptions.

During each interview, the researcher sat comfortably in her home office and the participant sat in his or hers. The interviews were audio-recorded and responses were transcribed later (Creswell, 2009). The objective of each interview was to collect specific, rich, and meaningful details about the China-born Chinese teachers' experiences; therefore, the researcher maintained a neutral stand and refrained from evaluative comments (Roulston, 2010).

The *epoché* was the critical phenomenological device that defeated bias that occurred from “unexamined assumptions, personal or systematic prejudices, closed-mindedness, and so on” (Van Manen, 2016, p. 354). In order to embark on the study while holding onto *epoché*, the researcher wrote a personal description of her own lived experiences of being a Chinese language teacher in the United States while reflecting on the political, economic, and social environment she was born then in China and her upbringing. Reflections of the personal descriptions of the lived experience was examined to orient the researcher to the phenomenon in hopes of holding true to *epoché*. The researcher did not allow the taken-for-granted everyday living experiences go unnoticed; instead, the researcher brought back the experiences into mindfulness while diminishing personal bias. The process of *epoché* prepared the researcher to continue to the interview process. The fundamental goal of the current study was to understand the lived experiences of the China-born Chinese teachers and keeping this objective at the center of the interview. The interview served as a means for exploring and gathering experiential and narrative material to develop rich and deep understanding. The researcher was there to listen, to learn, and to view the experiences from the perspectives of the participants (Bodan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009).

Since all the interviews were conducted using the web conferencing tool Skype and on a one-on-one exchange, the strategy afforded the researcher the opportunity to observe the

participants directly. During each interview, the researcher recorded field notes—both descriptive notes as well as reflective notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Field notes were the written account of what “the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp.118-119). The descriptive notes helped to paint vivid pictures of each school setting, the participants’ responses and actions. The reflective notes were written after each interview no later than the morning after, reflecting upon what was heard, seen, and experienced. Groenewald (2004) noted the importance for a researcher to maintain a balance between descriptive and reflective notes, such as “hunches, impressions, feelings, and so on” (pp. 13-14). The field notes complemented the interviews, which allowed the researcher to capture the lived experiences as whole (Creswell, 2009).

Field notes not only provided the researcher with the most original descriptions of experience accounts, but also served as a means to ensure trustworthiness in a phenomenological study. Groenewald (2004) warned that the researcher must, “to the greatest degree possible,” prevent the data from being prematurely categorized or “pushed” into the researcher’s unseen bias (p.16). Therefore, as a qualitative researcher, it was essential to establish credibility and trustworthiness. Providing details through field notes and conducting an appropriate research design provided the readers confidence that all aspects of the study made sense.

Member check was the other technique the researcher employed. The trustworthiness of the results was the bedrock of high quality qualitative research; therefore, the strategy of member check was used to validate the participants’ responses (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). The researcher contacted each participant, checking in with each of them regarding the initial analysis of the responses, and asking if the analysis was accurate. Fine-tuning occurred to

the analysis as expected to describe the experience more vividly, but none of the participants opted to alter the content of the transcriptions.

### **Analysis of Emerging Themes**

Vastly different from quantitative studies, the “data” in a human science research were human experiences. Therefore, phenomenology was less concerned with the “factual accuracy” than with the “plausibility of an account” (Van Manen, 2016, p. 314). In a phenomenological study, analysis did not mean “a loss of the whole phenomenon”; rather, it was a way of transforming the data through interpretation and phenomenological writing—*theme analysis* (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 9). Theme analysis referred to “the process of recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text” (Van Manen, 2016, p. 319). Analyzing the thematic meaning of a lived experience was a complex process, and it required creative and insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure. Therefore, the researcher must be cautious and thorough to grasp and formulate a thematic understanding of the phenomenon as a whole by practicing the act of “seeing” guided by *the epoché* and *the reduction* (Van Manen, 2016, p. 320).

In the current phenomenological research, the researcher applied a version of Hycner’s five-step method (1999). The five steps were:

- 1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction;

It was important to highlight that field notes were already “a step toward data analysis” (Morgan, 1997, p. 57); therefore, the first and foremost stage prior to Hycner’s method (1999) was the writing of field notes. The field notes compelled the researcher to further clarify each interview setting (Caelli, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

After the researcher collected all the data and compared it to the research purpose and questions, the researcher engaged in *epoché*—a process which provided permission to the researcher to bring to the forefront the feelings and essence of the research topic. Each of the interviews were audio recorded, which allowed the researcher to reflect and bracket the thoughts and experiences during and after the interviews. The researcher recorded both descriptive and reflective field notes, and was careful to notice emerging themes while holding true to *epoché*. Groenewald (2004) warned against over-analysis as over-analysis often meant removal from the lived contexts of the phenomena and possibly reducing phenomena to cause and effect. Therefore, the researcher transcribed key words, phrases and statements in order to allow the voices of the research participants to speak. It further pointed to Hycner’s caution to phenomenological researchers (1999) — to make a deliberate and purposeful effort to “see” the lived experience “in its own right with its own meaning” (p. 280). Because the researcher practiced the *epoché*, her own presuppositions and meanings and interpretations or theoretical concepts did not contaminate the unique world of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the researcher listened repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview to become familiar with the words of the participants to develop a holistic sense.

2) Delineating units of meaning;

The researcher recognized that during this critical stage of analysis, much conscious and continuous effort had to be taken to bracket her own presuppositions in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgements. Although it required the researcher’s substantial amount of judgement calls, the *epoché* was a critical device that the researcher consistently used to defeat bias (Van Manen, 2016). All of the original data were compiled to be organized and prepared, leading to an overall sense of the data. Then the researcher read through the entirety of



descriptions to gain a sense of the whole picture. After that, the researcher moved through the interview data of each participant carefully, especially examined the interview questions and responses. Since the interview questions were divided into three categories—*influence, teaching, and culture*; the researcher was able to flag data that reflected each category during this process.

By rigorously examining the list of units of meaning, the researcher aimed to “*elicit the essence of meaning of units within the holistic context*” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 19). During this stage, Hycner (1999) remarked that this called for even more judgement and skill on the researcher because the researcher needed to be engaged in something which could not be precisely delineated, for she was involved in that ineffable thing known as “*creative insight*” (p. 150). The researcher first examined a group of pre-determined codes by considering past literature while keeping in mind the emergence of codes (Creswell, 2009). Then the researcher analyzed each interview for the events that happened to each participant during the experience. Additionally, the researcher examined influencing factors that affected the experience.

### 3) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes;

Creswell (1998) contended that a phenomenological researcher needed to consider whether the emerging themes were “*extracted or isolated.*” The researcher was careful to look for the first clues of emerging themes and clusters. The identification of themes evolved as the data were explored. The theme was the tool to be used to get to the notion, providing an outline for the ill-defined notion (Van Manen, 1990). As the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers were analyzed, the researcher considered how the theme related to the notion of a particular lived experience. Therefore, a list of significant lived experiences were recorded to cluster the meanings into themes. Finally, the themes were determined and returned to the responses from the interview questions along with the research purpose and questions.

4) Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it;

The researcher incorporated all the themes elicited from the collected data and wrote a summary for each interview in order to give the phenomenon a holistic sense. Additionally, the researcher practiced member check—the researcher contacted each participant with that summary for the participant to review, and the participant provided feedback to determine if the essence of the interview had been correctly captured or if any modification was necessary.

5) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary (Groenewald, 2004).

A composite description of the phenomenon and a compilation of all of the lived experiences of each of the participants were generated. At this stage of the analysis, the researcher transformed each participant's living experience into expressions appropriate to the scientific discourse supporting the research. A draft of how the research interpreted the participants' accounts of their lived experiences was then formulated.

### **Limitations**

Researcher bias was difficult to determine or detect. This statement did not only apply to phenomenology but to all research studies. A phenomenological study was to induce information and to elicit experiences (Creswell, 2004). Therefore, presumptions must be considered.

Phenomenology required the researcher to interpret and make phenomenological reduction a crucial stage to reduce biases, assumptions, and pre-conceived ideas about an experience or phenomenon. Although the researcher upheld an open mind during the entire process of the study, it must be recognized the researcher's prior experiences had the potential to hinder her from truly understanding the lived experiences of the participants. Although the researcher engaged in the *epoché*, it was challenging at times to absolutely bracket from the researcher's

presumptions. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) contended that it was quite common to interpret the same situation in two vastly different ways; therefore, the researcher interpreted the experience through the individual lenses of each participant.

The researcher also recognized that not all participants were able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about the experience accurately or vividly as barriers existed. However, the goal of a phenomenological study was to “see” the experience from the participant’s perspective; therefore, in whichever fashion a participant described his or her experience, it was unique to the individual.

Another concern for phenomenological study was in the scope of generalization. Unlike empirical or quantitative studies, a phenomenological study didn’t draw conclusions of validity of observation from a sample of a population to the general population (Van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology was a form of inquiry that did not yield generalizations in the usual sense; instead, its beauty lay within the uniqueness of the participants’ individual experiences. However, the interpretation of a phenomenological study provided insight from described experiences and therefore making it possible to recognize recurring aspects of the meaning of a certain phenomenon.

In the phenomenological study, the researcher’s role was constantly re-positioned in the eyes of the participants. The researcher is a China-born Chinese teacher teaching and living in the United States, therefore, she is “one of them.” The researcher reminded the participants that her role during the interview should be viewed as “the researcher,” instead of one of the participants’ fellow colleagues. Keeping this notion in mind, it was crucial for the researcher to ensure her role did not affect the flow or the conversation of the interviews. Once more, the researcher’s loyalty to the *epoché* had proven to be extremely important.

Being a novice researcher, the researcher sought constant feedback from dissertation advisor to ensure the interviews generated concrete data. Furthermore, data analysis was not the researcher's strength; therefore, member checking was crucial for this phenomenological study. With the field notes documenting the research process, the researcher also took notice of other context-sensitive data such as casual conversations. All those tools provided the researcher with authenticity with the data.

Phenomenological research did not prove a relationship or reality, but opened the door for "deeper understanding of the world we live in" (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Although the participants' responses were ambiguous or variable at times, the researcher's sincere desire to provide a voice and compassion was reciprocal and mutually transformative.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Nothing is more indicting to a professional than to be charged with unethical practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) further suggest researchers to abide by two principles when involving human subjects—follow through with informed consent and protect informants from harm.

In order to inform participants with the complete responsibilities and potential harm of the research, the researcher made sure that participants entered the research voluntarily by distributing the informed consent forms to all participants and stakeholders prior to the interviews. The researcher asked each participant if there was any area that needed clarification, and the interview did not occur until the researcher explained the content and possible dangers of the study and understood by the participant, including the dangers and obligations that were involved. For a qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and the participant

was ongoing and evolved over time; therefore, the understanding of the informed consent form was the starting point for the researcher relating to the participant.

The researcher had the ultimate duty to exhibit sensitivity to both the procedural aspects of the study as well as the ethical issues integral in research with human beings (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The researcher made sure that ethical practice was recurrent throughout the entire study. Additionally, the researcher was sensitive to the cultural differences that arose as she interacted with the China-born Chinese teachers. Although the researcher is from the same cultural group as the participants, some participants might feel coerced to participate in the research because in a collectivistic view—one does not consider the freedom of an individual but instead the collective good for the group. Therefore, the researcher deliberately avoided selecting participants who had had working relationships with her, and made sure each participant's voluntariness was true to heart. The researcher recognized that although the researcher ensured the authenticity of the willingness from each participant for informed consent, it was best to avoid the appearance of coercion.

In order to protect the participants from potential harm, simply telling the participants “explicitly the content and possible dangers” of the study was only a condition to ensure ethical practices (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 49). One of the major considerations in order to stay true to the ethics of the research was to avoid mistreatment and abuse of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Prior to the research, the researcher participated in Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative modules (CITI) and received certification of successful completion of the coursework. The researcher then sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Bethel University using Appendix B — Informed Consent as evidence for protection over participants.

The researcher honored and will continue to honor the participants' privacy by protecting their identities; therefore, the use of aliases for the participants was put into place. Each participant was given a "nickname" to avoid identifying information that might have linked to the participant. The researcher ensured that anonymity was kept at all times. The researcher did not and will not relate specific information about individuals to others. Any information that was obtained in connection with this study and that could be identified with the participants would remain confidential. Additionally, participants had the right and will continue to have the right to review or edit interview audios and transcripts. Audio recordings were downloaded and were limited solely to the researcher to access. They are stored on a password protected removable media, and the transcripts and any other written communication were archived on non-networked, off-site removable media. The researcher submitted an information sheet approved by Bethel University's IRB detailing procedures designed to maintain confidentiality, restrict access to and protect data, and manage the future use of research and findings. Seven years after the occurrences of the interviews, all information related to the research data including audio recordings, transcripts, and other will be completely corrupted and destroyed.

Ethics extend beyond the past perspective pertaining to qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The researcher treated participants with respect and profound ethical and cultural considerations. Additionally, during any point of the study, the participants could withdraw their participation. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) warned that in negotiating permission to do a study, the researcher should make it clear to those with whom she negotiated what the terms of the agreement were, and the researcher abided by that contract and followed through with it.

Maintaining true and loyal to the authenticity of the data is another important consideration to ensure ethics in a research. The researcher reported the truth when she

composed the findings. The most important trademark of a researcher should be his or her devotion to report what the data reveals (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Fabricating data or distorting data was the “ultimate sin of a scientist” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 50). The researcher implemented great care to represent the China-born Chinese teachers’ feelings and emotions of the lived experiences, ensuring not to fabricate or alter the essence or the meanings of the data. The process of member checking was put to place for participants to clarify and verify data in order to assist the researcher to stay true to the participants’ lived experiences.

For researchers, ethical considerations did not reside narrowly in the realm of how to behave in the field; rather, ethics were understood in terms of their lifelong obligations to the people who had touched their lives during the course of their research (Curry & Davis, 1995; Duneier, 1999). Therefore, ethical decisions ultimately resided with the researcher, “with your (the researcher’s) values, and with your (the researcher’s) judgements of right and wrong” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 52). As a researcher, one had to know oneself, one’s values and beliefs, and be familiar with the principles other researchers had used in making such decisions (Punch, 1994).

Being an ethical and responsible researcher was more difficult than it appeared. The researcher abided by the consent contract and followed through all the guidelines and promises. The researcher also evaluated and was in touch with her own values and continuously taking the participants’ welfares and interests to heart and incorporated them into the researcher’s daily practice.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the methodology of this phenomenological study. It started with the background and introduction of the current study, explaining the rationale on the researcher

to employ phenomenology to study the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of China-born Chinese language teachers in American classrooms; therefore, the researcher used two overarching research questions to guide her research, and developed semi-structured interview questions that helped to support the research purpose. The research design was the major framework of the chapter, detailing the plan on how to proceed with the study, assisting the researcher to know how to continue and guide the research direction. Van Manen (2016) contends that a phenomenological research design should be inductive in nature, eliciting the feelings, emotions, and experiences of the participants of the study. The current study entailed investigating the lived human experience to uncover true meanings and gain deep understandings of experiences from the viewpoints of the individual participants—China-born Chinese teachers in the United States; therefore, phenomenology was the most suitable explorative research design for the current research (Groenewald, 2004). The participants of the study, data collection procedure, analysis of emerging themes were also explained in detail to help the dissertation committee view the study clearly. Additionally, ethical considerations and limitations of the study were communicated in a thoughtful fashion to demonstrate the profound care the researcher had put in place to proceed with a phenomenological study that aligned with the best practices in educational research.



## Chapter IV: Results

### Introduction

This phenomenological study aimed to understand the experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States by capturing their day-to-day living and interpreting the meaning of the essences that make up the experiences.

Uncovering the world in which the China-born Chinese teachers teach and live in the United States required a high volume of recording, interpretation, reflection, and extraction of meanings. Therefore, in seeking a suitable and explorative research design that could prevent or restrict the researcher's own biases, a qualitative phenomenological study was the optimal methodology to employ to "penetrate the final matrix of matter" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 17).

The researcher used this design to investigate the lived experiences in order to understand the multiple-layered meanings of those teachers' experiences. Those experiences captured the inconsequential details of the teachers' day-to-day teaching, living, feeling, and decision-making. Additionally, the experiences included the potential barriers China-born Chinese teachers faced in the United States as well as the contextual perspective to determine the effects context had on the teachers' reflections of their experiences. Using Hycner's five-step analysis method propelled the researcher to notice the "particulars" of an experience, making it "visible and conspicuous" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138).

The study was performed by conducting online video conferences using preplanned and semi-structured questions with China-born Chinese teachers who currently teach or recently taught in the United States. The video conferencing tool the researcher used was Skype, which afforded the researcher the opportunity to observe the participant's facial expressions and body languages directly. "Recently taught" in the current research referred to the timeframe of one

school year from the teacher's last day of teaching to the time of interview. During several of the interviews, the researcher asked the participants to explain their responses in detail or provide an example to their statement. By doing so, the researcher was able to gain insight and clarity to the participants' essential experiences. After bracketing expressions and phrases related to the teachers' experiences, the researcher used phenomenological reduction to establish the specific language and terms of writing to support understanding of those experiences. All of the original data were compiled, organized, and prepared, leading to an overall sense of the data. Meanings of those experiences were delineated. The researcher read through the entirety of descriptions to gain a sense of the whole picture. Since the interview questions were divided into three categories—*influence, teaching, and culture*; the researcher was able to flag data that reflect each category during this process. The essential experiences were clustered, followed by a final verification to corroborate the themes against the transcription of each participant. The researcher summarized each interview and practiced member check by going back to each participant for verification. The participants confirmed that none of the summaries needed modification. The researcher was then able to extract both general and unique themes from the interviews and made a composite summary reflecting both the context and “horizon” from which the themes emerged (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher was able to allow the participants' stories to unfold vividly in front of the eyes of the readers, connecting the minds of the readers to the participants' world, gravitating to meaning and reflectivity, achieving the goal of beautiful phenomenological writing. The data collected from the interviews all aimed to address the two overarching research questions in the study:

1. How do China-born Chinese language teachers describe their classroom experiences in the United States?

2. How do China-born Chinese teachers understand and make sense of their experiences in American classrooms?

### **The Researcher's Positionality**

Scholars recognized the influence philosophical worldview had on the practice of research (Creswell, 2013; Groenewald, 2004; Van Manen, 2016). One could identify the philosophical worldview and explain how the worldview shaped his or her approach to research (Creswell, 2013, pp. 5-6). Guba (1990) defined the term worldview as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 17). The worldview the researcher identified with in this study was social constructivism. Creswell (2013) explained that social constructivists developed subjective meanings of their experiences, and it led the researcher to explore the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. Thus, a social constructivism worldview was the most appropriate to the conduction of the research.

In addition to the effects philosophical worldview has on one's research approach, the researcher believes it is crucial to state her positionality to bracket from her own propositions due to her similar contextual perspective as the participants—the researcher is a China-born Chinese teacher. Therefore, in order to ensure the validity of the research, eliminating prior presumptions before conducting interviews is a critical stage of the research.

The researcher is a Chinese American who was born and raised in China and moved to the United States to attend graduate school in 2005. After graduation, she was awarded a position to teach Chinese at a high school in Connecticut. She has been teaching Chinese to American students since 2007. The researcher has travelled extensively within China and the United States, and has attended many world language teachers' conferences in the United States. Most of them are sponsored and hosted by Confucius Institutes located at various American universities. In

addition, the conference themes and topics are specifically designed for attendees who were born in China and later moved to the United States to teach Chinese. Most of the topics centered around teaching Chinese using various effective strategies, but few, if any, focused on the area of the meaning and understanding of “teaching in America,” which indicates the topic of the current research is an under-studied area.

The researcher experienced the diversity of the world and recognized that culture and early influences had the potential to display profound impact on one’s lived experience. The researcher, a China-born Chinese teacher in the United States, questioned deeply the emergence of teachers like her, in teaching and learning, living and feeling, barriers and influences, and culture turning to the nature of the essence of the experiences. A desire to examine the organic experiences of China-born Chinese teacher to understand their lives in the midst of teaching in the United States and how this deeper understanding could guide those teachers to make sense of their experiences brought fruition to the current research. The researcher’s position regarding the study was formulated as follows: a) data were contained within the perspectives of only China-born Chinese teachers in the United States; and b) because of this, the researcher was fully engaged with the participants in collecting the data. The phenomenological approach the researcher selected guided the entire research in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

### **The Participants**

The participants of the study were six China-born Chinese teachers teaching in the United States. All six individuals were given code names to maintain the confidentiality of their identity. All participants have been teaching in China and/or in the United States for at least three years, were born and raised in different regions of China, and are currently teaching or recently taught in various regions of the United States at the time of the interview. In this study, the term

“recently taught” referred to the timeframe of less than a year from the day the participant last taught to the day of the interview. There were two male participants—Jerry and Ron, and four female participants—Winnie, Lynn, Rebecca, and Nancy.

The following table provided general descriptions of demographic information of each participant:

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Name Code	Years of Teaching in the US	Region of Hometown in China	Location of Teaching in the US
Jerry	11	Northeast	Michigan
Ron	4	Southeast	Georgia
Winnie	3	Southwest	Connecticut
Lynn	6	Central	California
Rebecca	3	Northeast	Connecticut
Nancy	6	Northwest	Massachusetts

**Overview of Data Analysis**

In the current phenomenological research, the researcher applied a version of Hycner’s five-step method to analyze data (1999). The steps were:

- 1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction;
- 2) Delineating units of meaning;

- 3) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes;
- 4) Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it;
- 5) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary (Hycner, 1999).

Each step under the Hycner method was a phase that contributed to the completion of the composite summary of the findings. The researcher followed Hycner's advice not to "break (the whole phenomenon) into parts" (1999, p. 161); instead, the researcher investigated the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context as the whole. The entire data analysis process was an avenue to transform collected data through interpretation in order to provide the readers a holistic view on the lived experiences while holding true to the particulars of individual experiences. In the following sections of the dissertation, the researcher provided the readers an overview of the first two phases, detailed description of phase three—Presentation of Findings, phase four—An In-depth Look into Each Participant's Lived Experience, and phase five—The Composite Summary.

**Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.** The suspension of one's position or bias—the *epoché* was crucial in this research, as it hindered the researcher's own presuppositions or meanings and interpretations of theoretical concepts to enter the unique world of the participant (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, the word "bracket" in a phenomenological study specifically referred to the bracketing of the researcher's personal views or preconceptions (Miller & Crabtree, 1992). In the current study, the researcher listened repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview and became familiar with the words of the participant to develop a holistic sense. The audio-recorded interviews allowed the researcher to reflect and bracket the thoughts and experiences both during and after the interviews. The process allowed the

researcher to emphasize the uniqueness of one's own experience of each research participant. The researcher transcribed the interviews and accentuated key words, phrases and statements in order to allow the voices of the research participants to speak. It further pointed to Hycner's caution to phenomenological researchers (1999) — to make a deliberate and purposeful effort to “see” the lived experience “in its own right with its own meaning” (p. 280). The researcher's engagement with *epoché* supported to suppress her own presuppositions; therefore, the meanings and interpretations of theoretical concepts did not contaminate the unique world of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

**Delineating units of meaning.** After all of the original data were compiled and organized, the researcher prepared the data to be analyzed. The researcher moved through the interview data of each participant carefully, examining the interview questions and responses. Since the interview questions were divided into three categories—*influence*, *teaching*, and *culture*, the researcher was able to flag data that reflected each category during this process. This was the stage that the researcher took much conscious and continuous effort to bracket her own presuppositions in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgements. The researcher avoided eliminating experiences that might be seemingly unrelated to the themes initially but contributed to seeing the essential experience as a whole. For example, obtaining a long-term work visa in the United States presents a heavy burden to one of the participants. Although it does not directly reflect the participant's classroom experience, it implies the burden can influence the overall emotional and living experience of the participant in the United States.

Keeping in mind the emergence of codes, the researcher analyzed each interview for the events that occurred for each participant pertaining to the experience. Additionally, the researcher examined influencing factors that affected the experience. At this stage, a list of

relevant meaning extracted from each interview was carefully examined, and redundant units were eliminated. Hyncer (1990) advised the researcher to consider the literal content of the interview, the number of times a meaning was mentioned, and how it was stated. The researcher considered each question as a potential unit of analysis and went through the interview transcripts a few times. The analyzed units were both direct, in which the participant explicitly stated the meaning, and implied, in which the researcher extracted the meaning from the participant's statements based on how it was stated. The researcher scrutinized all collections of the participants' words or statements and determined if all were related to the same central meaning; if any was not, it was therefore eliminated. Fifteen units of meanings were developed, examined and determined through this process.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The third stage under Hyncer's method allowed the researcher to cluster units of meaning and formed themes. Hyncer (1999) referred the "clustering of units" process as the process to "elicit the essence of meaning of units within the holistic context" (p.150). This involved the researcher with "the ineffable"—the creative insight. The researcher was able to display her artistic judgement through thorough examination of the units and engaged in sophistication, and "art and whimsy" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 260). Creswell (1998) urged phenomenological researchers to determine whether the emerging themes were "extracted or isolated." Therefore, the researcher was careful to look for the first clues of emerging themes and clusters. The identification of themes evolved as the data was explored. Therefore, the researcher recorded a list of significant essential experiences, and clustered the meanings into themes. Finally, the themes were determined and returned to the responses from the interview questions along with the research purpose to answer the two overarching research questions.



The researcher developed three main themes and eight essential experiences that contributed to the overall emergence of the themes. The findings were particularly about the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. The researcher discovered that the China-born Chinese teachers (a) made decisions to teach in America based on their backgrounds and goals, and (b) gained joy and pride from their students’ responses to the Chinese language and culture. Concurrently, (c) they had to face and become familiar with a profound amount of impediment, to which they then had to adjust. The following table demonstrated the themes and essential experiences that made up those themes.

Table 2  
Emerging Themes and Essential Experiences

Theme	Essential Experiences
<p><b>Theme 1.</b> The China-born Chinese teachers made decision to teach in America based on their backgrounds and goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family background contributed to decision making.</li> <li>• Educational background contributed to decision making.</li> <li>• Achieving one’s dream and professional goal contributed to decision making.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 2.</b> The China-born Chinese teachers gained joy and pride deriving from students’ responses to the Chinese language and culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student achievement and progress provides joy and pride.</li> <li>• Student interest in the language and culture provided joy and pride.</li> <li>• Positive student-teacher relationship</li> </ul>

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provided joy and pride.

**Theme 3.** The China-born Chinese teachers had to face and become familiar with a profound amount of impediment, to which they then had to adjust.

- Pedagogical differences such as teaching approach and student behavior presented impediment.
  - Cultural differences such as parent expectations and burden to live abroad presented impediment.
- 

**Theme 1. The China-born Chinese teachers made decisions to teach in America based on their backgrounds and goals.** The first theme that emerged from analyzed data responded to the first category of interview questions, which discovered the influences that China-born Chinese teachers were under in order to make their decision to live and teach in the United States. The theme that surfaced was that the teachers made their decision to teach in America based on their background and goals.

The identification of the theme first evolved as the data was explored, especially after the researcher delineated units of meanings. The researcher had not expected the emergence of this prevalent theme. Because the researcher recorded a list of significant lived experiences, the theme was allowed to emerge. Then the theme was determined and validated after the researcher's member checking with each participant.

The first main theme of the participants' lived experience concerned their individual context and its influence on decision-making—they based their decision to teach in America on their familial or educational backgrounds, and professional goals. The participants shared numerous accounts of essential experiences that emerged from the main theme.

An essential experience that was mostly dominate was that of having a strong familial influence or authoritative figure such as a mentor affected their decision-making and classroom experience. Feeling of confidence, and formation of one's identity and strong support transpired when early influence set a solid foundation to classroom practice. The participants shared they were inspired by their familial beliefs in education, mentor's modeling to best practice, and how these people connected with them on a personal level. One participant explained,

The earlier influence on me is my family where my father and grandfather were teachers. They like teaching, so from a very young age, I and my brothers would play games pretending we were teachers. And we would tell each other what to do because our father and grandfather both did that.

Another participant mentioned that not only her family but also mentor were active participants in her decision-making.

My father and my mentor influenced me. My father was a principal at a local high school in Tianjin where I was growing up. He told me that education is the future of a nation. My mentor, Liz, is a great Chinese teacher. She gave me many suggestions about teaching Chinese to American children.

One participant stressed the importance of having had a great teacher as a mentor in her adolescent years was foundational and inspirational to her becoming a teacher and making best decisions as a teacher. She stated,

I had a lot of great teachers in my life especially my language teachers in middle school and high school. I also observed and was influenced by many great teachers here in the states when I went to a conference or went into a classroom. I am a fast learner, therefore

it is not hard for me picking up good teaching quality and habits from someone else and characterize them with my own style.

The essential experience of obtaining education that was specifically related to teaching Chinese to non-native speakers was another contributing factor to the teachers' decision making. The lived experiences indicate when participants' educational background were related to teaching, especially teaching Chinese as a second language, participants' decisions to teach in America were obvious, natural, and logical for them. Participants shared their education and prior training increased their teaching practice, which allowed them to flourish in the classroom. One participant shared,

I majored in Bilingual Broadcasting and Hosting as my undergraduate degree and Teaching Chinese as a Second Language as my graduate degree. Therefore, all my education also prepares me to be a Chinese teacher. My main focus was to learn how to teach Chinese. Therefore, it's a no-brainer that I became a Chinese teacher.

Another participant also described her educational background, which set the foundation to her career choice. She mentioned,

My background set the foundation for me being a Chinese language teacher. I majored Teaching Chinese as A Foreign Language at Shandong Normal University, and then continued to study the same profession at Minzu University of China as a graduate student.

One of the most important essential experiences that contributed to the participants' decision making was their dream and goal, which accentuated the main theme of context. The lived experiences indicated that achieving one's professional goal or realizing one's childhood

dream was essential in the participants' decision of teaching in America. The participants recounted their thoughts when they were children. One participant said,

When I was a child, I felt I was an introvert. I didn't like to talk to anybody and was afraid to speak in public or in front of a lot of family members. So in order to conquer that weakness, I tried to find opportunities to interact with other people. So all the professions I chose when I grew up all has to do with talking to others. I believe becoming a teacher can change some of the imperfections in my personality, especially the part that doesn't bring everybody sunshine. I also want to tell my students about my own shortcomings and weaknesses, and hopefully my story will influence and impact them in a positive way. With the younger kids, especially, they really want to copy their teachers. So I want to use myself to impact their lives.

Another participant shared how coming to America teach made his dream become true. He said,

So in my mind, it was like a dream come true when I got the call from Hanban to send me over here. I always love reading, so I read a lot of stories and newspapers such as China Daily, and internet articles about the US, so I really wanted to come here. But for my background, the only possible way for me to do that is through becoming a teacher of Chinese here. So I did.

One of the participants shared her determination to teach Chinese in the United States due to her personal drive. She mentioned,

I worked for Bank of America Hong Kong branch, so I worked with a lot of Americans. Very few of them spoke Chinese, but they told me many things about America, they were

not eager or not even interested in learning my language and culture, so I was determined to teach them.

Both contextual and psychological factors influence our ability to make decisions and our choices (Buchanan & O'Connell, 2006). Context provided the background against which people made career choices, and perspective in the process of their decision-making (Novicevic, Clayton & Williams, 2011). The participants had steadily been coming to terms with how their earlier influences contributed to their decision of coming to America to teach. They also recognized their educational background made their decision seemed logical. Although the China-born Chinese teachers did not state their educational background as being the sole factor to career choice, the researcher recognized their background presented some constraints against career change. The participants spoke of essential experiences that displayed the importance of achieving one's dream and goal had on their mental and psychological state. Achieving one's dream required proper and calculative planning. The participants' lived experiences of how they achieved their dream step-by-step are great examples of such statement.

**Theme 2. The China-born Chinese teachers gained joy and pride deriving from students' responses to the Chinese language and culture.** The second theme that emerged from analyzed data responded to the first research question, which captured the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. The theme surfaced was that the teachers gained joy and pride deriving from students' responses to the Chinese language and culture.

Much literature emphasized the impact of teacher attitude on student learning and achievement, but few studied the positive influence student achievement can contribute to teachers' "zest" (Stauble, 2010). China-born Chinese teachers, most being very patriotic, experience much pride in teaching the Chinese language and culture. Additionally, they have

adjusted their teaching approaches according to student aptitudes and characteristics to maximize student learning (Tong, 2017). Therefore, the second main theme of the participants' lived experience concerning their teaching was the most resounding but not surprising. The participants were able to develop a sense of pride and joy with the progress and achievement that their students demonstrated due to their teaching. Joy and pride were also generated from students' interest in the language and culture; additionally, owning a positive student-teacher relationship provided them such joy and pride. This theme is prevalent and expected, and included extremely positive feelings towards student achievement and students' expression of desiring to continue their Chinese study far past their school years.

An essential experience that emerged from the main theme of joy and pride was that of having developed a sense of accomplishment because of students' progress and achievements.

One participant said,

When I saw my students' language skills blossomed right in front of my eyes, I was so happy. As a teacher, you don't want much more than that. I remember from the very beginning lesson when I taught them how to pronounce the initials and finals until now when they can have a basic conversation with one another in the native language of Chinese, oh my, my heart sings! (GIGGLES) I am so proud of myself and my students! I think it's really both of us, me working hard as a teacher, and them learning hard as students. They feel proud of themselves too, which I believe is a biggest incentive in learning Chinese besides the grades (LAUGHS). Those moments can happen every day if you are lucky, and sometimes you might have to wait for a while to see their progress into fruition. I think you just need to open your eyes to seek, then you will see. Joy is a choice in the classroom, just like a choice every day.

It was evident the participant enjoyed those moments of joy and felt a great sense of pride because her students' continuous progress in Chinese language learning, and she was delighted talking about those moments. She talked with her hands flying in the air and clapped when she reflected on those proud moments as if she was re-living them. Her voice was exuberant and high when she discussed those moments in details, but returned to a calmer tone when her mind seemed to be in a reflective mode. The participant conveyed that those moments were the highlights of her teaching career and provided purpose for her continued practice to be a teacher.

Another participant added that those joyful and proud moments were witnessed by others and were often pushed to the extreme high when students earned awards that were recognized by the public. She said,

Last May, I sent three of my students to a Chinese speaking competition. The competition was hard, and the judges asked a lot of hard questions. Those questions not only require the competitors to understand them in Chinese, but to answer them in a culturally appropriate and sophisticated way using their critical thinking skills. I was so nervous. (CRINGES) But they did well! All three of them brought awards home! Of course, they made me look good too. But most of all, I felt good. I felt they deserved the awards because they worked hard and their hard work was recognized.

The essential experience of witnessing students' continued interest in the Chinese language and culture brought the teachers most joy. One participant added that the desire to be a life-long learner of the Chinese language and culture brought him to tears. He started his story calmly,

This doesn't come often. But once in a while, you will meet a student who is really "obsessed" with the Chinese language and culture. He or she will go on and tell you that



he or she is doing extracurricular work in the target language, for example, he watches Chinese soaps at home, or she joined a traditional Chinese dance group that mostly consisted of native Chinese people. I had quite a few students who used the Chinese App called “WeChat,” oh they love it! (RAISED HIS VOICE SIGNIFICANTLY) I mean they loved it! One student even has a long distance girlfriend from China that he is communicating with, exclusively in Chinese!!! Can you believe it?! Those kids are wonderful, they will go on to learn so much more. They are smart kids too, they know China is growing and they know learning Chinese is essential. They want to have a head start. I wouldn’t be surprised at all if they work for the American embassy in Beijing! I am so proud of them!

The blurry fine line between cultures, especially between cultures that resembled similarities on various dimensions created confusion to people of other cultures. One participant expressed his frustration. He said,

Although many American students are interested in Chinese language and culture, they don’t know where they can reach the REAL Chinese culture. Some students even misunderstood the Chinese culture. Some of them think China is still really poor, which makes me sad. Another example is that most Americans think Chinese greet each other by bowing down, but that’s Japanese. Not all Asian cultures are the same.

The essential experience of having a positive student-teacher relationship provided the teachers enormous amount of joy. This essential experience was mentioned among all participants. One participant said,

Many children will come to my classroom at the end of school to give me a big hug and say goodbye, they came specifically for that purpose—to say goodbye to me. Having

won their love is my proudest moment, and also makes me feel that I've accomplished great things.

The participant conveyed enjoying moments like that, not only with words, but also with a smile on her face and exuberant tone in her voice as she described those prideful moments. Another participant shared how important it is for her to have a positive student-teacher relationship, which made her job more enjoyable. She said,

If they like you, they trust you more and they ask you questions, which propels them to learn more and more. On a more personal level, good relationship makes your job more enjoyable. You are spending time with people you like who happen to like you, it's very relaxing.

A participant described her relationship with students as being "equal," and that equal relationship brought both joy to her and to her students. She said,

I learned to interact with the children, and get along with them equally. I can be their friend, you know. It is especially important when they are young, they need to trust you, then they will learn more.

The participants shared that they had continually considered the moments of joy and pride as the highlights of their teaching experiences. They shared how those moments made their job more enjoyable and added "sunshine" to their sometimes-gloomy days. The participants' passion towards the teaching profession, specifically teaching the Chinese language and culture was evident in all the moments they described their joy and pride. The moments could be small, but made differences in their lived experiences, and sometimes transformed their experiences to the better.

**Theme 3. The China-born Chinese teachers had to face and become familiar with a profound amount of impediment, to which they then had to adjust.** The third theme that emerged from the second research question, which addressed how China-born Chinese teachers understood and made sense of their lived experiences—their reflections and challenges they faced. For China-born Chinese teachers, pedagogical differences in the classroom and cultural differences in the society were the main barriers they had to face and become familiar with, and then had to adjust to. This theme emerged naturally and was obvious from the accounts of rich and detailed descriptions of their lived experiences. The differences—pedagogically and culturally, presented a profound amounts of challenges to the participants. The adjustments and making sense brought a mixture of emotions—shock, surprise, disappointment, and sadness. The variations in teaching pedagogy and culture impeded the participants from truly enculturating into the American society and classroom. This theme was noteworthy in terms of the findings of the study, and did not emerge out of surprise for the researcher. It is profound because the vivid descriptions of the participants’ day-to-day living indicated the differences might have had a huge impact on their living and teaching, which challenged them in their reflections and making sense of the lived experiences.

The first essential experience the researcher noticed was that pedagogical differences such as teaching approach and student behavior presented much surprise and challenge to the participants. One participant shared her perspective while comparing her experiences of teaching in an American public school and a Chinese language school managed by Chinese in America. She mentioned,

I learned that I need to teach “American-style.” In China, most of the time students are just “receivers” in the classroom. They are not allowed to talk or question teachers. But in

an American class, they challenge you. But I now know that student participation is an important part of teaching. So I involved them in teaching. However, on weekend, (when I teach at the Chinese language school,) it's like teaching in China! It's managed by Chinese, people who are more important than you are all Chinese, they watch over you all the time. They critique your teaching according to the Chinese expectations. Whatever new tricks you learn to teach American kids, you have to give up. You don't want to lose your job at the language schools either. It's a conflict, you know.

Another participant described the challenges facing her in terms of pedagogical differences. She said,

My education prepared me well theoretically in teaching Chinese as a second language, and my personality and the good habit of working hard which can be considered as part of Chinese characteristics prepared me well mentally in teaching. However, I have to consciously disassociate myself from my China-trained Chinese teaching background, because those practices don't necessarily work in America. I am trying, it's a constant struggle. I am getting there, one day, I will be like an America-born Chinese teacher.

The participant recognized the influence of her Chinese culture had on her teaching approach, and mentioned specifically she was struggling to disassociate from what she learned in China. She mentioned,

I was told to establish authority in the classroom, which you should do any way, in American classroom too. But what that term means in China is completely different than here in the US. I meant not to smile, not to be close to students. It's the opposite of student-centered learning, it's the opposite of self-satisfaction of one's own learning. It's about pleasing the teacher, getting a good grade to make your family proud.

Another participant recognized that she experienced a smoother transition compared to most of her China-born colleagues due to her prior interactions with American. However, she experienced constant challenges with classroom management. She expressed,

I think the biggest challenge for me at the beginning is classroom management. In China student behavior usually is not the biggest concern in the classroom. You know, Chinese students are so well behaved. They listen to the teacher, they will do whatever you ask them to do. They don't challenge you. You don't even have to tell them to get off from their phones, they just know how to use phones in class—it's courtesy. Kids in the US don't take you seriously. Let's take a step back, even if I tell the Chinese kids to put their phones away, they will listen, you can be guaranteed that they will never take them out again in your class. If one in a million chance, the Chinese kid takes the phone out for the second time, you tell his or her parents or the principal, they will make sure the kid don't take his or her phone out the third time. So what I mean is, you don't even have to worry about classroom management in China. There is no such talk of management, they manage themselves, they know what to do. So you don't have to spend a ton of time to discipline them, you can just teach, do what you are paid to do.

The researcher noticed the participant demonstrated her frustration through her voice and tone, expressing her feeling of disbelief. The participant's perspective was that classroom management took much of her instructional time, and she shared how she was increasingly aware of her context and influence. The experience of classroom environment was a challenging one because she had no prior experience or training on classroom management, but she conveyed that although she did not initially like it, classroom management was the utmost important

element in promoting a positive and lifetime learning environment, even more than teaching the content itself.

One participant added that another issue he faced was his struggle to reverse the impact his cultural beliefs had on his teaching practice in the United States because they created many barriers. He said,

This is really hard for me to say... I had students say that I cared more on how much they learn than their feelings. I told them that I was their teacher and I care of their learning, but it's their parents' job to care about their feelings. I know I can't say I don't care about their feelings, because it will hurt their feelings... ha! But I have my own daughter's feelings to care about. I guess I care about my student' feelings... just a little bit. I guess sometimes this made some of my students feel hard to learn Chinese language. They expressed that they felt I was very distant.

Feeling of disconnect was crucial for the participant's reflection of his lived experience. He expressed how he wished to interact with his students closely in the very beginning to foster that intimacy. The same participant highlighted his disbelief witnessing student behavior in American classrooms, and mentioned it might be why he had a hard time connecting with his students. He said,

No one challenged me in the classroom in China, I said one thing, next thing they do it. But here, oh boy, I can't believe how misbehaved they are!!! For example, when I explained rules in my classroom at the beginning of a term, a student asked me," What if the teacher do not follow rules?" are you kidding me?! I told them I didn't want to answer, I was angry. I couldn't believe they asked that question. I was the teacher, I do whatever I wanted to do.

Hofstede (1991) highlighted how one's cultural background could significantly impact his or her thinking and daily practice. For China-born Chinese teachers, recognizing their Chinese background and its impact on teaching approach and methodology was a challenging but giant leap forward. The teachers realized and accepted that feelings of anxiety and discomfort were common when experiencing conflicts between their cultural background and host country. What one educational system expects and values does not necessarily have importance in another society, hence obtaining intercultural competency and skills for intercultural communication is essential for living and teaching in a foreign country.

The essential experience of cultural differences such as parent expectations and burden to live abroad shadowed the theme of impediments the China-born Chinese teachers had to face and become familiar with and then had to adjust. The essential experience was drawn from the comments of the participants. The participants shared that there was always the feeling within them that they did not fit culturally into the American society because of their foreignness. One participant shared her unpleasant interactions with parents' involvement. When the researcher asked her about the challenges she faced in teaching in America, she said,

Parents! I do not mean all of them are bad, I just need more supports from SOME parents. They want a lot from you. In China, teachers are well respected, not here though. I was very surprised. They made me feel bad, like a bad teacher, but it's their children's laziness! No, I didn't say anything to them, you can't say anything in America, you know, I don't want them to sue me or the school. They lash out and they are gone, I have to get over it.

Unrealistic expectations from parents negatively prompted the participant to doubt her identity and discouraged the respect she already established in the classroom. Another participant

shared a more particular experience on how difficult it was for her to be accepted as a teacher in America. She said,

Parents don't trust you here. They think they are your bosses because they pay taxes. They demand good teaching, which is reasonable, but so many other things. Some things contradict themselves, for example, they want good grades for their kids, but they find excuse for their kids when they don't work hard. Let's also take the cell phone in class as an example... when I first took a cell phone away, I thought the parent would be grateful that I reinforced her child to focus on learning; instead, she called the principal on me saying because my teaching was boring, her son HAD to take his phone out to kill time. Can you believe it?! I am still angry thinking about it—it's like if your kid raped somebody, you are saying because that person dressed too provocatively. What on earth?! I can't believe it. Thank God, our principal stood by me and we laughed about it later on. But it's not a joke, it really happened. Oh, and especially don't take the phone away if it belongs to a black kid, they will accuse you of racial discrimination. You can't win. But that's one part I miss about China, though, you make mistakes, you get punished, then you learn. You can't have your parents sugarcoat everything—no one is going to sugarcoat you when you start working in the real world. You got to be responsible for yourself, you know.

It was obvious the participant felt hurt and was in disbelief by the parent's negative reaction to her discipline. The participant expressed that although disciplining students was an important and necessary part of learning, based on that particular parent's response, she would think twice before disciplining another student. The participant said the hesitance impeded her from establishing a positive classroom environment for a long time.



The burden of living abroad, especially the struggle with one's foreignness was another lived experience that trailed the main theme of impediments, drawn from the detailed comments of China-born Chinese teachers. The teacher experienced difficulties of living in another country, which impacted their way of thinking and their comfort of life. One participant discussed his difficulty of obtaining a long term working visa as a teacher in America. He said,

The visa for a long-term working as a teacher in the U.S. It was very difficult for me to stay here for more than a year, I have to extend my visa every year, not knowing if I will get it or not. The school or Hanban doesn't sponsor you to get a long-term work visa, or help you to get your process started to obtain a green card—that's hard information to swallow. You feel you've been here for a while, you like it here, you like your job, you make good contributions, but sorry, you can't be here long term. That's really hard for me. See? I am also different from other Confucius Institute teachers, most of them are really young— in their 20s. But I am 39 and I have a wife and a daughter to support and I want them to come here to live with me in the US. But as of now, it's impossible.

This particular participant came to America not only because of dream-chasing but to earn a better living for his family. Sacrificing his time to spend with his family generated feelings of frustration and helplessness, and the burden of trying to stay in America long term amplified those negative feelings. The participant shared the constant challenge he had to deal with was the notion of being foreign compared to everybody else. That notion unconsciously inspired him desiring to adjust to the American society; but meanwhile, reject the feeling of "being American" due to differences in way of thinking and living.

Another participant expressed his hurtful feelings of being a "foreigner." He described his experience,

No matter how helpful I was to the school, I heard they were talking about me not being the best teacher. I was really hurt, that made me not want to improve. But I continued my job every day because I needed it. I kept on thinking to myself, even if I was not the best teacher, come help me, not just talk about me, it makes me feel and look bad. I care about my “face” you know. Even if I was not helpful, at least I tried to be helpful—appreciate me and not bully me.

Judging another based on one’s own culture, like how the participant’s colleagues judged him, was common. Hofstede concluded that differences existed among cultures; therefore, different ways of thinking, expectations, and perspectives were major barriers for one to understand another from a different culture (1999). Additionally, cultural differences existed beyond the country borders. Culture is the conceptual design, the definitions by which people order their lives, interpret their experience, and evaluate the behavior of others (Lingenfelter & Mayers, 1986). One’s personal culture is an example of a micro culture existed within the societal culture. Therefore, the participant recognized that some of the enculturation challenges might be generated from his own inflexibility and personality preferences.

The participants recognized the impact their cultural contexts and beliefs had on their teaching pedagogy and every day practice. They experienced many cultural situations that surprised and overwhelmed them, such as challenges in managing student behavior, how to adjust to parent expectations and how to communicate with administration and parents effectively. Those situations presented a profound amount of impediments in their daily living and teaching in America that they had to face and become familiar with and eventually had to adjust.

In summary, there are three main themes emerged from the clustered eight essential experiences. The following section, an in-depth look into each participant's lived experience, further illustrated the main themes and essential experiences, bringing the reader to the final composite summary, which represented the China-born Chinese teachers as a whole.

### **An In-depth Look into Each Participant's Lived Experience**

The fourth stage under Hycner's method allowed the researcher to incorporate all themes elicited from the data to give a holistic context. Ellenberger (1985) captured it as follows:

Whatever the method used for a phenomenological analysis the aim of the investigator is the reconstruction of the inner world of experience of the subject. Each individual has his own way of experiencing temporality, spatiality, materiality, but each of these coordinates must be understood in relation to the others and to the total inner "world" (as cited in Hycner, 1999, p. 154).

The researcher presented an in-depth look at each participant's lived experience to guide the readers to comprehend and take in the experience as established by the researcher.

Additionally, the researcher conducted member check by returning to each participant with the summary of each interview for the participant to review and determine if the essence of the interview was correctly captured or if any modification was necessary. Although several participants expressed how surprising and interesting the transcribed texts seemed to them, none chose to alter any of the texts or analysis. To the participants, describing and re-living the experience as it was experienced at that particular moment was important.

**Winnie.** Winnie's excitement to participate in the study was evident from the beginning. Winnie was eager to demonstrate her pride in obtaining her position at her current school. Therefore, Winnie made sure the researcher understood the meaning behind each response and

her explanations. Contributing to the knowledge of what the classroom experiences were like for China-born Chinese teachers was important to Winnie.

Winnie taught at both American public schools and Chinese language schools that were managed by Chinese immigrants. Winnie experienced firsthand the differences between Chinese and American style of education and educational management. The constant switch back-and-forth of teaching pedagogy due to the vastly different expectations from her superiors presented a constant struggle for her. Winnie mentioned her experience at the Chinese language school she taught. She said,

They (the Chinese school principals) criticize your teaching according to the Chinese style. Whatever new tricks you learn to teach American kids, you have to give up. You don't want to lose your job at the language schools either. It's a conflict...

However, with the cumulative experience Winnie gained at both settings, she was able to maneuver freely and trained herself to be flexible and eventually enjoy the differences. Winnie explained,

I know what works and what doesn't in my American classrooms. Therefore, I always tried to make my classes fun! American kids like to have fun! I make all my activities and games related to my content, so they enjoy learning too.

Winnie's early influence such as her upbringing guided her decision to be a teacher. She also benefited tremendously from her mentor's modeling of culturally appropriate behaviors that set up the foundation for her classroom success. Winnie was extremely grateful to her mentor Liz and offered some helpful tips,

Liz told me that I need to be quiet and observant. However, when it's time to brag about my accomplishments, I need to speak up. I try to stay under the radar at school because I

really don't know the right way of doing things in an American public school, so I don't want to make mistakes. In other words, I think I am a helpful teacher not only to my students but also to colleagues because I remember what Liz told me. Stay quiet, watch, and be helpful.

Like most participants, Winnie had the pleasure of being taught by an inspirational teacher who later became the “spring” to her career choice and generated her love for teaching. However, when reflecting back on that particular teacher's teaching style, Winnie recognized the one-size-fits-all Chinese teaching style would not be efficient in American classrooms.

For Winnie, the experience of pride and joy all stemmed from her students—student interest and accomplishments. Winnie was proud of her Chinese heritage; therefore, when students initiated the culture-learning process, Winnie was a proud teacher. Winnie shared,

Occasionally, you will meet a student who is “obsessed” with the Chinese language and culture. He or she will go on and tell you that he or she is doing extracurricular work in the target language, for example, he watches Chinese soaps at home, or she joined a traditional Chinese dance groups that are mostly consisted of native Chinese people. I had quite a few students who used the Chinese App called “WeChat,” oh they love it! I mean they loved it! One student even has a long distance girlfriend from China that he is communicating with, exclusively in Chinese!!! Can you believe it?! Those kids are wonderful, they will go on to learn so much more. They are smart kids too, they know China is growing and they know learning Chinese is essential. They want to have a good head start. I wouldn't be surprised at all if they work for the American embassy in Beijing! I am so proud of them!

When describing those moments, the researcher noted how Winnie raised her voice significantly and moved forward in her seat to explain. Winnie did not hesitate to share her excitement.

Winnie's voice became low and she sat deeply in her seat when she conveyed her vexation at her students' parents. Winnie shared the challenge of cultural differences in which the position and attitude towards teachers presented to her. Winnie experienced lack of support from parents while their expectations were unrealistic. As protective as parents were, Winnie was surprised by how they managed to find excuses for their children's negative behaviors. Winnie explained,

Parents will try to find excuse for the students who did not finish the work. I am really surprised. In China, parents are embarrassed and will punish their children. But here, parents are really protective. This is truly surprising, you know. In America, the educational world talked about how to let students take ownership of their own learning and my impression is that American children are very independent. But their parents complain and blame the teacher when their children don't get a good grade.

Winnie recognized her experience was a complex issue, however common to most teachers. Winnie had the awareness of how she, a China-born Chinese teacher needed to react to negative experiences such as this; however, she was never quite sure how to comprehend the conflicting American ideal of education such as independent study and parent involvement. One parent said to Winnie, "It's your fault!" Experiences like this created a mixed emotion of anger, frustration and confusion to Winnie.

Winnie believed the importance of understanding and practicing the saying, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Winnie stated that she had to overcome herself and

open her mind to learn from her students, which was a rarity for Chinese. Confucius once said, “When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them, their bad qualities and avoid them” (Translated by Legge, 1897, p. 121). Winnie reflected on her own background and felt that she constantly needed to be considerate of her students’ points of view in order to faithfully practice Confucius’ great command.

**Rebecca.** It was a decision that Rebecca made when she was very young to teach in America. Rebecca’s two favorite subjects in school were Chinese literature and English. Therefore, she majored in Bilingual Broadcasting and Hosting to earn her undergraduate degree and Teaching Chinese as a Second Language as her graduate degree. Her educational background paved a way for her to know the principle and acquire the basic skills to be a successful Chinese language teacher in the United States.

Rebecca’s personality and the good habit of working hard, which was part of the Chinese characteristics prepared her well mentally in teaching. She stated, “I am very eager to learn and I am efficient too. I also like to push myself to change my materials and teaching techniques once for a while just to keep things interesting for my students and myself.”

To the researcher, pride and joy was part of Rebecca’s nature. She stated, Every time, I mean every single time, when I see my students growing interests of learning the language and culture and whenever I discover they improve their language skills, I feel good. I am goal-oriented, so as a teacher, my goal is for them to learn and improve every day. When they learn, they help me to reach my goal. And also, when I see them feel good about themselves when they finish doing a task and enjoying doing it.

Although Rebecca's joy and pride was constant in her teaching experience, she warned candidates like her not to teach in America if "you do not love teaching from the bottom of your heart." Rebecca had rich experience interacting with Americans prior to her arrival to the United States. Although her transition into her new life was "smoother than others," Rebecca communicated that one of the biggest barriers of her teaching was classroom management. She used the cell phone use in her classroom as an example to demonstrate the differences between classroom expectations between the United States and China. Rebecca mentioned,

Kids in the US don't take you seriously. Let's take a step back, even if I tell the Chinese kids to put their phones away, they will listen, you can be guaranteed that they will never take them out again in your class. If one in a million chance, the Chinese kid takes the phone out for the second time, you tell his or her parents or the principal, they will make sure the kid don't take his or her phone out the third time.

The researcher noticed Rebecca's eyes opened wide and she started "talking" with her arms when describing this frustrating situation. Rebecca was surprised by the amount of time she had to spend every day disciplining her students, especially on issues that wouldn't have existed in China.

Rebecca had always been conscious of her identity as a "foreigner" at school and felt the need to adjust and be considerate of the cultures and perspectives of the parents. However, a main barrier she experienced was the lack of trust from parents. According to Rebecca, some of the parents' expectations "contradict themselves." Rebecca used the following example to make her point across, "they want good grades for their kids, but they find excuse for their kids when they don't work hard."



Rebecca deemed an unpleasant experience with a parent as the “turning point of her teaching career”—during which time she decided not to compromise her own principles in order to please others. Rebecca described the experience was one of the most painful moments of her teaching career as well. She said,

(Rebecca noticed a student was using his cell phone in her class.) When I first took a cell phone away, I thought the parent would be grateful that I reinforced her child to focus on learning; instead, she called the principal on me saying because my teaching was boring, her son HAD to take his phone out to kill time.

When describing that incident, the researcher noted how Rebecca sank in her seat and she had tears in her eyes. Her expressions were mixed with astonishment, anger, frustration, fear, and sadness. The negative response from the parent tore apart Rebecca’s confidence, and she had to learn to rebuild it again.

**Nancy.** To Nancy, “to be a Chinese teacher was a career dream.” In order to maximize her opportunity for success in her classroom, Nancy acquired professional knowledge from her education and training, and utilized learning into her practice. In addition to basic teaching skills, Nancy also sought knowledge on classroom management, interpersonal communication, Chinese cultural knowledge, and cross-cultural communication.

Nancy shared that an essential experience of being a China-born Chinese teacher was the positive student-teacher relationship, which brought her an enormous amount of joy. She stated, “If they like you, they trust you more and they ask you questions, which propels them to learn more and more. On a more personal level, good relationship makes your job more enjoyable. You are spending time with people you like who happen to like you, which is very relaxing.”

Nancy stressed the importance of cross-cultural communication skills, and believed that they are more important than knowing and speaking the host country's language. Nancy stated, First of all, even if you speak English, it doesn't mean you can act the American way. There are going to be misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The whole social system is different and culture is different, every region is different. It is really overwhelming in the beginning, but you have the most potential to learn during that time, if you keep an open-mind.

Nancy explained that there was another essential experience that contributed to her joy and pride in teaching—student progress and achievement. Nancy provided an example, They witness their own progress every day in the classroom and they are loving it. And sometimes, their progress can be witnessed by others. Last May, I sent three of my students to a Chinese speaking competition. The competition was hard, and the judges asked a lot of hard questions. Those questions not only require the competitors to understand them in Chinese, but to answer them in a culturally appropriate and sophisticated way using their critical thinking skills. I was so nervous. But they did well! All three of them brought awards home! Of course, they made me look good too. But most of all, I felt good. I felt they deserved the awards because they worked hard and their hard work was recognized.

Nancy voiced the barrier of the dissimilar political system and regulations were among the first few issues that she had to deal with. She discussed her unexpected surprise, I was surprised at the frequent security incidents at schools in the United States. I don't know how to shoot a gun, I am a little worried. Gun ownership in China is strictly

regulated, which helps reduce gun-related crimes and deaths. The U.S. should learn from China and genuinely protect human rights.

**Jerry.** Jerry brought in a wealth of teaching experience in China, United Kingdom and the United States. He described himself choosing to teach in America “for living;” meaning he made the decision based on providing a better living situation for his family. Jerry, whose father and grandfather were both teachers, was influenced by their teaching practice and decisions from a very young age, “I and my brothers would play games pretending we were teachers.”

Jerry shared that he was viewed by students as “unapproachable,” which some may misconstrue as being “uncaring.” Jerry’s experience of teaching in China being significantly longer than in the United States trained him to disassociate from students after class time, and his father’s command of “you got to scare students first for them to respect you” hindered him from truly understanding students’ emotions and needs. Jerry expressed that under the pretense of distance between him and the students, it “made some of my students feel hard to learn Chinese language;” although Jerry truly cared about their learning.

Jerry expressed his joy and pride when describing student achievement. He stated, I am so happy for them and happy for myself that I taught them that—I am the initiator of their achievement, can you believe that?! If you don’t feel joy or pride when you see that, you are numb! I also will try so much harder when the students ask you questions or go a step beyond what I taught—that makes me really happy!

Although Jerry received formal training in China and taught in United Kingdom—a highly individualistic society like the United States, Jerry recognized that years of teaching in China made him focus “more on the amount of students’ input of language teaching points and

their grades output of the exams spontaneously.” The differences between student learning styles and expectations helped Jerry learn many lessons. He mentioned,

I learned to focus more on students’ need, and undertake the methodology of differentiation, which is still very difficult for me to do. In the beginning, I taught everybody the same way, because my idea is that if you don’t learn, it’s your fault. I can’t teach you differently just because you say you are different. Now I understand why differentiation is important, although I still have mental obstacles.

Like every participant expressed, Jerry was also surprised by how students felt the freedom to challenge teachers in American classrooms. The researcher noticed Jerry looked a little uneasy when describing the following experience. Jerry said,

When I explained rules in my classroom at the beginning of a term, a student asked me, “What if the teacher do not follow rules?” are you kidding me?! I told them I didn’t want to answer, I was angry. I couldn’t believe they asked that question. I was the teacher, I do whatever I wanted to do.

It was clear to the researcher that after two years of teaching in the United States, Jerry was struggling to grapple with surprises that relate to his foreignness in the classroom.

Jerry’s desire to experience the culture and social life in the United States set the foundation for his decision to teach in the United States. When the opportunity came for him to teach, he was confident the cultural differences would not be a hindrance to his future success. However, Jerry experienced much hardship and burden in the process of obtaining his long-term working visa as a teacher. Jerry mentioned,

It was very difficult for me to stay here for more than a year. I have to extend my visa every year, not knowing if it will get it or not. The school or Hanban doesn’t sponsor you

to get a long-term work visa, or help you to get your process started to obtain a green card—that's hard information to swallow. You feel you've been here for a while, you like it here, you like your job, you make good contributions, but sorry, you can't be here long term. That's really hard for me. See? I am also different from other Confucius Institute teachers, most of them are really young, they were in their 20s. But I am 39 and I have a wife and a daughter to support and I want them to come here to live with me in the US. But as of now, it's impossible.

**Lynn.** Lynn's transition from China to the United States was not as drastic as other participants because Lynn was teaching in an area in California where most of her students were of Chinese descent. Lynn was fully aware of her privilege of interacting with people who shared the same culture as her; additionally, her prior experience of working with Americans and possessing knowledge of America provided her much advantage of enculturating into the American society.

Lynn was an introvert when she was a child, but now always trying to find opportunities to interact with other people. Lynn stated,

So all the professions I chose when I grew up all has to do with talking to others. I believe becoming a teacher can change some of the imperfections in my personality, especially the part that doesn't bring everybody sunshine. I also want to tell my students about my own shortcomings and weaknesses, and hopefully my story will influence and impact them in a positive way. With the younger kids, especially, they really want to copy their teachers. So I want to use myself to impact their lives.

Lynn considered teaching a joy and hoped "children can learn happily" in her classroom. Lynn viewed herself as a highly positive teacher and believed that it should be the teacher's

responsibility to provide the condition for students to learn and students should have fun while learning. Lynn experienced a “huge amount of joy” when observing students’ affection towards her. A notable experience was witnessing how her students would make an effort to be around her. She stated,

Many children will come to my classroom at the end of school to give me a big hug and say goodbye, they came specifically for that purpose—to say goodbye to me. Having won their love is my proudest moment, and also makes me feel that I’ve accomplished great things.

Lynn’s school was a unique setting. Inside the school, Chinese culture and American management style formed the particulars of the school community. Outside the school, the host country culture still existed. Hence, the China-born Chinese teachers had to survive in the microcosm of the school with a large Chinese population as well as the larger culture of a foreign country (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). Lynn described how she was able to take advantage of her Chinese heritage and promoted cultural concepts. One particular activity Lynn developed highlighted her experience. She said,

We have a lot of activities in class that are culture related, for example, tea parties, Chinese calligraphy, etc. Especially in the beginning of each semester, I invite all the parents to come to see our culture presentations. The cultural concept is not only within my classroom, but a whole school initiative---so you get a lot of support, it’s a really good thing! Through all these cultural activities, not only children learn more authentic Chinese culture, parents have the opportunity to experience what’s real in China as well. Parents will also get to know you during this process, so if you have problems later on

with a particular student, you can contact them right away and they for sure will support you.

Lynn felt the informal interaction between her and parents helped to open the door for effective communication and made her adjustment to the host country less challenging. Holding onto the attitude of respecting the differences between two cultures, Lynn felt the need to stress the importance of positive teacher-student and teacher-parent relationship. Lynn expressed,

Students and even parents will challenge and doubt you and your ability, you will try to prove yourself, at the same time, you need to communicate with them—positively, very positively. They will trust you more and that trust will automatically make your life easier.

A main barrier that Lynn experienced was the lack of time spent with her family. She missed her parents very much. Additionally, being used to the fast pace and constant-moving life style of a youngster in China, being comfortable alone was challenging for Lynn. She stated,

I miss the lifestyle in China, it is always fast and moving. There are a lot of entertainment on weekends, but here there is very little. People go running and hiking on weekends, but it's boring to me. I want to go out to eat authentic Chinese food with my friends, but you always have to drive so far—it's inconvenient. So you go less and less, and your social life gets more and more boring.

**Ron.** Ron worked in various fields of profession, and unfortunately found out that teaching was not the best fit for him. Ron described his learning experience being consisted of “mo pa gun da.” The direct English translation was “touch, crawl, roll, play,” which demonstrated progressing stages of a baby's movement, meaning he gained his experience from both successes and failures. Ron's teaching style demonstrates freedom, playfulness, and self-

responsibility. Ron was proud of his free-style of teaching initially but soon was reprimanded by administration. One particular experience occurred after Ron purchased a Ping Pong table and taught his students how to play the game during class time. Ron said,

When the administration found out, they said I wasn't teaching Chinese—but I was! I taught them numbers, I taught them sports, I taught them gestures, and I taught them the ping pong culture, which is a great representation of Chinese diplomacy.

The researcher noticed that although Ron was laughing at the time of describing the experience, frustration and disappointment were written on his face. However, when talking about his students, Ron was proud of his experience being their teacher. Besides student achievement brought Ron joy, Ron found pride when students are “sincerely interested” in him, his culture and his native language. Ron continued,

We all love to talk about ourselves, but we need to learn to ask how another person's life is like. Where are they from? What's their background?... the kids care about me. They say I am funny, I really taught them a lot of things.

It was evident that Ron felt a great sense of accomplishment when students took an interest in his foreignness. However, Ron believed one of the main impediments in his transition to the United States was the feeling of not being in control of his daily living. Ron expressed,

The system, the educational system, decided my life, how many hours I worked and how much I earned. I had four classes, five classes is full time, they paid me half. It's public school, you know, how can they get away with it?!

Ron explained that another challenge for him was the demands from parents, particularly Chinese parents. He stated,



I do not mean American parents, they are sweet and although they kind of look at you differently, they realized that you are different, most of them cut you slacks. But the Chinese parents here in the US? Oh my, just because I wasn't officially a teacher type of teacher, they really questioned me about my ability to teach their children Chinese. They want me to give them homework, lots of homework, but I don't. They said they are my boss because they are tax payers.

Ron's experience painted a vivid picture of a typical experience of not knowing how to handle the teacher-parent relationship appropriately and effectively. He also conveyed that another constant challenge was his day-to-day teaching practice being questioned, given the differences in their way of thinking. Ron believed that one of the reasons he faced so many impediments was due to his lack of formal training in teaching. He stated,

Why do people care so much about certificate or paper? Kids really learn from me, you know?! I am also surprised... the Chinese parents were mean to me, just plain mean, instead of helping me as one of their "brother" from homeland, they bullied me, they went to administration and said I didn't give enough homework.

Ron recently left his teaching position because he felt he found his opportunity and purpose in establishing a real estate company helping "those who appreciate you." To Ron, teaching, or perhaps the teaching experience in that particular school, stripped away his joy in life. Ron sighed,

Teaching is like a war zone every day. You need to take your league—your students to conquer one mountain of knowledge after another, then you have all sorts of enemies trying to stop you. It is truly frustrating, you know, people are not trying to help you, they only want to stop you from what you are doing.

Ron felt that he constantly needed to adjust and be flexible with the demands of his job, which presented a battle between his background and perspective. Additionally, prejudice felt from administrators hindered Ron from attempting to develop meaningful friendships with his colleagues and school leaders and created feelings of anger and frustration. Ron stated,

Administrators trying to pick on you. I speak English with an accent, which means I am not ABLE to speak fluently, it is not a measure of my INTELLIGENCE. I heard some of them laugh at me, they are sarcastic. I pretended I didn't hear them, so they wouldn't lose face.

### **Composite Summary**

The final stage under Hycner's method allowed the researcher to look for the themes common to most of the interviews as well as the individual variations (Hycner, 1999). The researcher extracted general and unique themes from all the interviews and made a composite summary. The researcher took careful examination and determined that there was no evidence of the existence of significant differences. Finally, the researcher transformed the participants' everyday living into expressions and vocabulary into the scientific discourse supporting the research through interpretation and analysis (Sadala & Adorno, 2001). All the descriptions were put together to depict the lived experiences as a whole, which supported to answer the two overarching research questions.

**The lived classroom experiences of China-born Chinese teachings in the United States.** All participants expressed that their background and the desire to achieve one's goal were driving forces for them to obtain education and training specifically on teaching Chinese as a second language, which led to their decision of teaching in the host country of the United States. The China-born Chinese teachers gained joy and pride deriving from students' responses to the

Chinese language and culture. Students' responses, often positive, provided the participants with willingness to teach the target language and culture, opportunities to witness students' progress, reputation earned from students' public accomplishments. A positive teacher-student relationship was important to the participants, although it was not a commonly expected occurrence to the China-born Chinese teachers. The teachers, influenced by the Confucius teaching of establishing authority in the classroom combined with a rigid rote-memorization strategy discovered the joy of having a positive teacher-student relationship. The participants experienced pride when their students' accomplishments were recognized. Although the participants did not request or demand the recognition of their contribution to the greater cause—promoting intercultural understanding and cultural exchange, it was evident the participants were able to comprehend the change and the effort they had made.

The deep feelings of joy and pride were amplified when students expressed interest to learn more than what was taught, went above and beyond to learn the language and culture of China. The participants expressed the joy and pride confirmed their career choice and accentuated them being Chinese. These participants were passionate to teach about China. In the process of teaching, they fostered positive relationships with their students, giving way to prideful moments. One participant expressed his positive relationships with his students flourished when they were “sincerely interested” in him, his culture and his language. He further implied it was common for us to share about ourselves, but it made the other person feel important and his or her opinions matter when we dug into others' world and made sense of their personhood from their perspectives.

The China-born Chinese teachers experienced joy and pride when their effort of fostering a positive teacher-student relationship was confirmed and rewarded. They shared how students

were able to have fun while learning in their classroom, which helped them to consider their profession as part of a cause instead of a job. For many, the simple experience of joy occurred every day. One participant shared,

Children will come to my classroom at the end of school to give me a big hug and say goodbye, they came specifically for that purpose—to say goodbye to me. Having won their love is my proudest moment, and also makes me feel that I've accomplished great things.

**The understanding and making sense of China-born Chinese teachers' experiences in American classrooms.** Members of different cultures sample with diverse probabilities different kinds of information from their environment (Triandis, 2010). Some sample the content of communication more than the context (e.g. tone of voice, gestures), whereas others do the reverse. Some sample processes internal to individuals (e.g. attitudes, beliefs) whereas others sample processes external to individuals (e.g. social influences, roles) with higher probabilities. Some give greater weight to ascribed attributes of persons, such as ethnicity, race, religion, and others to achieved attributes, such as beliefs, attitudes, or a record of achievements. These differences had profound implications for the probability of conflict and the type of conflict that would develop between individuals and groups. The participants recognized that cultural background was constantly clashing and causing conflicts with their host country's culture. They provided key occurrences regarding the impediments they experienced as China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. Those sometimes unpleasant experiences drove the participants to reflect on the pedagogical and cultural differences between China and the United States, and come to the common understanding that living in America as a foreigner was not for the faint-hearted—they faced and became familiar with an enormous amount of barriers, to which they

then had to adjust. Settling down in a new country and being introduced to a new workplace involved not only adjusting to the normal rearrangements such as climate, nutrition and place of residence, but also to new work tasks and the local culture (Blom, 2002). In order to succeed in their new teaching assignments, China-born Chinese teachers faced the major challenge of learning how to interact effectively in a completely new environment where people think, feel, and act differently and speak a different language (Tarique, 2009).

All six participants stated although they had either received training and/or prior knowledge on student behavior in American classrooms, the vast differences between China and the United States were unexpected. The vast differences hindered them from fostering a positive classroom environment. The researcher considered the prior theme of participants gaining joy and pride from a positive student-teacher relationship, which was the foundation of fostering a positive classroom environment. Although most participants experienced the positivity in relationships, a positive classroom environment was not consistent due to the “freedom” American students felt in the classrooms. One participant conveyed, “teaching in the classroom is the most respected career in China, students are trained to 100% obey their instructors.” Therefore, the participants never witnessed students’ objection to their opinions such as text book content, unless it was a slip of the tongue. Although all participants gained knowledge of how an American classroom was supposed to operate through their training, and provided opportunities to students to share their opinions if they thought differently about a specific topic, the participants still required everyone to write the exact thing that was taught on the exam.

The closeness or the bond between the teacher and the students was difficult for the participants to get used to. Two participants shared their frustration towards student’ comments about them being “too distant.” The participants felt they sacrificed their personal time to share

with their family and chose to teach in a foreign country; therefore, it was not their responsibility to “care about their students outside of the classroom.” The participants later realized that mindset hindered them from having truly meaningful relationships with their students. Additionally, their Chinese background and beliefs did not afford them the mental freedom to initiate that closeness. The authoritarian influence such as their elders and mentors trained them to emphasize the importance of respect, and believed that respect could only be earned through forming and keeping distance. Students’ outspokenness towards teachers was another observation the participants were surprised by. To the participants, the fact the student even made comments about their teachers was hard to fathom. Prior to teaching in America, the participants observed all Chinese students in classrooms mute their voice through the whole semester because they were trained not to speak their minds and not to raise any conversation that had an opposite or different opinion to the instructor's teaching. The responsive learning environment in the United States set the participants to big surprises.

All participants highlighted cultural differences presented themselves with a profound amount of impediments, and parent expectations are one of the most challenging. The participants pointed out their frustration and disappointment towards the lack of mutual trust between them and the parents. The researcher noticed how this essential experience was the most hurtful and disappointing to the China-born Chinese teachers. The participants were puzzled and offended and eventually became outraged when facing unrealistic expectations from some parents. One participant’s encounter with a parent was a great representation of why the participants’ attitude towards parents were so negative. The participant conveyed,

When I first took a cell phone away, I thought the parent would be grateful that I reinforced her child to focus on learning; instead, she called the principal on me saying

because my teaching was boring, her son HAD to take his phone out to kill time. Can you believe it?! I am still angry thinking about it—it's like if your kid raped somebody, you are saying because that person dressed too provocatively. What on earth?! I can't believe it. Thank God, our principal stood by me and we laughed about it later on. But it's not a joke, it really happened. Oh, and especially don't take the phone away if it belongs to a black kid, they will accuse you of racial discrimination. You can't win.

The participants expressed how different it was in China. One of them said, But that's one part I miss about China, though, you make mistakes, you get punished, then you learn. You can't have your parents sugar coat everything—no one is going to sugarcoat you when you start working in the real world. You got to be responsible for yourself, you know.

The participants were emotional when they described their interactions with parents. It was clear to the researcher the hurt in their eyes. They expressed no matter how much they tried, parents just simply did not trust them. They started to wonder if their foreignness had anything to do with that distrust, and they doubted their own identities and wondered if they ever would be able to establish proper roles in the classrooms. Along the same line with parent expectations, the participants experienced language barriers that hindered their effective communication with the parents and frustration on feeling being misunderstood, which resulted in their negative reactions from critique and suggestions.

Although the participants experienced enormous amount of impediments due to pedagogical and cultural differences, they managed to cope and sought continuous effort to enculturation into the American society. The participants' views and daily practices were challenged and altered, but they recognized the necessity for that to occur. At times, they were

seen as foreigners, feeling left out of the school community, but through cultural understanding and communicating, they were able to achieve success in the classrooms. All participants were stunned at student behavior in American schools, but were able to quickly respond appropriately through daily practice and observing others.

The researcher asked the participants if they have any regrets to their decisions to teach in America, all of them responded no. However, they supplemented their answers by stating that they wished they had formal training on how to teach in America sooner. In that case, they wouldn't have made so many mistakes or had such difficulty in adjusting to the atmosphere of American classrooms. None of them would have designed to alter the journey. Faced by many difficulties, they conquered and learned through “mo pa gun da”—touch, crawl, roll, play—every day.

They experienced joy and pride through students, and also through the challenges that faced them. They climbed one big mountain after another, continued on their journey of passionately pursuing their dream and contributing themselves to the big cause of cultural exchange and intercultural communication.

### **Validity**

This phenomenological research design aimed toward truth. The researcher bracketed herself consciously and consistently in order to understand the lived experiences from the perspectives of the participants. The researcher employed member check to provide validity to the research. The trustworthiness of results is the bedrock of high quality qualitative research; therefore, the strategy of member checking was used to validate the participants' responses (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). After all the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the researcher returned to each participant, and checked with them regarding the



initial analysis of the responses, and asked if the analysis was accurate. Several participants were surprised how their language translated from verbal speeches to texts, most of their responses included vocabulary that indicated speaking in a more thoughtful manner, such as “um” or a pause. To all of them, the transcribed texts were very interesting and surprising to read and became very personal. As surprised as they were, they all chose not to alter or fine-tune any of the texts or analysis as they desired to describe the experience as it was occurring at that particular moment. Additionally, as a novice, the researcher sought guidance and advice from her dissertation advisor during the process of data analysis to ensure the accuracy of emerging themes.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present a detailed and in-depth investigation of the lived experiences of the six China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. The research method employed was the Hycner’s five-step method (Hycner, 1999). The researcher was able to establish three main themes which answered and explained the needed experiences to understand the lives of the China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. The researcher discovered that the China-born Chinese teachers (a) made decisions to teach in America based on their backgrounds and goals, and (b) gained joy and pride deriving from their students’ responses to the Chinese language and culture. Concurrently, the most common impediment that they had to face and become familiar with was the (c) cultural and pedagogical differences to which they then had to adjust. The next chapter—Chapter Five provides an overview of the study, presents the interpretations of the findings, draws conclusions of the study, and offers recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter V: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences and significant events of China-born Chinese language teachers in the United States. The research explored the impact of influence, teaching, and culture on the China-born Chinese teachers' classroom experiences in the United States. This chapter presents the readers with an overview and critical components of the first four chapters. Additionally, discussions, implications, and recommendations from the study are presented immediately after.

Chapter one opened the discussion on the research problem and significance of the research. The United States, the biggest Chinese language “consumer” in the world, has received more than 1,400 Chinese guest teachers since 2007, and the number is increasing every year (Hanban, 2017). By the year 2020, the United States would be hosting over 4,000 Chinese guest teachers (U.S.-China Strong Foundation, 2014). For Chinese guest teachers in the United States, intercultural adaptation is quite a difficult matter as it presents unforeseen circumstances and consequences (Jia, 2014).

The significant growth in Chinese language programs over the past five years presented an unfathomable gap between meeting student demand to learn Chinese and the lack of trained and certified teachers. For programs to be vital and sustainable, teachers must be able to engage and motivate students over the long term, incorporate best practices in teaching and learning of world languages, and connect the Chinese language program to other academic subject areas and aspects of school life and community (Asia Society, 2018). Scholars believe that “simply hiring a large number of Chinese teachers doesn't meet the demand of growing interest in learning Chinese” (p. 37, An Asia Society Report, 2010). The challenges and limitations hindered the

teachers from establishing rapport with students, enhancing credibility, and creating a productive learning environment (Zhang, 2014). With the upsurge of the Chinese language market in the United States and the need for Americans to communicate with the Chinese people efficiently and culturally, little was known about the lives and experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States until the current study was undertaken.

The increasing rate of globalization and the rapid increase in the number of Chinese guest teachers teaching in the United States pointed to the need for continued study concerning teachers who exhibited a more cross-cultural approach. By exploring the essence of the lived experiences of China-born teachers doing the work of teaching American students Chinese, headway was made to expand the knowledge base of Chinese teaching in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

The literature review underpinned by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980) and contextual perspective disclosed scholarly findings deliberating culture, living and teaching. Chapter two summarized and discussed central themes that emerged from literature and echoed chapter one in the discussion of similarities and differences in educational theories, teaching practices, learning styles, and educational policies in China and the United States. The chapter offered a plethora of viewpoints and theories and provided a thorough examination of existing research on related topics of the current study—culture, intercultural understanding and competency, Chinese in America, China's education, and influencing educators.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980) surfaced in the process of examination of literature regarding the essence of culture, followed by notable national and cultural differences between the United States and China. Unawareness and insensitivity of other cultures led to misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people from different countries. The

importance of culture was the fact that our ways of thinking and living were closely associated. Differences in cultures affected our perception, influenced our behavior, and shaped our personalities; therefore, it was an imperative to gain a deep understanding of the culture we lived in.

Following Hofstede and how culture affected value and behavior in a society, the “culture shock” phenomenon emerged; thus, literature on cross-cultural living was presented. Chinese people’s struggles first surfaced while covering stories of new immigrants and those who supposedly enculturated into American society. A narrative of China’s education—past and present were described, and how those realities helped to shape the teacher preparation programs and China-born Chinese teachers’ perceptions were explored. Finally, research on China-born Chinese teachers’ challenges in enculturation to the American society especially the educational world was examined, opening the discussion on the research topic and providing hope in celebration of both cultures.

Chapter three discussed the methodology of this phenomenological study. The research design was the major framework of the chapter, detailing the plan on how to proceed with the study, assisting the researcher to know how to continue and guide the research direction. The participants of the study, data collection procedure, and analysis of emerging themes were also explained in detail to help the readers to view the study clearly. Additionally, ethical considerations and limitations of the study were communicated in a thoughtful fashion to demonstrate the profound care the researcher had put in place to proceed with a phenomenological study that aligned with the best practices in educational research.

The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences in order to understand the multiple-layered meanings of those teachers’

experiences. Those experiences captured the details of the teachers' day-to-day teaching, living, feeling, and decision-making. Additionally, the experiences included the barriers China-born Chinese teachers faced in the United States as well as the contextual perspective to determine the effects context had on the teachers' reflections of their experiences. Using Hycner's five-step analysis method propelled the researcher to notice the "particulars" of an experience, making it "visible and conspicuous" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138).

Employing the phenomenological research methodology allowed the researcher to analyze interviews methodically by employing the Hycner's five-step method in Chapter four (1999). The results of this phenomenological study concerned with and challenged some of the scholarly research portrayed in the literature review. Data analysis disclosed three main themes, underscored by eight essential experiences. The themes and essential experiences alongside the voices or narratives of each China-born Chinese teacher illuminated the strides they were making in teaching while addressing the barriers yet to be overcome. The three main themes of how their background shaped their decision-making, joy and pride from their students, and impediments they faced and become familiar with and then had to adjust, were discussed in that chapter. Implications of these discussions relative to the literature and recommendations for future research were revealed, making way for the conclusion of the study.

## **Discussion**

This phenomenological study was performed in the host country of the United States on six China-born Chinese teachers who were strongly influenced by the socialistic society governance with Chinese characteristics. With the love for children and passion for teaching, these teachers longed deeply to enculturate into the American society and classroom linguistically, pedagogically, and culturally.

The researcher interviewed six China-born Chinese teachers who were from various regions of China, teaching in different parts of the United States, educating students of different ages, races, and socio-economic statuses, and possessing three or more years of teaching experience. In order to capture the participants' experiences as they were lived, the researcher wrote her field notes no later than the morning after each interview, recorded behaviors and facial expressions of the participants and reflected her thoughts in a journal. Once member checking was completed, the researcher continued to data analysis, formulating three main themes and eight essential experiences. The main themes and essential experiences emerged as a result of the interview questions which were constructed in response to the two overarching research questions:

1. How do China-born Chinese language teachers describe their classroom experience in the United States?
2. How do China-born Chinese teachers understand and make sense of their experiences in American classrooms?

**Background influenced the participants' decision to teach in the United States.** The participants' individual context influenced their decision-making—they based their decision to teach in America on their familial or educational backgrounds, and professional goals. Numerous accounts of essential experiences contributed to the emergence of this theme. An essential experience that was mostly dominant was that of having a strong familial influence or mentor affected their decision-making and classroom experience. Feelings of confidence, identity formation, and support transpired when early influence set a strong foundation to classroom practice. The participants shared that they were inspired by their ancestor's beliefs in education and the mentors' modeling to best practice and how these people connected with them on

personal levels. Additionally, the participants demonstrated good habits of working-hard, which came from their Chinese upbringing and characteristics. The good habits prompted them to learn from others, especially from teachers who were born and raised in the United States.

The participants recounted their childhood dreams and goals. The essential experience of personal dream and professional goal accentuated the main theme of context. The particular accounts of lived experiences indicated that achieving one's professional goal or making one's childhood career dream come true was essential in the participants' choice of teaching in America. Additionally, that choice was affirmed by their expressions and experiences of joy.

According to Buchanan and O'Connell (2006), both contextual and psychological factors influence one's ability to make decisions and choices. The China-born Chinese teachers' individual context provided the rationale against which they made career choices, and perspective in the process of their decision-making. The participants had come to the understanding that their earlier influences had contributed to their decision of coming to America to teach. When they reflected upon those influences, they understood the perspective they were withholding. They recognized and were grateful for their educational background, which made their decisions seemed logical. The participants experienced that achieving one's dream and goal was important for one's mental and psychological satisfaction. The participants realized their dreams came to fruition partly because they planned their career properly and calculatedly. The participants' lived experiences of how they achieved their dream step-by-step were great examples of such reflections.

**The participants experienced joy and pride from their students.** The China-born Chinese teachers expressed their joy and pride derived from students' responses to the Chinese language and culture, and this was the most resounding theme in the study. The participants were

able to develop a sense of pride and joy with the progress and achievement that their students gained because of their teaching. Joy and pride were also generated from student interest in the language and culture; additionally, having a positive student-teacher relationship provided them such positive feelings. The varied accounts of experiences included extremely positive feelings towards student achievement and their expressions of desiring to continue their Chinese language and culture study far past their school years. The participants shared their joyful and proud moments, which were witnessed by others and were often pushed to the extreme high when students earned awards that were recognized by the public. Although the participants did not request or demand the recognition of their contribution to the greater cause—promoting intercultural understanding and cultural exchange, it is evident the participants made great effort to contribute to the change.

The participants shared that they had continually considered the moments of joy and pride as the highlights of their teaching experience. They shared how those moments made their job more enjoyable and their sometimes not-so-good days go fast. The participants' passion towards the teaching profession, specifically teaching Chinese language and culture, was evident in all the moments they described their joy and pride. The moments could be small, but made differences in their lived experiences, and sometimes transformed their experiences to the better. The China-born Chinese teachers experienced joy and pride when their effort of fostering a positive teacher-student relationship was validated and rewarded. They shared how students were able to have fun while learning in their classroom, which helped them to consider their profession as part of a great cause instead of a job. For many, simple experiences of joy happened every day.



The China-born Chinese teachers gained joy and pride derived from students' responses to the Chinese language and culture. Students' responses, often positive, provided the participants with the willingness to teach the target language and culture, opportunities to witness students' progress, and the reputation earned from students' public accomplishments. A positive teacher-student relationship was important to the participants, although it was not a commonly expected occurrence to the China-born Chinese teachers. The teachers, influenced by the Confucius teaching of establishing authority in the classroom, combined with a rigid rote-memorization strategy, discovered the joy of having a positive teacher-student relationship.

The deep feelings of joy and pride were amplified when students expressed interest in learning more than what was taught, and went above and beyond to learn the language and culture of China. The participants experienced confirmation of their career choice and an enormous amount of pride of being a Chinese. These participants were passionate to teach about China. In the process of teaching, they fostered positive relationships with their students, giving way to prideful moments. One participant expressed that his positive relationships with his students flourished when they were "sincerely interested" in him, his culture and language. He further implied it was common for one to share about him or herself, but it made the other person feel important and his or her opinions matter when we dug into others' worlds and tried to see their perspectives.

**The participants had to face and become familiar with a profound amount of impediments in the United States, to which they then had to adjust.** Upon facing barriers, the participants reflected, came to understanding, and made sense of their lived experiences—their reflections and challenges they faced. For China-born Chinese teachers, pedagogical differences in the classroom and cultural differences in the society were the main barriers with which they

had to become familiar with and then had to adjust to upon their arrival, living, and teaching. Varied accounts of rich and detailed descriptions of their lived experiences allowed this theme to emerge naturally. The differences—pedagogically and culturally, presented an overwhelming amount of challenges to the participants. The adjustment and making sense brought out a mixture of emotions—shock, surprise, disappointment, and sadness. The variations in teaching pedagogy and culture impeded the participants from truly enculturating into the American society. It was profound because the vivid descriptions of the participants' day-to-day living indicated the differences might have had a huge impact on their living and teaching, which challenged them in their reflections and making sense of their lived experiences.

The first essential experience the researcher noticed was that pedagogical differences such as teaching approach and student behavior presented much surprise and difficulty to the participants. One participant shared her perspective while comparing her experiences of teaching in an American public school and a Chinese language school managed by Chinese immigrants, and another participant described her challenges facing pedagogical differences. The second participant also mentioned that although her Chinese characteristics prepared her well mentally in teaching, she had to consciously and consistently disassociate herself from her China-trained Chinese teaching background. The participants recognized that some of the most commonly used teaching strategies and practices did not necessarily work well in America. The participants expressed their constant struggles to teach like America-born teachers.

One of the most noteworthy reflections the participants had was giving recognition to the notion that the influence their Chinese culture had on their teaching approach, presented barriers in the classroom. One participant recognized that she experienced a smoother transition

compared to most of her China-born colleagues due to her prior interactions with Americans, but expressed her constant challenges with classroom management.

All six participants stated although they had either received training or had prior knowledge on student behavior in American classroom, the vastness of differences between China and the United States were unexpected. That vastness created a hindrance in them promoting a positive classroom environment. The researcher considered the prior theme of participants gaining joy and pride from positive student-teacher relationships, which is the foundation for fostering a positive classroom environment. Although most participants experienced the positivity in relationships, a positive classroom environment is not consistent due to the “freedom” American students feel in the classrooms. One participant conveyed, “teaching in the classroom is the most respected career in China, students are trained to 100% obey their instructors.” Therefore, the participants never witnessed students’ objecting to their opinions about text book content, unless it was a slip of the tongue. Although all participants gained knowledge of how an American classroom was supposed to operate through their training, and provided opportunities to students to share their opinions if they thought differently about a specific topic, the participants still required everyone to write the exact thing that was taught on the exam.

The closeness or the bond between the teacher and the students was difficult for the participants to get used to. Two participants shared their frustration towards student’ comments about them being “too distant.” The participants felt they sacrificed their personal time to share with their family and chose to teach in a foreign country, therefore, it was not their responsibility to “care about their students outside of the classroom.” The participants later realized that mindset hindered them from having truly meaningful relationships with their students.

Additionally, their Chinese background and beliefs did not afford them the mental freedom to initiate that closeness. The authoritarian influence such as their elders and mentors taught them to emphasize the importance of respect, and the teachers thought that respect could only be earned through forming and keeping distance. Students' outspokenness towards teachers was another observation the participants were surprised by. To the participants, the fact the students even made comments about their teachers were hard to fathom. Prior to teaching in America, the participants observed that all students in Chinese classrooms mute their voice through the whole semester because they were trained not to speak their minds and not to raise any conversation that had an opposite or different opinion to the instructor's teaching. The participants were very surprised by the responsive learning environment in the United States.

All participants expressed their disbelief and disappointment when facing the students' parents. The participants felt that disciplining students was an important and necessary part of learning, but based on their negative experiences due to parents' reactions to their discipline, they would be hesitant before disciplining students, which might impede their establishing a positive classroom environment. Additionally, unrealistic expectations from parents made the participants doubt their identities and respect in the classroom. The participants pointed out their frustration and disappointment towards the lack of mutual trust between them and the parents. The researcher noticed how this essential experience was the most hurtful and disappointing to the China-born Chinese teachers. The participants were puzzled and offended and eventually became outraged when facing unrealistic expectations from some parents. One participant's encounter with a parent is a great representation of why the participants' attitude towards parents are so negative.

The participants were emotional when they described their interactions with parents. It was clear for the researcher to see the hurt in their eyes. They expressed no matter how much they tried, parents just simply did not trust them. They started to wonder if their foreignness had anything to do with that distrust, and they started to doubt their own identity and wondered if they ever would be able to establish their proper roles in the classrooms. Along the same line with parent expectations, the participants experienced language barriers that hindered their effective communication with the parents and frustration on feeling being misunderstood, which resulted in their negative reactions from critique and suggestions.

The essential experience of burden to live abroad shadowed the second themes of impediments to which the China-born Chinese teachers had to face and with which they had to become familiar with and then had to adjust. The essential experience was drawn from the comments of the participants. The participants shared that there was always the feeling within them that they did not fit culturally into the American society because of their foreignness. This experience was drawn from the detailed comments of the China-born Chinese teachers—the difficulties of living in another country, which affected their way of thinking and comfort of life. Hofstede (1991) highlighted how one's cultural background can significantly affect his or her thinking and daily practice. For China-born Chinese teachers, recognizing their Chinese background and its impact on teaching approach and methodology was a challenging but giant leap forward. The teachers realized and accepted that feelings of anxiety and discomfort were common when experiencing conflicts between their cultural background and the culture of the host country. What one educational system expects and values does not necessary have importance in another society, hence obtaining intercultural competency and skills for intercultural communication is essential for living and teaching in a foreign country.

One participant expressed his feeling of being judged about his foreignness by his colleagues. Judging another based on one's own culture, like how the participant's colleagues judged him, was common. Hofstede concluded that differences existed among cultures; therefore, different ways of thinking, expectations, and perspectives were major barriers for one to understand another from a different culture (1999). Additionally, cultural differences existed beyond the country borders. Culture is the conceptual design, the definitions by which people order their lives, interpret their experience, and evaluate the behavior of others (Lingenfelter & Mayers, 1986). One's personal culture is an example of a micro culture existed within the societal culture. Therefore, the participant recognized that some of the enculturation challenges might have been generated from his own inflexibility and personality preferences.

Cultural differences had profound implications for the probability of conflict and the type of conflict that would develop between individuals and groups. The participants recognized that cultural background was constantly clashing and causing conflicts with their host country's culture. They provided key occurrences regarding the impediments they experienced as China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. Those sometimes unpleasant experiences inspired the participants to reflect on the pedagogical and cultural differences between China and the United States, and came to the common understanding that living in America as a foreigner was not for the faint-hearted. Settling down in a new country and being introduced to a new workplace involves not only adjusting to the normal rearrangements such as climate, nutrition and place of residence, but also the necessity to adjust to new work tasks and the local culture (Blom, 2002). In order to succeed in their new teaching assignments, China-born Chinese teachers must face the major challenge of learning how to interact effectively in a completely new environment where people think, feel, and act differently and often speak a different language (Tarique, 2009).

Although the participants experienced enormous amount of impediments due to pedagogical and cultural differences, they managed to cope and sought continuous effort to enculturate into the American society. The participants' views and daily practices were challenged and altered, but they recognized the necessity for that to occur in the process of enculturation. At times, they were seen as foreigners, feeling left out of the school community, but through cultural understanding and communicating, they were able to achieve success in the classrooms. All participants were stunned at student behavior in American schools, but able to quickly respond appropriately through daily practice and observing others.

### **Implications**

The results clearly indicated that China-born Chinese teachers gained joy and pride deriving from students' responses to the Chinese language and culture. The teachers felt joy at seeing students learn under their teaching. Joy was experienced when the teachers witnessed achievements and progress from their students. Continuous and consistent interest towards the Chinese language and culture contributed to the teachers' feelings of both joy and pride. Having developed and maintained a positive student-teacher relationship was vital to the joy of teaching. Positive narratives of the teachers' experiences originated from pride in students and feelings of success at seeing students move forward in their language acquisition and mastery. Great joy was witnessed when students demonstrated self-initiated and life-long learning abilities and principles. Positivity emanated from each participant when discussing student attitude towards the teachers and the subject area. The teachers' attitude of positivity stemmed from the students' positive responses to the language and culture.

The China-born Chinese teachers described their contextual perspective as being a major influencer to their classroom decisions, especially the initial decision to teach in the United

States. The contextual perspective was not only related to their educational but familial background. The majority of the participants expressed the influence their family members placed on their decision to become a teacher in the first place, and having had a mentor who modeled behaviors of dedication, support, and inspiration was crucial in their classroom success. The joy of achieving one's personal and professional goal was an important contributor to the teachers' satisfaction regarding their career choice as most of them expressed the desire to promote linguistic and cultural exchange between China and the United States. The China-born Chinese teachers were studied by ways of rich, detailed interviews, and the teachers described the level of hope and influence generated from the family, which in turn provided that empowering attitude to achieve and inspire. Reflecting on prior research and the lived experiences of the China-born Chinese teachers, the implication stood that factors like family, mentorship, education, professional goals, and personal desire were all fundamental influences while teaching in the host country of the United States.

Other implications from this study involved the day-to-day living experiences and impediments that the China-born Chinese teachers faced every day. The barriers generated from uncertainty towards a new culture, burden to adjust and enculturate, unexpected differences between the Chinese and American school systems and class management, teaching approach and pedagogical differences. Two barriers particularly notable were parent support and classroom management. All six participants described their struggles with lack of parent support or excessive parent involvement, which impeded their daily practice of teaching. Student behavior in the American classroom was unexpected by the China-born Chinese teachers, who were used to larger class sizes but a quieter classroom environment. However, the teachers were able to adjust their expectations and management strategies to create a positive learning



environment. The adjustments required the China-born Chinese teachers to step outside of their comfort zone and seek effective strategies to best manage student behavior in the classroom. Most importantly, the teachers became aware and quickly recognized that prior expectations and inflexibility hindered their classroom success.

Although it was not an emphasized essential experience, several of the China-born Chinese teachers described their lack of meaningful friendships within the schools they taught. China, a country that operated largely on *guanxi* put much emphasis on networking. For the teachers, lacking the *guanxi* put them in an in-between place, where they had to initiate a continuous network of aid and backing to help them navigate obstacles. Some still struggled to seek and manage that network. The data collected from the interviews indicated that China-born Chinese teachers not only needed to have intercultural competency and a support network but also the ability to fit flexibly into the culture of the host country.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in American classrooms. The research study explored the impact of influence, culture, and context on the China-born Chinese teachers' experiences in the host country of the United States. The China-born Chinese teachers faced enormous amount of impediments during their enculturation process to the United States. The teachers needed to be aware of and be sensitive to and appreciate the American culture. Teachers also need to appreciate, understand, and celebrate the cultural differences by obtaining intercultural competency and displaying empathy and flexibility when teaching and living in the United States. The United States, a highly individualistic society, values differences and different styles of learning in the classroom; therefore, China-born Chinese teachers needed to adjust their expectations, teaching approach and pedagogy to obtain success in the classroom.

## **Recommendations**

The findings drawn from this study can be used as a foundation for further studies. This study initiated interest in the severely understudied area—the living and teaching of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States. The researcher dug deeply into the lived experiences of the teachers and provided a channel for their voices to be heard. The China-born Chinese teachers experienced excitement and shock, along with other emotions when they initially came to the United States. Facing many cultural differences and difficulties, the teachers had to become familiar with the differences and then learn how to adjust to them. A study on the China-born Chinese teachers' initial perceptions of American culture and how their perceptions have changed after some time could be done in the future to yield a deeper understanding of the thoughts and reflections of this group of teachers.

As teaching Chinese increasingly becomes a mainstream profession and an independent academic discipline, the recommendation would be to address some of the general concerns of learning the unique properties of the Chinese language, such as how to write Chinese characters in balance and how to how to pronounce Chinese pinyin more culturally. The hope is for curriculum writers to create the infrastructure for the development of effective and sustainable Chinese language programs for American students in the future.

Chinese teaching in the United States is not a simple matter of education; rather, it is closely bound up with the blending of political and economic development, culture, and ideology (Luo, 2016). Gu (2009) suggested that the seeming absence of the underlying psychological themes in Chinese literature only served to highlight the differences between Chinese culture and its Western counterpart and confirmed the greater emotional repression in Chinese culture founded on the deep-rooted Confucian moral system. An in-depth study to explore the potential

effective coping, adjusting, and teaching strategies specifically designed to target China-born Chinese teachers in the United States would provide insight for teacher training programs prior to the teachers' arrivals. It would also bring mental awareness and skillful readiness to unexpected obstacles.

During the past few decades China has undergone enormous political, economic, and demographic changes that have transformed the realities of migration to and from the country. The migration of professionals, executives, technicians and other highly skilled personnel seeking better employment prospects and lifestyle in the American labor market is increasing every year (Ip, Hibbins & Chui, 2006; Collins, 2001). Providing the constant business interactions between the two worlds, there is an increasing need to understand the East versus West culture differences (Adler, 1993). An extended study to investigate the lived experiences of expatriates, not only the teachers, but professionals who work in other subject areas in the United States, would generate a lot of interest from the Chinese community and organizations. The potential study could highlight both the challenges and the "gifts" of living abroad, and inspire those who live cross-culturally to be open-minded and resourceful.

The ideal of the American dream attracted several of the participants to immigrate to the United States. The definition of the American dream inspires one to pursue a life that is "better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" regardless of social class or circumstances of birth (Adams, 1931). The China-born Chinese teachers, as the "model minority," had tried immensely hard to achieve the American Dream (Bligh & Pearce, 2014). A further study to investigate the meaning of the American Dream from the perspective of the teachers would be beneficial to the educational world.

The study not only sets a strong foundation for future research, the findings directly drawn from the interviews also helped the researcher to provide specific recommendations for the practitioners.

Hanban, the largest non-government and non-profit Chinese agency that sends China-born Chinese teachers to teach Chinese overseas, is generally charged with cultivating knowledge and interest in the Chinese language and culture in nations around the world whose residents are not native speakers of Chinese. In order to select qualified teachers to teach overseas, Hanban primarily recruits and selects graduates with a bachelor's degree or above, as well as postgraduate students and professional teachers. In order to qualify for the selection, all candidates must major in disciplines in the liberal arts such as Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, Chinese Linguistics and Literature, Foreign Languages, Education, History, or Philosophy. Before dispatching qualified teachers to teach overseas, all must receive a series of training. The training not only includes English comprehension and speaking, but also teaching pedagogy and strategies specifically focused on the uniqueness of the Chinese language. The candidates, motivated by a strong sense of "devotion, friendship, mutual help and progress" as well as a sense of honor, mission and responsibility in the career of teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages, are extremely enthusiastic about their service and mission (p. 37, An Asia Society Report, 2010). Oftentimes, the sense of enthusiasm can temporarily hinder one's ability from seeing the potential difficulties and from anticipating challenges ahead. None of the research participants recalled receiving training on cross-cultural competency nor being informed of the immediate challenges upon their arrival. Equipped with official training in China on teaching principles and pedagogy, few were aware of what it meant to teach in America prior to making their decision of teaching in America. Therefore, teachers need to consider and take

actions in order to make their teaching effective and assimilation and enculturation process seamless and efficient. For example, teachers can seek information regarding what the initial arrival experience is like from reading research findings such as these and published articles on the related topic, and gain abundant knowledge in order to mentally prepare themselves of the potential challenges and difficulties. Additionally, teachers can initiate communication with veteran overseas teachers and seek coping strategies of anticipated impediments. One also needs to reconsider their initial decision to teach in America, and reflect upon their individual needs versus others' prior experiences before committing to the mission of teaching in America.

In recent years, Hanban has recognized the teacher enculturation challenges through their teacher return surveys and teacher reflection reports, and increased its collaboration with both Chinese and foreign universities to establish numerous joint training opportunities for localized Chinese language teachers for foreign Chinese teaching. Although the current study could not gain access to the specific content of the training, the researcher believes the joint training needs to specifically focus on two main areas—one is to raise awareness of the cross-cultural living realities, such as cultural shock, enculturation challenges, and impediments teachers face in the classrooms and in society; the other is to organize structured practice and preparation on cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competency. A good example of such structured training would be sending potential candidates on a cultural tour to assess interest and intercultural competency prior to making their decision to teach overseas. A cultural tour that is embedded with local classroom visits for the teachers to observe a different educational culture and initiate conversations with veteran teachers would be most beneficial for the potential candidates.

One could imagine the confusion to evaluate a world language classroom when an administrator did not speak the target language. The findings of the study could also inspire

school administrators and evaluators to create a systematic and specific set of measurement tools to evaluate the China-born Chinese teachers' performance in schools. Additionally, school administrators could seek training opportunities and provide those opportunities to the China-born Chinese teachers to increase their linguistic, pedagogical and cultural competencies. Administrators could be proactive in supporting the China-born Chinese teachers by keeping the channel of communication open, and be quick to respond to needs when problems arise. The teachers desire to feel the sense of being American; therefore, demonstrating sincere interest in the teachers' lives in addition to their classroom performance is crucial in increasing trust and morale from the China-born Chinese teachers.

A joyful and proud China-born Chinese teacher is one who has opened his or her eyes and mind to witness student progress, achievement, and desire to learn more. Such teacher also enjoys having basic and in-depth conversations with their students. The study explored the teachers' lived experiences, and found both joy and challenge in enculturating into American society. The positive student-teacher relationship sustained them and inspired them to do more and better in and outside of their classrooms.

### **Concluding Comments**

The researcher made the decision to employ a qualitative, phenomenological approach to facilitate the study. This study aimed to understand the experiences of China-born Chinese teachers in the United States by capturing their day-to-day living experiences and interpreting the essence of the meaning that made up their experiences. To understand the multiple-layered meanings of the teachers' experiences, the seemingly inconsequential details of the teachers' teaching, living, and feelings needed to be captured.

Rather than conducting surveys that involved a large number of participants and hypothesizing that all teachers had certain common experiences, performing a qualitative study propelled the researcher to notice the “particulars” of an experience and made them “visible and conspicuous” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). Van Manen (2016) contended that phenomenology gravitated to “meaning and reflectivity” (p. 16). To discover the world in which the China-born Chinese teachers teach and live in the United States, the researcher completed a high volume of recording, interpretation, and extraction of meanings.

The literature review was the underpinning roadmap that allowed for conclusions to be drawn based on the lived experiences, then themes were allowed to emerge naturally. There was one research method that was used continuously and consistently during the entire research, that was the *epoché*—bracketing from one’s predetermined biases. The faithful practice of *epoché* was incorporated to validate the data and findings of the study. The researcher used transcripts of the interviews to interpret stated and obvious units of meaning, and relied on field notes to extract the implied essence of the experiences.

The researcher used Hyncer’s five-step method to allow the themes to emerge inductively (1999). The theme of joy and pride emerged when the participants witnessed students’ progress and achievements. A composite textural-structural descriptive outcome of developing a sense of accomplishment due to positive and strong relationships with the students was evident in a majority of the participants. The result demonstrated connections to prior experiences of working with Americans or American students. Additionally, flexibility and love for the children contributed to the feelings of joy and pride.

Another major theme—notable impediments, overlapped with research presented in the literature review. The majority of the China-born Chinese teachers had to become familiar with

and adjust to the cultural and pedagogical differences between the United States and China, especially during the initial stage upon arrival. Although all of the teachers received official training in China on teaching principles and pedagogy prior to their arrival in the United States, few were focused on the meaning of teaching in America. Many teachers attended language teaching conferences hosted by various Confucius Institutes in the United States. However, the majority of the conferences aimed to increase the level of effectiveness regarding strategies to promote student learning, but few focused on why some seemingly effective strategies may not be successful in American classrooms.

The China-born Chinese teachers, many being “the only child” in their families, sacrificed the advantage of living within a short distance from their family members. They missed their family and friends at home immensely, but the dream and feeling of being part of promoting cultural exchange between the United States and China not only sustained them but also inspired them to teach in the host country. Facing unexpected barriers and obstacles, the China-born Chinese teachers recognized the cultural and educational differences between the two countries and eventually embraced their journeys as part of the globalization experience.

Hofstede (1981) identified five cultural dimensions that distinguish countries from one another, and assigned each country a score on each dimension. By comparing the scores of dimensions between China and the United States, it is apparent that the two characterized the most differences in the dimensions of Individualism Verses Collectivism (IDV), Power Distance (PDI) and Long Term Verses Short Term Orientation (LTO). Coming from a country like China, a highly collectivistic society, the teachers were initially surprised by American student behavior in the classroom, but quickly recognized and adjusted their teaching styles to how students learned best. The teachers were overwhelmed by the questions from students, some sounding



quite challenging at times. The findings of the study recognized that the teachers found joy and pride when students asked questions because it demonstrated their interest in the language and culture. Parent involvement was rather frustrating to the China-born Chinese teachers. Teaching is a highly respected profession in China, where teachers receive the highest level of admiration from students and their parents. All participants expressed the lack of support from parents, ranging from creating excuses for their children's irresponsibility in completing tasks to questioning the teachers' abilities to teach and teach well due to language barriers.

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of China-born Chinese teachers teaching in the host country of the United States, tapping into the uncharted territory of research by listening to the stories of each participant to gain in-depth understanding of their lived experiences. The increasing globalization called for the teachers to gain awareness of cultural differences and obtain intercultural competency in order to gain success living and teaching in another country. China-born Chinese teachers needed to overcome many obstacles and barriers in order to gain the feeling of success in their classrooms. However, the joy and pride generated from their students helped them to overcome the negative experiences.

As a concluding thought for this research, the participants believed the compromise and negotiation they had to overcome were well worth the cost in becoming a more effective teacher. The participants often mentioned, "teaching is an art"—hopefully this time, it may work its magic.

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## Appendix A

### Letter of Participation

Ni Hao! I am a Chinese language teacher at Walton High School in Marietta, GA. I am writing to you because I am also a doctorate student at Bethel University pursuing a degree in Educational Leadership. My doctoral studies have led me to my dissertation topic—a phenomenological study entitled “Rice to Biscuits: An in-depth look at China-born Chinese teachers’ experiences in American classrooms.” A phenomenological study differs from the quantitative approach because data collection is accomplished by the process of interviewing participants to gain a deeper and firsthand understanding of the lived experience of being a China-born Chinese teacher in the United States.

The interview should take approximately sixty minutes of your time, and it is one-on-one basis via a video conferencing tool such as Skype. All information will be kept to the highest confidential standards. I have gained your contact information from the Chinese Language Teachers Association-USA, and I hope you will be interested in participating in the study.

I have attached an Informed Consent form to provide you detailed information regarding the procedures and participation. Please email me with any questions at: [rachelzhang19822002@yahoo.com](mailto:rachelzhang19822002@yahoo.com) or you can call me at: 203-260-8849.

Thank you for your potential participation!

Sincerely,

Rachel Cook

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

My name is Rachel Cook, a doctorate student at Bethel University. I am conducting a phenomenological study titled “Rice to Biscuits: An in-depth look at China-born Chinese teachers’ experiences in American classrooms.” The consent form offers detailed information regarding your voluntary participation. You can stop the interview at any time and/or not answer any question without any repercussions. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

#### *Purpose of the Research*

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences in the classroom for China-born Chinese language teachers in the United States. Since a qualitative research is designed with the premise of evolving methodology to produce themes for inquiry and explorations, the current research study will dig deep into the impact of culture and context on the China-born Chinese teachers’ abilities and experiences to provide effective teaching in the host country of the United States.

#### *Research Procedures*

The interview will occur in the privacy of an online chatroom. The interview will take approximately sixty minutes and will be audio taped. I will ask a series of open ended, predetermined questions relating to the overarching theme of the phenomenological study, and I may ask follow up questions allowing you to clarify or elaborate if necessary. Once the interview is finished, I will transcribe the interview and ask you to review the transcription for accuracy and clarifications.

#### *Potential Risks for Participants and Means to Resolving/Managing Those Risks*



Research adds to the field of knowledge. Therefore, by participating in this study, you will be directly contributing to the field of knowledge and gain information pertaining to the experience of being a China-born Chinese teacher in the United States. However, there are potential risks for you if you choose to participate in this study.

1) Privacy – Minimal—however, the researcher will display the following precautions that are putting in place to minimize it.

The researcher will honor the participants' privacy by protecting their identities; therefore, the use of aliases for the participants will be put into place. Each interview will be letter-coded to avoid identifying information that might link to the participant. The researcher will ensure that anonymity will be kept at all times. The researcher will not relate specific information about individuals to others. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the participants will remain confidential. Additionally, participants will have the right to review or edit interview audios and transcripts. Audiotapes will be downloaded from the recording device and will be limited solely to the researcher to access. The audio tracks will be stored on a password protected removable media, and the transcripts and any other written communication will be archived on non-networked, off-site removable media. The recording device, audio tapes, removable media and the transcripts will be kept in a locked and secure place for seven years after the occurrences of the interviews. After seven years, all information will be corrupted and destroyed.

2) Sensitive information – Minimal—participants could be reminded of difficult situations and may become emotional. However, you have the option of not answering a question that is too uncomfortable.

*Confidentiality*

Participation in the study is voluntary. Thus, as a participant you may opt out at any time. As a researcher, I am held to the highest standard regarding confidentiality. I have received my Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative modules certificate (CITI) declaring I have completed all of the necessary coursework pertaining to ethical and confidential practices when conducting a human subject study. The participant's confidentiality will be preserved by removing identifying information to each participant. Names will not be kept with the audio tapings. Pseudonyms will be used. Audio files and transcriptions will be kept on a jump drive and locked for seven years and then destroyed.

### *Participant Consent*

By signing the informed consent, I understand that I am a voluntary participant in this study. I am an informed, consenting participant. I have read the entire consent form. If I have questions or concerns, I will contact the researcher. I freely agree to participate in the study under the terms and conditions outlined. I approve of the researcher using the interview data in accordance with the conditions outlined. Consent can be revoked at anytime. This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel University's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research related injury, please call me at 203.260.8849, email me at [rachelzhang19822002@yahoo.com](mailto:rachelzhang19822002@yahoo.com), or my research advisor Dr. Mary Schulze Michener at [mary-michener@bethel.edu](mailto:mary-michener@bethel.edu).

Participant:

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

#### *Introduction to Study*

1. The researcher will explain the procedure of the study, which includes the purpose of the study, confidentiality, ethics, and so on.
2. The researcher will ask the participant if they have any questions prior to each interview.

#### *Introductory Questioning*

1. How long have you been teaching at your current school?
2. How long have you been teaching in the United States prior to teaching at this school?

#### *Interview Questions*

##### Category I: Influences

1. What experiences have guided you to who you are today as a Chinese language teacher?
2. Are there early influences that you experienced that made you the teacher you are today?
3. What conditions have allowed you to be successful in your current position?

##### Category II: Teaching

4. Explain your teaching pedagogy and approach.
5. What aspects of being a teacher bring you joy or pride?
6. What made you decide to be a teacher in the United States?
7. What unexpected obstacles, if any, do you face teaching in the United States?
8. How has the situation of teaching in the United States changed your teaching style?
9. If you had the opportunity to turn back time, would you change any of the decisions you have made in your teaching career?

##### Category III: Culture

10. How have your culture and/or background shaped how you teach?
11. How do your cultural beliefs shape how you teach in the United States? Does this create any barriers or opportunities?
12. Have you experienced any cultural situations that have surprised you?
13. What kind of things in life, if any, do you have to sacrifice in order to teach in America?
14. What advice would you give to a new-to-America China-born Chinese teacher in order to succeed in teaching in the United States?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

*Closing*

1. Thank the participant for his or her the time.
2. Remind participants of the confidentiality.
3. Explain the next steps. Contact will be made again in the form of member checks. The participant will be asked to read the transcription to clarify information and opinions regarding accuracy.