BECOMING A BI-CULTURAL TEACHER: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE STORIES OF CHINESE TEACHERS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

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This study is about Chinese teachers who work and live in the American landscape. This is a narrative inquiry into the professional experience of three Chinese teachers, including myself, who became bi-cultural teachers within two vastly different landscapes. It involves the telling, retelling, and reliving of my experiences and those of my co-participants in America and examines how our Chinese cultural and educational experience shaped our teaching identities.

From our narratives, I illustrate the ways in which my co-participants encountered, adapted into, worked within what were novel roles as teachers, as well as gained new perspectives on teaching. I drew on our stories to find themes in the development of our hybrid teacher identities. Our narratives demonstrate an evolution that connected our identities as Chinese teachers with how we saw ourselves professionally, culturally, and personally and who we were – our identities in America. We began to realize that our past is part of our present and future. Learning to teach in two landscapes that have different cultural norms and educational beliefs, we began to look forward.
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I owe thanks to my co-participants, who trusted me with their stories and permitted me an opportunity to share in their lives.

I’m indebted to my family and friends in America and China for their warmth, love, support, and encouragement as I made my way through this dissertation journey.
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PROLOGUE: HERE AND THERE

Water is taught by thirst
Land, by the oceans passed
Peace is taught by its battles cold
Love, by memorial mold
The past isn’t what
has vanished. No,
It’s what belongs to us.

(Anonymous)
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It was one of those beautiful afternoons in Beijing. I was sitting by the window in a “trendy” Starbucks close to downtown. I call it “trendy” because the customers ranged from high school students wearing school uniforms to foreigners who worked in the international companies nearby. If I could use a word to describe this Starbucks now, I would use “cosmopolitan” – a politically and culturally proper word to describe it. At that time, without knowing much about “diversity” and globalization, I named it “trendy.” I didn’t often come to Starbucks, partly because I like tea no matter how “cosmopolitan” I might be, and partly because its “globalized” coffee price often made my Chinese wallet cry. However, in that afternoon I chose to sit in Starbucks enjoying some coffee and sunshine because I wanted to meet my best friend before heading for Chicago.

The people who sat next to our table were Americans. I knew it because their American accent reminded me of Voice of America – a radio station that I listened to almost everyday. Maybe even more importantly, though, they reminded me of a beloved American teacher I had back in college. Her name was Carolyn. We all loved her. She not only taught us how to enjoy American literature but also opened a window for the colorful American culture that ranges far beyond Hollywood movies. Due to this, I immediately felt connected to these Americans who sat next to me, though they were total strangers.

It was at that moment, while speaking with my friend, that I realized I was caught between my past and my future. Suddenly I felt that she was becoming my past, though our
friendship would last forever. Starbucks, on the other hand, was like a rehearsal for my upcoming American life.

Over twenty something hours later, my flight landed at Chicago O’Hare International Airport. The first thing that I noticed after stepping off the plane was that I became a “foreigner”, being overshadowed by “blonde hair” and “blue eyes.” My black eyes and hair had never made me feel different and alien. I was tired and starving after the long flight. I needed to find something to eat. There were so many restaurants at the airport, but none of them was familiar to me. I didn’t know a thing about the food they offered and I didn’t even know how to order food here. Ms. Carolyn did teach us the names of some American food and showed their pictures to us, but I was too starved to remember anything from her class. Finally, a familiar name caught my attention – McDonalds, a name that you can see almost anywhere in a Chinese city. My starving Chinese stomach couldn’t wait. I rushed to McDonalds and ordered a spicy chicken sandwich, my favorite sandwich that I always ordered in McDonalds when I was in Shanghai. At that moment, for an unknown reason, McDonalds, an American fast food restaurant made me feel like home.

What this Study is About: An Overview

This is a narrative inquiry that situates the reader in a narrative space of experience that features time, people, and place between a continual re-finding of identity and being. In this narrative inquiry, I embark on an investigation into the transformation of teacher identity through personal experience, applying both multicultural and cross-cultural lenses for the purpose of analysis. This helps to not only illustrates the movement of the border-crossing teacher from
“nowhere” to “now here,” from a sense of disorientation to a configuration of place, but also investigates the stories of working in a particular place, “the environing conditions” (Dewey, 1938, p. 35), from where experience originates.

Situated within the recent scholarships on narrative inquiry and cultural identity, this inquiry is about the stories of Chinese language teachers living and working in the United States. The lives of three Chinese language teachers both inside and outside of the classrooms were examined in order to capture understandings, interpretations, and the defining of teachers’ multiply constructed roles and identities as instructors and communicators of Chinese culture in a changing socio-cultural context.

This narrative inquiry explores the complex interrelationships between culture and language teaching, between teaching practices and teachers’ socio-cultural identities. It is designed to reveal the lived experiences of teachers dwelling in changing cultural contexts as they intersect with historical and social structures of culture and difference. It examines how Chinese language teachers negotiate emerging identities of empowerment as they teach in a new landscapes. Through investigating how the interweaving of global educational landscapes leads to the transformation of cross-cultural teacher identity, this study demonstrates how experiences of teaching in the cross-cultural context influence the ongoing negotiation of identity as the teacher constantly encounters the cultural borders. By using a life-history narrative methodology to report on lived experiences and the linkage between culture and language teaching and learning, this study examines how the epistemological impact of foreign language teachers’ exposure to language strangeness, educational strangeness, and cultural strangeness all influence the way they teach and construct their emerging cross-cultural identities as well as how teachers’
social-cultural identities, understandings, and practices are negotiated and transformed over time as they cross personal and national borders.

This is a life-history narrative inquiry with two co-participants. This inquiry has three Chinese language teachers including me, the researcher, as the main research participant. In this inquiry, I offer not only my own narrative that unfolds my perceptions of cross-cultural experiences but also document the negotiation of teachers’ socio-cultural identities and personal and professional growth in the changing cultural spheres. By using narratives, my co-participants and I co-construct an account of experiences that contributed to our progress towards being and becoming teachers in the United States. The nomadic movement across borders in both our personal and professional development is expressed through our narratives. Each distinct location of our narrative documents a unique path towards the construction of our teacher identity. Each of our unique cross-border journeys emphasizes not only our strong links between East and West but also the importance of personal meaning-making in the construction of our professional identity.

**Purpose of the Study**

Set against the shifting cultural landscape of a globalization, the principal purpose of this study is to examine how my co-participants and I construct and re-construct our identities through our cross-cultural experiences during our journey of learning to teach in a global context. It aims to understand the construction and integration of the cross-cultural teacher identity of Chinese language teachers and examines how our cross-border experiences shift our identities as persons and teachers, investigating not only how our teacher identity forms, but also how it may have changed over time and place. My primary intent throughout this inquiry is to
unpack our narratives and explore how they influence our identity formation in a foreign cultural landscape. The focus of this study is on foreign language teachers’ experiences of enculturation (acquisition of first culture) and acculturation (learning of second or additional culture) (Herskovits, 1958) in both China and the United States.

In order to capture the perspective of individuals’ lived experience, my co-participants’ and my own life stories, cultural backgrounds, cross-border learning and teaching experiences, and the Confucian moralities and educational beliefs that are instilled in us are depicted through narratives. By using narrative inquiry, I investigate the fluidity and complexity of cross-border experiences in the broader landscape of language, culture, and society and view the construction of teacher identity as a process of becoming. This study is meant to evolve into a deeper, richer, and more expository understanding of the participants regarding who we were, who we are, and who we will become.

**Research Questions**

This is a narrative inquiry into the experience of my co-participants and myself as we engage with and define ourselves in the context of becoming and being a Chinese teacher in the United States. In this study I attempt to gain insight into how cross-cultural teaching experiences, the cultural resources, and intercultural teaching contexts may influence Chinese language teachers’ navigation within and against American school settings and create emerging teacher identities. I started my inquiry with the intention of understanding our changing identities and changing lives as Chinese language teachers within different landscapes and documenting the complexity of working in a foreign educational system. At the onset of the investigation, one overarching question has motivated my thinking about my narrative inquiry of
our cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities: What does it mean and feel like to become bi-cultural teachers moving among different landscapes? This is the key research question that guides this study.

Following on from this overarching research question, I developed several research questions and narrowed them down to the following particular research questions based on the four-directional model (inward/outward; backward/forward) proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). 1) How do Chinese language teachers understand and position themselves in the context of American schools? 2) How do Chinese language teachers make sense of and adapt to American cultures of schooling? 3) How do the life histories of Chinese language teachers affect the way that they understand their roles as teachers? 4) What are the goals and hopes that Chinese language teachers have for their future and development?

While the main goal of this inquiry was on the trajectory of Chinese language teachers’ journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers and emerging teacher identities among multiple landscapes, these particular research questions served to inform and shape the focus and scope of this study covering the four dimensions of space (inward/outward/backward/forward). Inward: this study interrogates teachers’ beliefs, feelings, and moral dispositions as cross-cultural subjectivity. Outward: it focuses on their relationships with cultural others. Backward: it shows the nostalgia for the past. Forward: it expresses their development and hopes over time in another culture. Table 1 shows each research question and dimension of space.
Table 1

*Research Questions for Study*

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**How I Came to this Study: Researcher Reflection**

My motivation to conduct this study stems both from my personal journey as a stranger in the United States and my growing intellectual curiosity and excitement with regard to the topic of cross-cultural teacher identity. The origin of this study can be traced to my trip to New York City in 2007. When my friend Wumei and I talked excitedly about our upcoming New York trip we didn’t expect that we would be given an opportunity to investigate our cross-cultural identity. When the subway took us to Flushing (a Chinatown in NYC) both of us were shocked by what we saw and experienced. The subway line 7 is like a magic line that took us back and forth switching between Manhattan and Flushing, between being American and Chinese. The magic line inspired us to share our feelings about what it means to be Chinese while living in the United States and where our cross-border identity may come from. No matter whether in the United States or in China, we found that wherever we went we always felt strange
and different. The strangeness we experienced in China, in the United States, and back in China made us feel dislocated; as if we are trapped in an in-between culture or a third space (Bhabha, 1994) in which we felt neither Chinese nor American. Who are we? What have our border-crossing experiences got to do with the construction of our identities at work, or in life? Can this sense of being in-between fully express the fluidity and complexity of our cross-border experiences? How do our cross-border experiences affect the way we construct our personal and professional identities? A quest for the answers to these questions brings me to this study.

**Why Does this Study Matter: The Significance of the Study**

Under the influence of globalization, border-crossing teaching experiences, either culturally or geographically are growing in number among members of the teaching profession. Although more and more teachers opt for working overseas as the globalization of education grows (Hinchcliff, 2000), very few cross-cultural education narratives make it into the academic literature. Few works have connected the trajectory of identity formation of foreign teachers with the shifting social and cultural contexts, and little attention has been paid to the personally challenging and transformative processes that teachers experience while living in globalized communities (Alfred, 2003). It’s the value of this study to expand the boundaries of cross-cultural education by inviting teachers to offer their voices to the processes of international education.

I hope that this study results in an expanded cultural and professional understanding of how cross-cultural teachers can contribute to the development of teaching in culturally diverse school settings and within the wider context of a global world (Cushner & Brennan, 2007a). Their cross-cultural journey between schools and curricula in their native countries and those on
a foreign landscape will shed light on the development of global education and broaden our understanding of teaching across cultures.

In order to enrich our understandings of cross-cultural pedagogy, we need to pay special attention to teachers’ experiential knowledge with reference to cross-cultural encounters in teaching. Teachers and any other person with a shared interest in intercultural education or schooling may benefit from this study which aims at facilitating an understanding of the personalized and contextualized teaching experiences of border-crossing teachers.

Through understanding a deep contextualization of intercultural educational experiences it can also contribute to the literature on cross-cultural teaching and learning within various cultures. The strength of this narrative inquiry is not to facilitate excellence or proficiency in cross-cultural teaching, but rather, to inspire cross-cultural educators and others who are interested in working in international contexts to reflect on their own cross-cultural practices and foster a multicultural focus in their educational or cultural practices. With interpretive and transformative intention, it’s my hope and ambition for this study to have a hermeneutic capacity that inspires readers to make their personal interpretations, reflect on their personal transformations, and then present a sense of agency in their teaching and life.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the literature which, along with personal experience, lead to the formation of the research questions in this study, starting with the key question, What does it mean and feel like to become bi-cultural teachers moving among different landscapes? It is the intent of this chapter to illustrate perspectives found in literature on teacher identity that explore the cultural and social landscape of teacher identity construction in the global context.

The Formation of Identity and Border-crossing Teachers

I started this inquiry with the intention of finding theories in the literature to help me understand Wumei’s, Xiaotian’s and my cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities in the global context. In order to understand how teachers understand and position themselves in the global context (Research Question 1), it is crucial to discuss the ways in which teachers’ experiences and their social-cultural and learning backgrounds have shaped their identities (Research Question 2), where they were from (Research Question 3), and where they were going (Research Question 4). To bring out teachers’ personal experiences and social-cultural backgrounds in relation to identities, multiple theoretical frameworks are needed with which teachers’ identities could be examined in relations with others within the global context.

Focusing on different aspects of identity such as cultural identity and professional identity, researchers have adopted a variety of perspectives to study identity. In this study I will draw from various theories in order to illustrate a fusion of theoretical perspectives pertaining to border-crossing teachers’ development of dynamic identity in foreign cultural contexts.
Due to the uncertainty produced by rapid change through communications technology, the global economy (Menter et al., 1995) and a corporate culture that dismantles traditional patterns of social life, a new consciousness called identity theory (Casey, 1995; Gergen, 1991) has in recent years brought renewed attention to the identity problematic. Contemporary authors tend to see identity not as a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon. The construct of identity occurs in an inter-subjective field and can be best characterized as an ongoing process in which one interprets himself/herself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context (Gee, 2001).

There are many things that we need to know about identity, but at least one thing may be clear — “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis” (Mercer, 1990, p. 43). As Saul Bellow noted in 1987, our old forms of identity have worn out and the new ones have not yet been born. In a time when many people are caught between the decline of old identities and the new identities are in the process of becoming or yet to be born, when what is alien in a large sense represents otherness, when the “self” becomes the repository of our pride, our fears and anxieties, identity is not only in crisis but also problematic.

Weeks (1990) argues that identity is about belonging. It is not only about the individuality, but also about the complex social relationships with others. Drawing on the work of Goffman (1959), Jenkins (1996) also claims that individual identity is generated in the relationship between personal self and public self.

Identity is also conceived as a process of defining and redefining, not only ourselves but also others throughout life and in different social contexts. This implies a degree of reflexivity across shifting contexts (Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Hewitt, 1989; Jenkins, 1996; Lash &
Friedman, 1992). In this sense, identity can be characterized by fluidity and continuous change and becomes a “constant social negotiation that can never be permanently settled or fixed, occurring as it necessarily does within the irreconcilable contradictions of situational and historical constraints” (Britzman, 1992, p.42).

What these various perspectives on identity have in common is the idea that identity forms in relation to major structural features of society; people have multiple identities and they are fluid, situated and negotiated in different social contexts and through different ways. In this study, the term “identity” is employed to mean “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5), and constructs the four research questions: 1) How do Chinese language teachers understand and position themselves in the context of American schools? This asks in Norton’s terms, “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world.” 2) How do Chinese language teachers make sense of and adapt to American cultures of schooling? This asks in Norton’s terms, “how the relationship is constructed across time and space.” 3) How do the life histories of Chinese language teachers affect the way that they understand their roles as teachers? This asks in Norton’s terms, “how the relationship is constructed across time and space.” 4) What are the goals and hopes that Chinese language teachers have for their future and development? This asks in Norton’s terms, “how the person understands possibilities for the future.”
Teacher Identity

Palmer (1998) argues that the essence of teaching is not the particular method that one uses, but the extent to which one incorporates his/her sense of identity into the teaching.

In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood-and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning... Bad teachers distance themselves from the subject they are teaching-and in the process, from their students. Good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life. (p. 505)

Nias (1989) also noticed the importance of teacher identity in teaching. “[Teachers] self image is more important to them as practitioners than is the case in occupations where the person can easily be separated from the craft” (p. 202-203). What Nias implies here is the intricate relationship between teacher’s personal identity and teacher development. Danielewicz (2001) seems to have a similar idea by saying that teacher development is seen as part of the process of transformative reimagining of the self. If we see teacher identity as the manifestation of the individual’s self when it comes to teaching, the teacher identity then includes the teacher’s situational and personal identities that are relevant in the classroom.

Becoming a teacher involves the construction of a person’s identity. As Britzman (1992) indicates, teaching is more than just playing a role. It requires nothing less than identity construction to accomplish what it means to be and to become a teacher. Roles are flimsy and superficial, transitory and easily adopted or discarded. They are like ready-made clothes that one
can put on before class and take off after. Identities, however, require the commitment of self to teaching and is on the line every day.

Stigler and Hiebert (1999) argue that “cultural activities, such as teaching, are not invented full-blown but rather evolve over long periods of time in ways that are consistent with the stable web of beliefs and assumptions that are part of the culture’’ (p.87). In the Chinese context, cultural traditions particularly are seen as a crucial influence mediating the ways Chinese teachers function in both school and society. Cultural traditions provide teachers with the security to assert their professional identities and professional authority, both of which are necessary for them to maintain the cooperation of students in the pedagogic process (Beijaard et al., 2000; Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Kelchtermans, 1996; Zembylas, 2003).

**Self-image of the teacher.** Teachers’ self-image is determined by the way they perceive themselves and their roles in society (Combs et al.,1974). This perspective helps to explore the research question 1) How do Chinese language teachers understand and position themselves in the context of American schools? It is appropriate for exploring how teachers understand their relationship to the world.

The teacher’s job consists of many culturally and socially defined roles. The different roles leave a great deal of freedom for the teachers to carve out their own approach to the tasks assigned to the professional positions they have chosen to inhabit (Gudmundsdottir, 2001). This means that the very construction of these roles belongs as much to the context as they belong to the teacher.

**The essentialized American teacher identity.** Many scholars have been trying to answer the question of what it means to be a teacher in America. Some authors argue that being a
teacher has something to do with having enough practical experience upon which one can reflect (Clift, 1990). Some have asserted that being a teacher means to know the curricular content thoroughly, in other words, being a teacher means to be a subject matter expert (Ferguson & Womack, 1993; Goldhaber & Brewer, 1998). Others believe that being a good teacher not only means to be a pedagogical expert but also to be a critical thinker (Giroux, 1997; Shor, 1987).

Although different theorists have different ambitions in creating the image of the good teacher, many American teachers see themselves as a combination of subject matter experts, didactical experts and pedagogical experts (Beijaard et al., 2000; Kompf et al., 1996). In American society, many teachers see themselves as a “facilitator” sharing control and authority with students in the classrooms. This is an extension of cultural values of individualism and autonomy.

Many American teachers believe that the teachers’ work is to facilitate student social and emotional development as much as their academic development. Being able to do this gives teachers immense satisfaction and sustains them in more constrained and less humanistic teaching conditions (Lasky, 2005). Their capability to “make a difference”, to exercise some sort of power (Giddens, 1984) is something they are struggling with in the current politicized reform context that brings new professional expectations and professional tools.

The essentialized Chinese teacher identity. Contrary to the role of the American teacher as subject matter expert and pedagogical facilitator, teachers in China describe themselves as “gardeners” (yuán dīng). Traditionally, many teachers in China considered themselves to be caring, guiding, and helping. Teachers had authority over students. As knowledge receivers, students showed respect for teachers’ knowledge and gratitude for their
caring. One of the deeply held views of teaching in China is captured in the aphorism “to give a
glass of water, you need a bucket of water.” According to Paine (2000), this implies three core
tenets of teaching as commonly practiced in China.

1. The central aim of teaching is to provide knowledge for students. It is an act of
transmission, its movement unilateral. The teacher plays the leading role.

2. Knowledge, at the core of all teaching, is the most important requirement for a teacher.
An excellent teacher is distinguished by possessing an exceptional amount of knowledge.

3. Students are expected to receive the teacher’s knowledge as it is presented.
Construction or transformation of that knowledge is not an essential part of learning or teaching.
(p. 51)

Chinese teachers’ self-understanding about teaching is that of the virtuoso (Paine, 1990).
Their art is teaching. It is through the combination of their accomplishment of the necessary
knowledge of their subject and some personal teaching aesthetic that they can achieve
excellence. The virtuoso teacher is one who has so mastered the technical knowledge of the text
that she or he is able to transcend it, adding a piece of one’s own self, one’s own interpretation,
in organizing the presentation, communicating it (transmitting the knowledge), and rendering it
understandable for the audience. Traditionally, this was a goal for teachers in China. (Paine,
1990, p. 54).

When considering the influence of cultural traditions on Chinese teachers and
classrooms, Confucianism should be particularly kept in mind. Confucianism, the dominant
philosophy in China and one of the oldest philosophies in the world, laid strong emphasis on the
importance of education (Leung, 1999). As Eisner (1992) indicates: “When a particular ideology
becomes pervasive or has no competing alternative, it tends to become invisible” (p. 303). In a similar manner, Confucian philosophy is deeply rooted in the fabric of Chinese culture and education and has been practiced by Chinese in all social and educational dimensions subconsciously. For over 2000 years Confucianism has formed a broad and complex educational system in China which is centered on the established Confucian philosophy, epistemology, pedagogy, and the roles of the teacher.

For Chinese teachers, the Confucian tradition imposes high cultural expectations on them and allows the public to scrutinize and criticize teachers regarding these culturally expected norms. Many studies show that good Chinese teachers in the Chinese cultural tradition are expected not only to be experts in their disciplines but also caring figures to students (Gordon, 2000; Gao at el., 2006; Ouyang, 2003). They are also expected to possess the moral qualities to serve as role models and mentors for students (e.g. Gordon, 2000; Ouyang, 2003; Yang, 2004). In China, teachers are consistently portrayed as “soul engineers” who are responsible for cultivating moral qualities among students (e.g. Ouyang, 2003). They are also described as “silkworms”, who diligently spin silk thread till death, and “candles”, who selflessly burn themselves to light others (e.g. He, 2002). These metaphors underline the traditional perception of teachers and the teaching profession as altruistic and self-sacrificing.

Comparing the Essentialized American and Chinese Teacher Identities

Weber and Mitchell’s (1995) work has shown that teacher’s work cannot be separated from their perceptions of their professional roles. Teachers’ view of themselves are closely linked to the cultural contexts of their work. Culture shapes people’s values and perceptions
Teachers’ perceptions of themselves are shaped by the specific cultural contexts where the teaching and learning takes place (Ramsden, 2003).

Different work contexts have an impact on the way teachers view themselves. There are common feature of teacher roles in different cultural contexts. Education often refers to formal schooling in American culture while the meaning of “jiào yù” [education] in Chinese culture is much broader. It refers to inculcating a sense of moral, social and personal responsibility in children. It involves respect and responsibility. Therefore, teachers are perceived as mentors as well as authority figures over parents and students in China. Many studies indicate that good teachers in the Chinese cultural tradition are expected to be not only experts in their disciplines, but more importantly, caring figures to students (e.g. Gao, 2006; Ouyang, 2003).

When thinking about the difference in terms of the role of a teacher, it has to be noted that the Chinese teacher is likely to play the role of an authority. Chinese culture, as part of the Confucian-heritage cultures, is traditionally a representative of a collectivist culture while American culture is more individualist (Hofstede, 1986). The former shows a higher respect for authority and the latter a higher respect for individuality. The roles of teachers were defined differently in America. The relationship between the teacher and students in American cultural context is more egalitarian. The American culture of schooling places students at the center of their own learning. American students are encouraged to be responsible for their own learning without being afraid of the authority of teachers. The major difference noted between Chinese and American teachers’ roles involves encouraging students to take ownership of their own curricular efforts.
The teacher’s role in China embodies an important social status for teachers. Chinese teachers tend to embrace their dignity as a teacher and believe that the harmonious teacher-student relationship is based on the respect for teachers and the well-defined role of teacher as an educator. Their motivation for teaching is initially driven by a need to perceived as confident, knowledgeable, respectful, and competent by their students. As for American teachers, this need is taken over by the need of their students. American teachers would be likely to adapt to the role of a facilitator/delegator and would be less likely to play the role of an authority. American teachers, more often than Chinese teachers, would live up to the expectations of their roles by working with students rather than playing an authoritarian in students’ learning.

Chinese teachers in the 21st century construct their roles as a hybrid of Chinese and Western educational traditions. The hybridity of the Confucian educational tradition and Western educational influence dates back as early as the 1920s when Dewey, one of the most influential Western thinkers in the history of modern educational theory, had a great influence on Chinese education, and shapes the way Chinese teachers look at themselves. Chinese teachers have blended Chinese and Western perspectives from which they understand themselves and construct their roles as teachers.

The Chinese ideal teacher views teaching as virtuosic activity, which incorporates not only a recognition of the importance of knowledge but also an acknowledgement of the role of affection and commitment in teaching. Focusing on both aspects of teaching, the teaching of books and the educating of persons [jiāo shū yù rén] represents an approach to teaching that encompasses elements often seen in conflict by nature. The ideal of the virtuoso teacher manages to encompass the dichotomies of traditional/progressive and teacher-centered/child-
centered instruction and puts them in harmony. Chinese teachers represent their view of themselves as virtuoso, fulfilling a guiding role in the learning and the personal growth of students.

Whereas Chinese teachers perceive themselves more in a virtuoso role, American teachers tend to view themselves as facilitators. American teachers tend to find themselves in a facilitating role that focuses on helping student assume responsibility for their own learning. They confine themselves to function more as a facilitator. For many American teachers, it is their role as a teacher to promote independence and academic progress of their students. They tend to see themselves as supporting and facilitating roles and view their students as partners exercising a degree of autonomy in their study.

As economy and culture change, society also changes. These changes place new demands, challenges, and expectations on teachers. Not only will teachers need to adapt to these changes, but the educational systems also need to transform themselves to meet the needs of the changing socio-cultural patterns. The essentialized teacher identities are crucially related to social, cultural and political context, though the causes, complexities, and consequences vary from Chinese culture to American culture.

Within both cultural contexts, learning is the key for teachers in understanding themselves and their roles under different social-cultural expectations on teachers. Being a teacher in both cultural contexts means a lot of responsibilities. Beyond their professional knowledge, their mastery of instructional strategies, teachers need to gain insights into the students, uncover the students’ motivation to learn, and help the students achieve academic success. Although the essentialized teacher identities in Chinese and American educational
systems and practices differ in significant ways, teachers in both countries must adapt themselves to meet the challenges of global changes in order to fulfill their roles, hopes and dreams for life in and beyond school (Paine & Fang, 2006).

**Teacher Identity in Cross-cultural Research**

This literature review further supports the construction of research question 2) how Chinese language teachers make sense of and adapt to American cultures of schooling, and 3) how the life histories of Chinese language teachers affect the way that they understand their roles as teachers.

Teachers working abroad have a history of crossing socially, historically, and culturally constructed borders. Giroux (1992) calls them “cultural workers” who are not only involved in the transmission of culture but also are socialized into the teaching profession within new cultures. As border-crossing teachers move through the cultural landscape and the pedagogical expectations both as a teacher and student of culture, they are caught between the cultural self and new ways of knowing, making sense of multiple identities and transitional spaces. Border-crossing teachers represent a wide array of socio-cultural roles and identities: as teachers and language learners, as gendered and cultured individuals, as expatriates and nationals, and as native speakers and non-native speakers. They are the teachers whose identities are situated and interpreted in the changing personal and professional landscapes. The shift in their personal and professional context gives birth to the creation of new hybridized identities, which come essentially to “a question of cross-cultural movement between landscapes that are themselves moving (He, 2006, p. 69).
Border-crossing teachers make sense of their cultural self through the interactions with cultural others and reveal their cultural self to others (Bell, 2002; Cruz & Duff, 1997; Edge, 1996; Geertz, 1995; Meddenhall & Oddou, 1985; Roberts, 2003). During this process, an ongoing narrative identity emerges as they negotiate a new teaching landscape (Bell, 2002; Carter, 1993; Pavlenko, 2002). The ways they make sense of their cultural integration play an important role in the construction of their socio-cultural identity. Their identity is a “process of continual emerging and becoming” (He, 1995, p. 216). It is constructed over culture, time and place.

Border-crossing teachers are not only teachers but also members of diasporas who “are caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts, and futures. They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways” (Clifford, 1994, p. 305). As Mercer (1994) observes, “in a world in which everyone’s identity has been thrown into question, the mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new, hybridized identities points to ways of surviving, and thriving, in conditions of crisis and transition” (p. 4). Their identities are not homogeneous but hybridized. They are not fixed but poised in transition “between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated crossovers and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalised world” (Hall, 1992, p. 310). As they cross personal and national borders,

They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped … they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several “homes” (and to no one particular “home”)… They are the products of the new diasporas created by the post-colonial
migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them. (Hall, 1992, p. 310)

As Hall (1988) argues, individuals in the diasporas do not simply inherit fixed identities, ethnicities, cultures, and languages but rather are involved in an ongoing collective and individual process of making, remaking, and negotiating these elements, and thus constructing dynamic new identities. Their identity is constrained by culture as much as it is enhanced by it. As “diasporic” individuals, switching back and forth between a real or imagined homeland and their inhabited cultures, their “routes” of travel matter as much as the “roots” of origin for understanding diasporas (Clifford, 1994). In this sense, their diasporic identity “is in the doing, the forging of linkages and articulations within specific diaspora contexts across space and time” (Lukose, 2007, p. 412).

Border-crossing teaching often requires a renegotiation and repositioning vis-à-vis the cultural Other to enable new and dynamic spaces of knowing. This is what Bhabha (1994) calls “in-between spaces”. It provides “the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation” (p. 1332) which McWhinney and Markos (2003) describe as “liminal space,”

There, learning transforms in radical, irreversible, and often unexpected ways... They lead the traveler to let go of assumptions and wander in the transformative space, free from expectations and ego identity. (p. 21)

Moving between cultural spaces dislocates border-crossing teachers from identities that they are comfortable with, to spaces of cultural power and cultural powerlessness. The place makes the culture. Other places make other cultures.
The world is shrinking. Living in what Giddens (2007) calls the “global age” when people anywhere in the world are connected instantly at any given time or place, teachers, especially foreign language teachers, are inevitably working from culture to culture, school to school, place to place. Those who have taken steps to teach abroad encounter enormous cultural challenges which make familiar things appear strange. Alfred (2003) argues that, “Intercultural experience has the potential to be highly significant…entering a situation in which the familiar is drastically reduced…has the potential to change an individual in important ways” (p. 14).

Bhabha (1994) argues that working in cross-cultural education means a recognition of “newness” to an encounter (p. 10). Each border encounter repositions the past in the present, to become what Bhabha calls “the third space” that “innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (p. 10).

Developing a Fluid Narrative Inquiry of Cross-cultural Lives and Cross-cultural Identities

For understanding the life histories of the three Chinese language teachers (research question 2), How do the life histories of Chinese language teachers affect the way that they understand their roles as teachers?) and the goals and hopes that they have for the future (research question 4), What are the goals and hopes that Chinese language teachers have for their future and development?), I attempted to perceive our experience as changing and fluid, rather than as fixed. In order to develop a fluid narrative inquiry of cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities, contextualized across languages, places, cultures evolving with time and history, I followed the flow of educational research that focused on understanding the continuity
and disruption of cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities in changing real-life situations and contexts.

Clandinin’s and Connelly’s and other researchers’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, McAdams et al., 2006, MacLure, 1993, Holland & Lave, 2001 and etc.) work broadened my way of looking at the shifting, dynamic, contextualized and historicized quality of the three Chinese language teachers’ cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities, and inspired me to explore and portray the shifting nature of our past self, our present self, our sense of who we are, and our future self. With particular emphasis on narrative as a major source that relates teachers’ border-crossing experiences to their hybridized identities this study will connect the trajectory of identity formation with the narrative storytelling of life history and the interplay of place and time within changing socio-cultural contexts.

Capturing teacher identity in the multi-faceted context is not easily done through conventional ways of conducting research. In order to gain a better understanding of teacher identity in the cross-cultural context, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest we need to think narratively. We need to make meaning in relation to people, time and history, and change from culture-to-culture, language-to-language, place-to-place (Carr, 1986; Phillion & He, 2001). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that people can never see themselves as they are because they are always something else, which allows us to consider the changing, fluid, dynamic quality of our cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities. “We are all storytellers, and we are the stories we tell…The I tells a story of the self, and that story becomes part of the me” (McAdams et al., 2006, p.3).
Wortham (2001) stresses that the power of narrative is of transforming as well as representing. Sfard and Prusak (2005) even argue that narratives can be considered in much the same way as identities: “Lengthy deliberations led us to the decision to equate identities with stories about persons. No, no mistake here: We did not say that identities were finding their expression in stories—we said they were stories” (p. 14). From this narrative perspective, teacher identity is the stories teachers have told and lived by.

In order to understand teachers’ identities we must understand their life as Connelly and Clandinin (1999) suggest, “our identities are composed and improvised as we go about living our lives embodying knowledge and engaging our contexts” (p. 4). Our stories and experiences are the narrative expressions of our life and reflect who we are. In this regard, as Carter and Doyle (1996) suggest, “biography, narrative and life history (are) at the centre of teaching practice, the study of teachers and the teacher education process.” (p. 120)

Giroux (1992) argues that the deconstruction of the cultural individual within a cultural place reveals the nature and nuance of one’s self in relation to the locale one inhabits and embodies. Identity is historically and culturally fixed in the primary discourses marked by place. The story comes from then and there, but the personal meaning happens now and here. Bruner (1990) wrote,

Human action could not be fully or properly accounted for from the inside out—by reference only to intrapsychic dispositions, traits, learning capacities, motives, or whatever. Action requires for its explication that it be situated, that it be conceived of as continuous with a cultural world. (p. 105)
The construction of identity happens in time, place, and relationship to others. People inhabit spaces with historically rooted epistemologies (Geertz, 1995; Scott, 1992). As Abram (1996) argues, there are inextricable and intangible links between person and place. The politics of identity are inextricably linked to the politics of place.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) propose the temporal “forward and backward” dimensions of narrative inquiry to consolidate a coherent storied identity constructed over time. They adapt Dewey’s foundational analysis of experiences as a “metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space” (p. 50) and propose a four-directional dimension model: inward and outward, and backward and forward. The former two explore a person’s introspective reflections which projects out to the social world. The latter two examine narrative change over time.

Manguel (2007) argues that in narratives, place and time “remain constant as we travel through them; the stories…change in order to hold the passing of memory, since the telling of a legend is always both a voice from the past and contemporary of the teller” (p. 79). What he describes here is the complex and contradictory relationship between the past and the present. In this regard, identity is not a unitary self, but as a member of a culture with narratives long in the making (MacLure, 1993).

Here Holland and Lave’s (2001) “history in person” can help us understand better the interplay between the past and the present.

“History in person” is not a simple idea, but it is amenable to more specifically focused inquiries, of which two stand out in the method of the present project: to approach history as something that is in part made in and by persons, and to approach the study of persons as historically fashioned. (p. 30)
History is not only just “what happened”, but also involves continuous processes of social and cultural production (Cohen, 1994). It is not only something to be remembered but also part of imagination. Therefore, memory or history performs at the crossroad of space and time. As McQuire argues, “To be without a memory is to risk being without identity” (McQuire, 1998, p.168). It is in the play of history, culture and power where people derive their understanding of who they are and what is possible. Hall (1990) says,

Cultural identity …is a matter of ‘becoming; as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (p. 225)

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is interested in life and the classroom stories happening between people, both within and outside the school as well as over time. Studying the positioning of people in different times, places, and cultural contexts highlights the ways different people converse and act, and thus can give us a platform from which we can explore the “third space” (Bhabha, 1994), a hybrid space that emerges from the interaction of different cultures, different shared experiences, and different ways of knowing.
Summary

In this study, I attempted to explore the complex processes of becoming cross-cultural teachers in the global context through a fluid narrative inquiry of cross-cultural lives and cross-cultural identities of the three Chinese language teachers in America. The chapter reviewed the literature on the underlying, essential questions of the construct of teacher identity. Questions such as, is the “self” located in the human subject? Or is it, to a certain extent, restricted to one’s relations with others within a perceived and contextualized world? Behind the quest for identity are often different, even conflicting, values and perspectives. In order to know who we are, we need to express what we are, what we desire, and what we want to be and become.

This chapter reviewed literature on the relationship of teacher identity and place or space with reference to cross-cultural encounters in teaching and cultural and social landscape in the global context. The final section provided a review of literature on the intersection of fluid narrative inquiry as a methodology and the literature on cross-cultural identity development. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue further that the value of narrative inquiry lies in its capacity to look inward, outward, backward, and forward at teachers’ lived experiences in order to capture their identities and see them as situated within sequences of places in which they occur and from which they emerge.
CHAPTER III
THE RAPIDLY CHANGING TEACHING LANDSCAPES IN CHINA AND AMERICA IN THE LATE 20th AND EARLY 21st CENTURIES

As Greene (1995) pointed out, “The narratives we shape out of the materials of our lived lives must somehow take account of our original landscapes if we are to be truly present to ourselves” (p. 75). Our narratives are embedded within the landscapes we inhabit. Our identities were shaped by these landscapes that are constantly “changing, and growing, sometimes disappearing from view, sometimes struggling to emerge and to evolve over time” (Neumann & Peterson, 1997, p. 9). Based on this understanding, this chapter serves as a Chinese ink painting to capture the artistic conception of the storytellers’ narratives in international landscapes. It provides a contextual background for comprehending the storytellers’ cross-cultural teaching experiences and depicts a broader scope to help us move beyond description to interpretation.

Teachers determine and are determined by the larger cultural and social landscapes in which they function. Negotiating these contextual ambiguities reflect the interaction of individual values and norms on the one hand and the broad context in school and out of school on the other. As Lasky (2005) argues, teachers’ agency to reform is always mediated by the social and cultural context, the demands for change, and by their teacher identity as well. Similarly, Goodson (2001) argues that teachers’ work has to be understood along with the interplay among internal, external, and personal factors.

Internal change agents work within school settings to initiate and promote change within an external framework of support and sponsorship; external change
is mandated in top-down manner; personal change refers to the personal beliefs and missions that individuals bring to the change process (p. 45).

The broader socio-cultural and educational context in which teachers live play an important role in shaping teacher identity (Duff & Uchida, 1997; He, 2002a, 2002b).

Understanding of teachers’ day-to-day work requires the conceptual and empirical disentanglement of teachers’ self-understanding on the one hand and the cultural and structural landscapes in which they work on the other.

**China: Teaching, and Learning in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries**

In order to understand the interplay among structural and personal factors as they shape teachers’ experiences of becoming and being a teacher this study starts with the belief that human beings have the ability to influence their environment while embedded in the context of current socio-cultural factors (Giddens, 1984). In this way, teachers are not only living in a complex dynamic but are also a part of it. They shape, and are shaped by the socio-cultural features of society and school cultures (e.g. Datnow et al., 2002; Flores & Day, 2006). All these factors have been shown to shape the landscapes in which Chinese teachers work and thus impact our self-understanding as well as our pedagogy of teaching.

Teachers in China find themselves in a time of transition, as socialism, and its related ideologies and practices are being altered and replaced by a global capitalist economy. As China moves rapidly into modernity the nation is confronted with major economic and social changes (Asia Society, 2012). Being caught in the middle of a nation undergoing dramatic social change, Chinese teachers encounter new challenges while shouldering the task of educating the nation’s youth (e.g. Gu, 2015). China’s one-child policy and economic growth, for instance, have
changed the values and attitudes of parents toward schooling, creating new challenges for Chinese teachers.

Teachers in China are constrained by changing social, cultural, and educational realities and more recently, a commercialization process in China. This draws attention to the impact of changing social patterns of devolution and commercialization of the teaching profession in China. These social changes, not dissimilar to trends in other social contexts, make teachers feel ever more deskilled and threatened (e.g. Kelchtermans, 1996; Sachs, 2001; Troman, 2000).

Since China initiated its modernization program in the late 1970s, education has received increasing public attention. More Chinese have come to realize the importance of education. The Chinese government’s rationale for prioritizing education has stemmed from viewing education as playing a vital role in fostering socio-economic development, supporting scientific and technological advances, enhancing national competitiveness and confronting the unprecedented challenges of globalization (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1999a; Yuan, 2001). In an era of fast transformation, when education reforms have been initiated with a hope of meeting various challenges and pursuing a better future in the new millennium (Cheng, 2002a, 2003b; Fullan, 1998; Paine & Fang, 2007), teachers in China have no choice but to face numerous new changes, expectations, and uncertainties in their internal and external environments (e.g. McGhan, 2002; Wheatley, 2002; Paine & Fang, 2007).

It is not only part of the Chinese tradition for people to view education as an important means to acquire socio-cultural capital and achieve social mobility on the socio-economic ladder (Lee, 2000; Ross, 1993; Schoenhals, 1993; Turner & Acker, 2002; Yang, 2002), but many
Chinese see it as a tool to bring about change in their personal life as well as society at large. Therefore, many Chinese parents value and support formal education for their children.

As a response to being caught up in a global trend of educational commercialization, educational competition in China has become ever more intensified. Since China has allocated relatively limited educational resources, academic competition has often been intense, which puts enormous pressure on students to fight for their advancement (Phelps, 2005; Turner & Acker, 2002; Yang, 2002).

The Chinese have a long educational tradition for high-stakes testing. Many Chinese students spend their entire childhood and adolescence preparing for the College Entrance Exam (CEE, gao kao) which means not only their life-long chance for university but also a perceived ultimate pass to a promising future. The CEE, both in the past and now, is still very powerful in affecting not only the economic and social quality of students’ future lives but also the nature of teachers’ teaching lives. For Chinese teachers, the importance of the testing system in education lies in the fact that the exam dictates the curriculum as well as their own work conditions (e.g. Gao, 2008), preventing them from addressing other valuable knowledge in fear of failing to prepare students to get a “ticket” to a decent university and losing personal bonuses and positions. As a result, Chinese teachers live in what they call an “examination hell.”

This intense obsession with testing, especially with the CEE puts most Chinese primary and secondary school teachers in a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, the government, seeing education as a social engineering tool (e.g. Lee, 2000), began in the 1990s to urge teachers to take a more quality-oriented education approach and foster positive personal qualities among students rather than putting too much emphasis on exam results (State Council, 1999).
Given the importance of the CEE in the lives of their students, teachers are torn between the responsibility for their students’ preparation on the CEE and providing students with a quality-oriented education. For many Chinese primary and secondary teachers, little else matters but the test scores. In addition, their salary, reputation as a good teacher, and social status are all determined by student performance on exams.

Apart from the traditional examination-driven teaching, Chinese teachers are also living in an age of new imported changes such as the commercializing and management of teachers (Paine & Fang, 2007). As Chen (2003) argues, “what is clear is that the Chinese academic profession is at a crossroads, torn between old and new forces—the old traditional bureaucratic control and the new corporate culture” (p. 132). Educational administrators in China are now encouraged to adopt a managerial culture for teaching and teachers which integrates Chinese traditional culture, socialist values, and modern entrepreneurial values imported from the West (Fu & Tsui, 2003; Gao et al., 2006). Almost all aspects of teaching and teachers in China have been affected by the global trend of commercialization and management in education (e.g. Hawkins, 2000; Wong, 2004; Guo & Guo, 2016).

Valuable cultural traditions that serve as teachers’ key power sources have disappeared rapidly in many changing contexts, including China. This not only shakes the foundations of teachers’ professional authority but also their ability to impact students’ beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Kelchtermans, 2005; Troman, 2000). Although Western positivism prevails in contemporary China’s education, the Chinese educational tradition, influenced by Confucianism, is still influential in curriculum and practice, at least in Chinese
teachers’ beliefs about teaching and being a teacher. In the classroom, teachers play the role of the authority (e.g. Wang, 2006; Hu, 2010).

However, over the last decade severe criticisms against teachers have been growing in this old yet new country, particularly through public media such as the Internet (Li, 2004). Li’s study on teachers’ professional images in the media reveals that teachers have become gradually associated with negative images, such as “incompetent pedagogues”, “wealth-collectors”, or “abusers”. This indicates a withdrawing of public trust and the growing vulnerability of the teaching profession in China (e.g. Gordon, 2005; Kelchtermans, 1996, 2005; Sachs, 2001).

Being caught between the Confucian tradition and neo-liberal global ideology, teachers in China are charged with contradictory roles and responsibilities which would lead them neither to “hell” nor “heaven” but rather to the land of uncertainty.

Low salaries, heavy workloads, large class sizes, limited resources, and parental pressures – these words can best describe the working conditions for most Chinese primary and secondary teachers. According to 2003 statistics, the average annual salary of Chinese primary and middle school teachers was 13,300 Renminbi (RMB) per year or 1,108 RMB per month (People’s Daily Online, 2004). That is the equivalent of $1,621 U.S. dollars (USD) each year or $135 USD per month. Class size is a major concern for Chinese teachers. In Chinese middle schools a class size of 90 students is not uncommon. Large class sizes, combined with an emphasis on exam preparation, not only increase the workload for Chinese teachers but also require teachers to spend more time on classroom management.

Teaching in China remains mainly a collective job. Chinese teachers tend to work with other teachers collaboratively, seeking guidance from each other. They are frequently required
to observe and be observed by other teachers. They share the staff room so that they can communicate with other teachers and possibly deal with students’ behavioral and academic issues collaboratively. This collectivist orientation toward teaching is similar to what Joyce and Showers (1983) advocate for American teacher’s staff development. However, the Chinese way of collegial support may prevent Chinese teachers from creating their own teaching styles. Unfortunately, the critical dimension of true collegial support is missing in Chinese teachers’ collegial relations which could prevent their collaborative work from degenerating into conformity and formalities.

Although Chinese teachers can choose to work in harmony with their co-workers by showing collegial support to each other they often feel vulnerable when dealing with relations with parents and students which are complicated by the shifting educational policies and reforms at school. These policy changes as well as emerging consumer awareness among parents and students have undercut teachers’ traditional authority and created great unease among teachers (Gordon, 2005; Troman, 2000). China now is facing the consequences of the one-child policy implemented by the government in 1979 in an attempt to control the growing population. The policy has led to the social phenomena of the “little emperors” (xiǎo huáng dì), spoiled single children whose every need is met by parents and grandparents in an environment of unprecedented economic prosperity. Movius (2002) argues that Chinese children are struggling to define themselves and their options in aggressive consumer terms. The self centered attitude of the “little emperors” poses a challenge to the traditional social norms of Chinese society.

All this makes most Chinese teachers concentrate their attention towards classroom management, unmotivated students, and those unable to accept criticism. These problems are
unfamiliar to Chinese educators and represent a challenge to the traditional view of teaching and the authority of teachers.

Moreover, the tension between teachers and parents is increasing in Chinese schools. As China becomes an increasingly competitive society Chinese parents are particularly concerned with their child’s success and thus heavily invest in their child’s education. This leads to consumerist attitudes toward teachers. Since education plays such an important role in helping students compete for admission to universities, parents raise expectations for schools which cause heightened and often contradictory demands on teachers.

Chinese parents used to be reserved or timid, but today with a consumerist attitude toward teachers, they have become more aggressive in scrutinizing teachers. Teachers are often criticized for not helping students succeed in their exams, which is the primary concern of many Chinese parents. As families’ investment in education increases dramatically, Chinese parents have become more and more demanding about their children’s educational success. It’s interesting to note that in today’s China, if academic failure occurs, blame is easily placed on schools and teachers, not on the child. With Chinese parents’ enthusiastic involvement in their children’s educational process (Lee, 2000), the professional authority of Chinese teachers is being threatened more than ever before.

These shifts in the social and educational context have some implications for teachers in China. First, the critical importance of teachers’ roles in helping Chinese students succeed in the future have been further enhanced as academic competition for a place at elite universities intensifies (Li, 2004). Teachers have become subject to even closer scrutiny that leads to tensions between teachers and the public (Schoenhals, 1993). Second, the commercialization
process gives teachers opportunities to practice their professional expertise in ways ranging from private tutoring to selling tutorial materials for larger financial gains. Last but probably the most impactful as the commercialization process deepens, cultural traditions have fallen down and teaching has increasingly been reduced to the status of a marketable service and teachers to service-providers. This makes Chinese teachers feel the pressures of accountability and limitations in the professional roles in teaching like their counterparts in the United States (e.g. Kelchtermans, 2005; Sachs, 2001; Paine & Fang, 2007).

School reforms and social movements in both China and America are changing what it is like to work as a teacher. They’ve made a difference in the lives of those who teach. They’ve affected the way the teachers participants in this study made sense of themselves at school in the changing landscapes.

**America: Teaching & Learning in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries**

Being a teacher in America is growing more difficult though it was not easy in the first place. Pay is relatively low and opportunities for advancement are scarce compared to those with similar training (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Given its complexity, low pay, and ambivalent social standing, it is not surprising that teaching in the U.S.A. is challenging.

Some recent trends that make teachers’ work lives more demanding include: expectations for improved student achievement have escalated and teacher accountability has increased; paper work, meetings, and administrative responsibilities for teachers have increased; teachers have been asked to take more responsibility for managing the work of others; bureaucratic control and standardization have increased in schools; teachers have less control over how they organize time and present curricula; teachers are expected to implement multiple school improvement
innovations; teachers have less ‘‘non-contact’’ or ‘‘planning’’ time at school; the tasks of teaching that go beyond actual teaching have increased and teachers have been required to do more work on their own time, away from school (Campbell & Neill, 1994; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995; Moon, 2013).

In Hargreaves’ (1992) words, ‘‘teachers’’ work has become increasingly intensified, with teachers expected to respond to greater pressures and comply with multiplying innovations under conditions that are at best unstable and at worst deteriorating” (p. 88). Unreasonable workloads, insufficient time to meet expectations, increases in children’s needs, additional non-teaching responsibilities, increased difficulties with parents, increased accountability, and added responsibilities for children with disabilities (Huberman, 1993; Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995) are among the realities that most primary and secondary teachers have to deal with on a daily basis.

Because of the market orientation in education teachers now have to turn outwards toward wider publics as they plan, prepare, and defend what they teach (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). The need to maintain a closer relationship with the community at large is intensifying. Schools can no longer hold the outside world at bay. People can choose the neighborhood they like to live in, the stores they like to shop at, but schools have to open their doors for students and parents from various cultural backgrounds (Cushner at el., 2003). Teachers need to learn to work with more diverse communities and to see parents as sources of learning and support rather than interference.

The new form of relationships that teachers need to establish with parents is one of the greatest challenges for them in the new era. Communication with parents has always been a part of American teachers’ work and responsibility. In the United States, the traditional teacher-
parent relationship takes multiple forms including interviews, parent nights, special consultation on student problems, parent councils, and parent volunteer help in the school and classroom (Epstein, 1995). However, in recent years the teacher-parent relation is becoming more extensive. For American teachers, the relationship with parents is often professionally controlling and defensive so as to sustain teachers’ sense of professional superiority. The literature on parent-teacher relations suggests that considerable strides have yet to be made to establish a genuine partnership where relationships between teachers and parents are both open and authoritative (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). The question of how to make teachers feel less threatening toward parents’ involvement is an ongoing challenge for teachers in America.

One factor that makes teacher work lives at school less desirable lies in the fact that most teachers are still teaching in a box. Individualism, isolation, and privatism are identified as widespread features of the culture of teaching in American schools (Rosenholtz, 1989). Drawing on the classic work of Lortie (1975), Edelfelt (1995) uses “deafening silence” to characterize teachers’ isolated situations and concludes that the isolation of teachers derives from “their subordinate status, and ... their isolation within the cellular structure of schooling” (p. 223). The egg-crate architecture of most schools and the way school schedules are set make it difficult for teachers to really know what goes on in other teachers’ classrooms. One solid agreement across the literature on teachers’ work lives at school is the isolating nature of teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989). As Hargreaves (2000, p.160) concludes, this isolating nature of teaching, unfortunately, leads to some undesirable consequences.
According to Lasky (2005) teachers in the US tend to believe that their teaching role is being systematically eroded by the current reform context. They feel vulnerable and powerless in this context. They experience inefficacious vulnerability as they watch valued work conditions rapidly disappear. In this context their change “agentry” (Fullan, 1991) is compromised, as the control for generating change is becoming more centralized at the structural level. Thus, teachers become reform mediators rather than reform policy generators (Clune, 1990).

What used to comprise “a good teacher” is being revised in the new global era (e.g. Day, 2012). The previously asserted professional capital, in Bourdieusian terms, is being contested and reconstructed by neo-liberal ideologies (Weiner, 2007). The educational policies that emphasize accountability and testing help make the school directly answerable to an external audience (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The heightened accountability of schools makes teachers directly responsible to their immediate administrators and to political authorities as well. Consequently, teachers are obliged to spend a great deal of time complying with administrative matters and working with “lowered teacher discretion and increased routinization” (Beneveniste 1987, p. 9). These factors challenge teachers’ understanding of teaching, but also challenge their autonomy at school.

**Comparison of Chinese and American Landscape of Teaching in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries**

From a Chinese point of view the working conditions of Chinese teachers and those of American teachers might have little in common. With regard to class sizes, salaries, access to resources, teacher-student relationship and collegial support vast differences exist between most American and Chinese classrooms. However, as Chinese schools adapt themselves to face the
challenges imposed by national development as part of the global economy, the problems that American teachers have to face at school are not unfamiliar to Chinese teachers.

**Summary**

This chapter attempted to explicate the research questions by reviewing literature on the teaching landscapes in China and America in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1999), as the educational landscape changes, teacher identity changes as well, the in-classroom place and the out-of-classroom place. A change of landscape often results in new stories for a teacher to live by (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009).

As a result of social-cultural changes, teachers in both China and America are challenged by a new set of educational policies and facing increased social expectations (e.g. Stewart, 2012; Day, 2012). Social changes and the global economy have severely challenged the teaching profession in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in both landscapes (e.g. Moon, 2013). In America, the teaching profession and society are moving away from the long-held goal of public schools that support democratic equity and a civic cultivation, toward a social efficiency goal and managerialism (e.g. Cuban, 2003; Weiner, 2007). Being caught between the Confucian tradition and neo-liberal global ideology, teachers in China are charged with contradictory roles and responsibilities which would lead them neither to “hell” nor “heaven” but rather to the land of uncertainty. What is clear are the economic concerns behind these educational policies and social expectations on teachers in both landscapes. The one common thread running through these social changes in the changing teaching landscapes of China and America is based on the long held belief that students’ success in schools is the key to continued social progress and economic wellbeing in the 21st century global economy (e.g. Jensen, 2012; Wang, 2015). In this
new education orthodoxy (Hargreaves et al., 2001), teachers in both China and America succeed primarily by satisfying others’ definitions of their work (e.g. Gu & Day, 2007; Day et al, 2007).
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

No matter where you go in life or how old you get, there’s always something new to learn about. After all, life is full of surprises. – Anonymous

In recent decades, as a method of inquiry to understand teachers’ experiences and their practical knowledge, narrative has become a central focus for conducting research in the field of teacher education because of its potential to speak to practitioners and accurately represent the demands of teaching (Carter, 1993). The use of narratives, and the epistemological frameworks through which these narratives embody and convey meaning, not only provide an important way to think about curriculum and teaching, but also is vital to understanding what goes on at school (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

Ochs and Capps (1996) argue that narrative inquiry presents a fundamental means of making sense of human experiences across cultures. The promise of narrative lies in the fact that it permits and encourages the study of teacher identity in the cross-cultural context of life and in the pursuit of broad educational questions about cultural adjustment, identity, and community. Although the notion of story is common to every culture, the stories themselves differ widely in different societies. One of the defining features of culture is the story structure through which it makes sense of the world. The shape of our stories, and the sense of what they constitute are all formed by the tales with which we were raised. By examining their stories, we become aware of the underlying assumptions that teachers embody from other cultures. This makes narrative inquiry a particularly valuable approach for examining teacher identity in the cross-cultural context.
Life-History Narrative as a Research Methodology

Narrative inquiry is working with teachers’ consciously told stories that rest on deeper stories of which they are often unaware. Narrative inquiry stems from teacher’s stories but it also goes beyond the specific stories to explore the assumptions behind them. No matter how fictionalized a teacher’s stories are, all of them rest on and illustrate the story structures he/she holds. Therefore, narrative inquiry allows deeply hidden assumptions to surface and helps to provide a window into teacher identity.

Narratives also allow us to present teacher identity holistically in all its complexity and richness. It enables us to recognize the complexity of identity: it is “the representation of process, of the self in conversation with itself and with its world over time” (Josselson, 1995, p. 33). The sequentiality of events, embeddedness, and moral stance mark the richness of narratives. Through the strategy of narrative, each dimension of teacher identity can be differently realized. Narrative analysis is particularly helpful for representing and interpreting identities in multiple facets and different contexts (Riessman, 2002).

With a focus on the intersecting of language, culture, and identity in life contexts, narrative broadens understanding of the complexity of teacher identity and the lived experiences. Phillion and He (2004) argue that narrative inquiry in its most profound and fundamental form is a study of life. They wrote: “When studying life, as in narrative inquiry, the researcher needs to attend to whatever happens in life” (Phillion & He, 2004, p. 7). It promises greater explanatory power, by “opening up for study the sealed boxes within which teachers work and survive” (Ball & Goodson, 1985, p. 13), and thereby offering better theoretical linkages between human agency and social structures.
Researchers are becoming more interested in examining how teachers’ stories, their self-concepts and inner beliefs, the circumstances of their daily lives, and the past and present of their life shape the way they construct their professional vocational identities (e.g. Nias, 1989; Lasky, 2005). As a method of inquiry, “story/narrative has become a central focus of conducting research in the field of teacher education because of its potential to speak to practitioners and accurately represent the demands of teaching” (Carter, 1993, p.6).

MacIntyre (1984) argues that narrative is a means of escape from the limitations of post Enlightenment social science, and a way of exploring inter-subjective understanding. According to him,

… narrative selfhood is correlative: I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. (p. 218)

These studies, particularly that of Connelly and Clandinin (1999), explicitly link storytelling to teacher identity. For over two decades, Connelly and Clandinin (1999, 2000) have written books and articles on teacher knowledge and teacher identity. Through their publications Connelly and Clandinin have provided researchers with a valuable conceptual framework that makes teacher narratives meaningful (Anderson, 1997). Aligning with some authors (e.g. Gee, 2001; Giddens, 1991), Connelly and Clandinin (1999) provide a sound theoretical basis for studying teacher identity by focusing on the relationship between teachers’ stories and their identity. They argue strongly and soundly for the use and analysis of teacher narratives in exploring teacher identity. Their influence in the field of narrative inquiry of teacher identity has
been significant. Their major contribution is their conception of how teachers’ knowledge, teachers’ context and teacher identity “...are linked and can be understood narratively” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4).

The narrative understanding of teacher identity as negotiable, flexible and adaptable adds a sense of empowerment/agency compared with an essentialist understanding of identity (Weber & Mitchell, 1995; Zembylas, 2003) by allowing the construction of teacher identity to be unique, relevant and meaningful.

In this study, I refer closely to Clandinin and Connely’s (2000) “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” (p. 50) to investigate the transformations of teachers’ personal and cultural identity that emerge through narrative. In retelling teachers’ narratives, I work more specifically in the four dimensions of inward and outward, and also backward and forward (Clandinin and Connely, 2000). My use of narrative inquiry in this study originates particularly in the narrative understanding of identity and how the interplay of people, history and place shapes teachers’ identity in cross-cultural contexts.

Inspired by the narrative understanding of identity, this study provides scope for the linking of identity making with the expressing of identities through personal narratives. This narrative inquiry relies heavily on the history and place where stories are linked to their lifeworld moments (Van Manen, 1990) by encompassing the situational dimension, and exploring how identity incorporates people, time, and place. History and place are not positioned in this study as a disconnected binary, but rather as an interplay that flows in the transformation of identity.

As teachers develop, they may cross many personal and national borders. This nomadic journey across borders can be best understood through narrative (Carter, 1993; Connelly &
Clandinin, 1988). Within this study, I composed and presented my co-participants’ and my own narrative portrayals in the form of “lived experience descriptions” (Van Manen, 1990) to depict our stories “from the inside” (ibid.). Through the lens of life-history narrative, the metaphors by which my co-participants and I lived, the way we construed our work, and the stories we recounted, tell about what was going on in our lives as cross-cultural Chinese teachers.

For Clandinin and Connelly, teachers’ “personal practical knowledge” shapes and is shaped by their professional contexts. Therefore, they developed the idea of a “professional knowledge landscape” to understand the dialectic among “space, place, and time” (p. 4)

Understanding professional knowledge as comprising a landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places, and things. Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and a moral landscape.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 4-5)

Weber and Mitchell (1995) encourage teachers to use life-history informed methods to revisit their past and their beliefs in order to reinvent themselves as teachers. From this perspective teachers are agents rather than “containers” of their practical knowledge, they are once more both creators in, as well as created by, the social and cultural worlds they inhabit.

(West et al., 2007 p. 32)

Clandinin and Connelly(2000) claim that narrative inquiry as a methodology allows for a window on lived experience that provides the best way of representing and understanding experience. As a method of inquiry to understand teachers’ experiences and their practical
knowledge, narrative is the central focus of this study due to its potential to capture the detailed stories or life experiences of teachers (Creswell, 2007). This narrative inquiry provides an opportunity to understand the teaching lives of Chinese teachers by exploring my co-participants’ and my own lived experiences at home and in school, in our homeland and in a foreign country, as well as our hopes and dreams beyond school. It allows room for explaining how our identities were formed and changed over time and provides holistic accounts of the interconnectedness of social, emotional, and moral aspects of our lives.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) go a step further and propose life-history narrative as an important method to link teachers’ work with their lived experiences:

Professional work cannot and should not be divorced from the lives of professionals. . . . Life history studies have the capacity to transform the content of analyses of professional practices. Once professional practice is located within a whole-life perspective, it has the capacity to transform our accounts and our understanding. (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 7)

This study reflects that view. It sees the life-history narrative as autobiographical narration created by the storyteller’s fragments of life which reveal a story of personal experience (Denzin, 1989a). The potential of this narrative inquiry lies in the fact that it brings personal experience to bear on inquiry, and sees research as connected to, rather than disconnected from, life. By thinking narratively, seeing experience as the starting point of inquiry, as changing rather than fixed, as contextualized rather than decontextualized, this narrative inquiry places my co-participants’ and my own narratives in broader personal, historical, social, and cultural contexts. These narratives illuminate our lived experience within
historical and social structures and link personal troubles with public issues (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995).

**Personal Sense-Making**

This study implies a personal sense-making quest and allows me to broaden and strengthen this quest by involving my co-participants because they shared a similar sense-making journey. It is involved with the telling, retelling, and reliving of my storied experience and those of my co-participants. It starts from where my experience lies as an international student and a Chinese language teacher. It emerges from my experience of working as a Chinese language teacher in an American public school. This narrative inquiry is not about me and only about me. It is not research because it is “by me, for me”; it is research because it is self-consciously “by me, for us” (Ham & Kane, 2004, p. 117). It helps me to remain grounded in my narrated experience as a Chinese teacher and situate myself in a context through which I can link myself to the other two Chinese teachers.

As Connelly and Clandinin (2006) have pointed out, “teachers seem to be more concerned to ask questions of who they [were] than of what they know” (p. 3). Teachers teach who they are. With a focus primarily on “personal experience methods” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994), the life-history narrative is used in this study to help examine the personal, temporal, social, and spatial dimensions of experience and the contexts in which my co-participants and I worked as cross cultural Chinese teachers. Taking the form of life-history narrative inquiry, I embark on an investigation into the cross-cultural teaching lives of Chinese teachers through my personal experience and those of my co-participants. The narrative of my journey from China to the United States charts not only the “dislocation” in my personal and professional life but also
indicates how I was prompted to explore my co-participants’ and my journey of learning to teach within multiple landscapes. By juxtaposing my own experiences with those of my co-participants, this study offers an angle of vision that looks beyond the teller and makes connections to “the larger frame of shared experience” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16).

Grounded in an international context, the narrative inquiry research tradition (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) has provided this study with a springboard for sharing and investigating the stories of my co-participants as well as my own with regard to an international teaching landscape. Within this study, I use my own narratives and life history interviews with my co-participants as a lens to look at not only my personal experiences and those of my co-participants, but also the broader social-cultural contexts in which these narratives are situated (LaBoskey, 2004a, 2004b; Weber & Mitchell, 2005).

How I Came to the Methodology

I learned about narrative inquiry when I was in the middle of my graduate study in China. A friend of mine introduced me to a book of narrative study with the strong belief that I would love reading it. When I asked her why, she said: “Just like clothes need to be worn by the right person, books tend to be appreciated more by the right people and you are just the right person to read this one.” This investigation embodies an important fundamental question to me: “Who am I? Why am I doing this?” Schram (2006) argues that your decision to commit yourself to a particular research approach reflects the potential you believe to be gained from that perspective. I can’t agree more. While thinking about this study, I couldn’t help asking myself: “What is the potential I believe will be gained from the narrative perspective?” With an academic background of English literature and a strong interest in biography I believe that most people in the world
have a natural impulse and capability to tell stories about their lives, which not only link their past to their present and future but also help them bring meaning to their life and work. My focus is to understand how people “produce, represent, and contextualize experience and personal knowledge through narratives” (Coffey & Akinson, 1996, p. 54), as well as to recount the story of “individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57).

Because the main focus of this study is to explore the border-crossing journey of Chinese language teachers as it disrupts and recreates their identities, the research methodology is aligned with life-history narrative inquiry for its potential to express the sense of immediacy of a life lived in the “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) and interpret teacher identities in their multiple guises and different contexts (Riessman, 2002). I turn to narrative as the mode of this inquiry because I believe that life-history narrative inquiry can bring my past and present together in order to illuminate my journey of learning to teach in a foreign context and make connections with the paths of my co-participants. Within this study, I take possession of my experience as a Chinese language teacher and attempt to articulate where I came from, how I got here, and where I wanted to go. I’m not only a researcher but also “a member of the landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). Getting inside narrative inquiry allows my identities as researcher, international student, and Chinese language teacher to come together.

**Procedures, Selection of Participants**

This is a narrative inquiry of the cross-cultural journey of three Chinese teachers as they moved from an Eastern to a Western culture. Based on the key principle of purposeful sampling
to choose participants, I attempted to select individuals who “likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 433). I used my personal network to recruit information-rich participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The participants would meet the following requirements: (a) having teaching experience before teaching in America, (b) having been educated in China, (c) having at least 2 years of teaching Chinese language to American students.

I made a list of potential participants. I contacted them to see if they were willing to volunteer to be a participant. They were informed of the purpose and methodology of the research before they decided whether or not to participate. Among the potential participants whom I contacted, one teacher couldn’t participate in my study. One was not interested in this study. I then talked with participants who showed great interest in this study and sent them a letter of information. I finally selected Wumei and Xiaotian who met the inclusion criteria, showed great interest in my study, and had time for the interviews. Wumei, Xiaotian, together with me, became the research participants of this study.

**Participants: The Story Tellers**

Wumei, Xiaotian and I, the characters in this inquiry, grew up during the Chinese economic reform in 1980s, pursued graduate studies in China during the beginning of the 21st century, and moved to the United States over the next decade. Wumei, Xiaotian and I met at college in the China years. Our friendship continued in the United States because we shared feelings about what it means to be Chinese and Chinese teachers. My inquiry into our constant search for who we were, who we are, and who we will become in the United States brought us
together. As I inquired into Wumei and Xiaotian’s lives and they inquired into my life, we stayed connected with a sense of knowing and recognition.

The following biographical sketches provide a glimpse of who we are.

Me

I’m a Chinese woman who likes books, fashion, food, and travel. I’m also a Chinese woman who lives in an “in-between” world: living here and there falling in between. I’m an international student living in the United States. I’m a researcher as well as a Chinese language teacher. I conduct research on the teaching lives of other people as well as myself. I’m a storyteller as well as a listener. I’m a good listener. I like telling stories. Story telling is my way to express myself and to find myself in the world. Coming from Xi’an (a famous historical city in China) history, geography, and culture are in my background. They not only made me but also my stories.

Wumei

Wumei is a good friend of mine. We share a lot of similarities as well as differences. She had taught Chinese to overseas students in a Chinese university for several years before she taught Chinese in an American public school. Many of Wumei’s school teachers had no doubt that she’d be good at anything she chose to do. She is the one who told me “There are no bad students just bad teachers.” If someone else had told me this, or if I read it in a book, I would have taken it as a joke. I tend to believe her words, not only because she was always a good student but also because of the way that she cares about her job. Wumei loves her job. She loves being a Chinese teacher introducing Chinese language and Chinese culture to her students.
Xiaotian

I met Xiaotian during graduate school at SU (pseudonym) university in Shanghai over 10 years ago. I came to know her through her roommate who was a friend of mine from Xi’an. In SU university, almost all the graduate students lived in the same apartment building on campus. Our social life was pretty closely tied to this inconspicuous building. Xiaotian and I quickly became good friends. We both love books, fashion, food, and travel, and have a lot of other interests in common. Xiaotian liked to smile a lot. Her big smile often made people around her feel warm. Years passed, our friendship still lasts in the United States after we both have traveled thousands of miles from where we once belonged.

Participants’ Preparation for Teaching in America

Xiaotian and I received our teacher education preparation from one of the leading teachers’ universities in China. We had at least one-year post-secondary teaching experience before we came to teach Chinese to American students. Wumei graduated with an M.A. in Chinese Language and Literature and joined the faculty of NW University (pseudonym), teaching Chinese to overseas students. After at least three-year’s post-secondary teaching, she applied to the Hanban (Office of Chinese Language Council International) for a fellowship to teach Chinese in the U.S., and attended a two-week Chinese language teacher training course. Prior to our coming to the United States, all the participants in this study served as faculty members at the university level, had no experience teaching secondary students, and had no cross-cultural teaching experience before coming to teach Chinese in American schools.

All the participants in this study lived in a time of change in China. During the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, China had undergone rapid and dramatic changes on
every field of life. The Chinese language teachers who participated in this study were exposed to these rapid changes when the Chinese educational tradition met with the Western educational tradition. Since the 1980s, a large number of native speakers of English from the West have been recruited to teach English, mainly in Chinese universities. The participants in this study were exposed to the Western influence during their university years in the 1990s and at the beginning of 21st century. They learned communicative English from watching American soap operas such as “Friends”. They attended English classes given by native English-speaking teachers. All the participants in this study had similar learning experiences in China, where the traditional practices of teaching and learning were challenged but yet remained.

**Data Collection**

This narrative inquiry is comprised of interviews and my autobiographical narrative as the means of investigating my experiences and those of my co-participants. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) call narrative data the “field texts” which can be gathered through life history, annals and chronicles, records, interview transcripts, storytelling, diary study, letter writing, autobiographical and biographical writing, conversation, personal artifacts, and documents. The “field texts” for this study come from my own narrative and those of my co-participants when we learned to teach Chinese in an international landscape.

The data collection process for this study was completed within three years. I conducted three in-depth narrative-life history interviews with each participant; each interview lasted about 1-2 hours in length, and the total interview time for each participant was about 3-6 hours. My last interviews with the participants were conducted in 2013. By the time I left William High School (pseudonym) in 2013, after 6 months, I had completed collecting the research data.
Self as Protagonist - The Process

Within this study, I use my narrative to offer an account of experience that was grounded in personal history and subjectivity (Mishler, 1990). By beginning with my personal dimension in this study, I understand my “self” as a protagonist and acknowledge that the self can be involved in the meaning making process (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008). By doing so, I would be able to re-trace the steps of my personal journey to becoming a language teacher in America and demonstrate inter-connectedness with my co-participants.

Journaling

Journaling is a method of data collection that is used in this dissertation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It has become a means for generating and gathering data in this study. I had written my autobiographical writings while I was teaching Chinese in William High School. During my research process, I have kept a journal in which I have recorded and reflected on my lived experience of teaching. The journal includes: my observations and notes made while teaching a class; introspective reflections on my thoughts, feelings, and experience. I linked them together with a theoretical/narrative string. It has served as a channel to release my anxiety and frustration from teaching, to work through different ideas and feelings about my teaching, and to reflect on my teaching experience.

As a participant researcher my research journal, with my own reflections, interpretations, and perspectives are essential parts of data collection. As a result of my interactions with my co-participants, fellow teachers, and students at the school where I taught, I created my autobiographical reflection and documented my teaching life as a Chinese teacher. In constructing this thesis, I have made use of my journal to keep a record of memorable
experiences and ideas, to trace the development of my teaching and research process, and to make a voice on my thoughts and feelings about my experience. The role of my research journal goes beyond merely being an additional source of information. It is an important instrument to document the data collection and analysis process.

While I consider my journal a valuable source of data for this study, I am also aware of the fact the scope of my journal can only serve as a partial source of data as it is limited to my observations and memories of my teaching. In this study, I’m a co-storyteller alongside the other two Chinese language teachers. My co-participants and I are both the subjects and the method of this study. As well as documents related to my own experience as a Chinese language teacher, I collected the stories of my co-participants who were learning to teach in American schools via life-history interviews. The narrative life-history interviews, along with my stories of experience, are used in this study to explore the research questions and capture our everyday experiences as Chinese language teachers.

Connelly and Clandinin write, “doing narrative inquiry is a form of living” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 89), I made interview notes on my interviews with participants. I went over my notes and marked the places where I had questions to ask in the follow-up interview. I attempted to write down reflections on every interview and recorded every change I made for conducting the next interview. In my research journal I also attempted to write down my intuitions during the interviews. In each of the three interviews, I was able to indentify the strands that emerged from the interactive interview process.
Interviewing

A major objective of the in-depth interviews was to collect the participants’ life history. The interview questions in this study were reflective in order to “elicit personal narratives or stories about concrete events and experiences” (Woods, 1996, p. 27). They meant to collect the participants’ life history that generated their beliefs and conceptions about teaching and the role of the teacher. All the narrative interviews are focused on my co-participants’ life stories related to who they are. They focused on “[the participants’] experience of behavior, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory perceptions, and the individuals’ background or demographic information” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 445). The interview questions I prepared were only used as a prompt when participants recalled their history. They were conducted in a flexible format to allow for probing. Johnson (2002) endorsed the use of in-depth interviews in qualitative research.

If the interviewer happens to be a current or former member or participant in this activity, he or she may use in-depth interviews to explore or check his or her understandings, to see if they are shared by other members or participants. Former or current members can fruitfully use in-depth interviews to check, stimulate, or inspire their own self-reflection and to see if their understandings are the same as those shared by others who are also members or participants. (p. 106)

The interviews followed an interview guide. Before I started to interview the participants, I designed the interview guide to concentrate on the participants’ teaching beliefs, relations with their students, and responses to unfamiliar cultural and educational environments. It is inspired by “autobiographical self-thematisation” developed by Kelchtermans (1993, 1994)
encouraging participants to reflect chronologically on their teaching experiences (auto-biographical) and share the experiences and meaning they held for them (thematisation). It focused on the following themes: growing up; schooling (past and present), self image, teaching beliefs, relationship with students, real-life decision-making, dilemmas, accounts of personal changes and growth, and visions of the future. With an emphasis on storying rather than literal questions to which I sought direct answers, the interview guide is used to prepare for the interviews. It is used as a prompt to understand experience, and reflect on experience.

I followed the interview guide but didn’t stick to it exclusively. I left the space for it to dynamically develop along with the progress of the interview process. The interview guide allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes and to spontaneously ask questions to probe a particular subject. It is useful for establishing a nonstructural conversational style with a focus on developing a flow that each interview could move along in a natural and relaxed way. It left enough commonalities to make comparisons and allowed for specific individual experiences of each participant to be presented.

The interviews in this study are aligned with Mishler’s understanding of the interview process as a “discourse between speakers” (Mishler, 1986b, p. 234). My co-participants’ answers to the questions are viewed as stories that are “held together thematically and structurally with a strong temporal ordering to successive events or episodes” (Mishler, 1995, p. 107). A single interview is seen as a series of stories or narratives that have a storyline with a beginning, middle, and end conveying a particular perspective that emerges as a local occurrence between my co-participant and me.
About a month thereafter Wumei and Xiaotian agreed to participate in this study, we began our interviews. A preliminary early-stage interview session was arranged, in which I told them that I proposed to use their stories for research purposes and explained to them my research project at which time they expressed their own views as to how it should proceed. The early-stage interviews focused more on the participants’ biographical information, aiming at collecting data about participants’ education background and early learning experience.

I started the first interview with fact-based questions, such as their early learning experience and their educational background. For example, I asked the participants to briefly introduce themselves, including their family members, educational backgrounds, and early learning experience. These background questions served as a prompt as the participants recalled their life history. They helped me to capture the participants’ life history chronologically. New questions were generated from the early interviews, and they were added for the following round of interviews.

The later two interviews which were refined from the first interview focused more on the participants’ perspectives of teaching, learning, and the role of the teacher. I used more reflection-based questions to invite the participants to look retrospectively and introspectively. For example, I asked them to recount the best and worst teaching experience during their journey of becoming a Chinese language teacher in America. The more reflection-based questions encouraged the participants to be responsive to provide rich information and allowed emerging themes for probing.

The interviews in this study were informal and semi-structured. Prior to the beginning of each interview, I had an informal conversation with each participant. During the interview
sessions, I encouraged the participants to talk freely about themselves and their life in the United States. This not only helped them open up to me but also helped me create an atmosphere that made them feel comfortable while sharing their stories with me. As I already had rapport with the participants, the interviews were more like friendly and natural conversations between friends. They were naturally developed into conversations in which the participants talked most of the time.

The interviews in the study were conducted in a cumulative way, that is, each interview served to reveal new pieces of the life puzzle for the following interview. We had follow-up casual talks after each interview. The process of conducting interviews and having follow-up discussions with participants served as my learning experience, which is fluid and open. The entire interview process was open to pursue the emergent streams brought up by the participants (Patton, 2002). I listened carefully to participants’ narratives of growing up and their daily lived experiences as a teacher. I opened my ears to participants’ voices and perspectives in order to hear what had otherwise not been heard about their ways of knowing and learning and our identity transformations. Throughout the interviews, I was not only a keen listener but also part of the conversation. I asked questions, encouraged the talk to go on, and shared the participants’ laughter and complaints.

The in-depth interviews with Wumei and Xiaotian helped develop a person-oriented narrative thinking approach and an understanding of the cultural ground upon which their cross-cultural lives were situated. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, which both Wumei, Xiaotian, and I spoke as our first language. The messages quoted in this study were all
translated by myself into English and checked by participants to avoid a translation loss of meaning.

Over the course of three years, I communicated with Wumei and Xiaotian about their narratives via e-mail and telephone communications. I kept track of our informal conversations, e-mails, and my own self-reflection journals. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. Upon completion of each interview, the audio taped recordings were transcribed verbatim. This transcribed data served as the primary source for the data analysis.

I wrote down my reflections and impressions in my field journal of what I had heard after each interview. Participants’ narratives mirrored my own dilemmas as a Chinese language teacher and provoked my self-reflection as a researcher. By carefully reading the transcripts, I reflected on what I heard and identified some themes. I documented my reflective field notes throughout all stages of the inquiry.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

Analysis for this study starts with an understanding that data are texts that contain, represent, and express traces of lived experience (Reissman, 1993; Denzin, 1989a). It follows a recursive and non-linear process that allows for the complexities of lived experiences as they intersect with historical and social structures (Denzin, 1989a, Reissman, 1993). The data collected in this study was analyzed “for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies” (Creswell, 2007, p. 155). The analysis and interpretation have been carried out in the light of presenting and discussing my co-participants’ and my own articulated experience in order to illustrate some significant features of our journey of learning to teach across multiple landscapes.
Following the data collection phase, I examined all in-depth interview transcriptions and my autobiographical writings. After transcribing the interviews I read the transcripts very carefully and attempted to capture every note that flashed through my mind. Agar (1980) suggested that the researcher should read the data several times in its entirety. Immersion into the data helps the researcher to obtain a holistic picture of what the data is trying to say. At the onset of the data analysis process, I kept open to the data. I immersed myself into the data and lived through it. I then sat back from time to time to re-view what I had been told and documented my own reflections. I finally analyzed them for emerging common narrative threads among our narratives.

The analysis of the data was completed in two phases: vertical analysis and horizontal analysis ((Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the vertical analysis phase, each participant’s narrative was taken as an individual unit of analysis. The three-dimensional space approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is used in this vertical phase, which involves analyzing the data for three elements: “interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical places or the storyteller’s places)”. I narrated each participant’s stories chronologically from childhood learning experience to the current teaching experience.

In the horizontal analysis phase, the participants’ narratives were compared to look for common patterns or threads. In this horizontal phase, our narratives are analyzed in the direction of inward, outward, backward, and forward (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Inwardly, my analysis delved into our feelings, hopes, and expectations. Outwardly, it focused on our relations to others. Backwards and forwards, it addressed our remembered past, the present moment, and future development over time in a different culture. I used cross-cases analysis (Creswell, 1998)
to find common patterns/threads that emerged from our stories to connect to my research questions.

Denzin (1989a) suggests that a researcher should begin biographical analysis by identifying an objective set of experiences in the subject’s life. After the stories of teachers’ experience were gained through interviews, I retold their stories based on narrative elements. I then rewrote the stories into a chronological sequence. I began the analysis by a sketch of the lives of the storytellers in order to identify the changes over time in the development of our teaching careers. In this sketch, I looked for life-course stages to develop a chronology of our life from which stories and epiphanies would emerge. Then, I looked in the transcripts for concrete, contextual biographical materials. Finally, I reconstructed our individual biographies and identified factors that had shaped our lives.

Based on a chronological sequence, the narratives of each participant were presented in four broader categories in a vertical pattern: (a) early learning experience, (b) previous teaching experience in China, (3) teaching practice and beliefs in America, (d) visions of the future. These four categories unfolded a storyline about each participant’s professional growth as a Chinese language teacher.

After this, I analyzed our stories and identified the major themes that emerged from them. The vertical patterns of data allowed me to make horizontal comparisons across the storylines of all the participants and indicated the similarities among the participants. Analysis and interpretation of data address “the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships among them - in short how things work” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 12). I identified the emergent themes from comparing, contrasting, finding commonalities and
differences, noting the patterns and themes, and looking for paradoxes and surprises. In order to provide a temporal and conceptual coherence of the storytellers’ stories, I disentangled our narratives by comparing the stories told about individual experiences in different periods of our lives, and looked for the similarities and differences in our understanding of the larger social context in which our experiences were placed.

The findings of this study were represented in the light of “a comprehensive, holistic narrative description and interpretation which integrates all aspects of group life and illustrates its complexity” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 36). The individual stories of all participants were captured and presented in a narrative and chronological pattern of “early learning experience,” “previous teaching experience in China,” “teaching practice and beliefs in America,” and “visions of the future.” The analysis focused on critical moments of the participants’ stories and illustrated the complexity of our journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers in America.

Each representation is always a transformation (Mishler, 1986a). I have attempted to present the participants’ narrative portrayals in the form of lived-experience descriptions (van Manen, 1990). During the process of representing and analyzing data, I struggled to find a balance between description and interpretation. Bell (2000) argues that narrative researchers must not only “tell the story”, but must go beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure and carefully examine the underlying insights and assumptions the story illustrates. It is my job to tell “readers what that story means” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 2). In order to get into storytellers’ stories and interpret the interpreted world, I immersed myself in the life of the storytellers and lived with our stories during the data analysis period. I continued to look at our
narratives from inside, step out of it, and look into it again from outside. From moving backwards and forwards, I tried to frame the interpretations of this inquiry process through the lens of the authentic views of the participants.

I have attempted to preserve the original tone while representing participants’ stories. As I retell Wumei’s and Xiaotian’s stories, I use their own words and analyze them in a way to connect the key elements in their stories. Their stories were told and sustained in their ways of knowing and in their ways of being, which cultivated a fluid way of presenting and thinking about their changing lives and emerging identities. Clandinin and Connelly’s (1990) technique of connecting stories with “place” and “time” were adopted in writing the narratives. “Place” in this study is a cultural and social context where my co-participants and I live out our stories, such as the places we grew up, the places we went to school and the places we are teaching. “Time” in this study refers to my co-participants’ and my stories in the past, present and future.

The data analysis in this study moves beyond unitizing data, and categorizing dates to representing or reconstructing data (Creswell, 1998). Based on Connelley and Clandinin’s (2000) “three dimensional narrative space” (p. 50), I constructed our narratives in the dimensions of interaction, continuity, and situation focusing my descriptions and interpretation of our narratives on the influence of people, time, and place. While retelling our stories I connected the place and time in a meaningful way. In my effort to understand and interpret our narrated experiences in the four-directional dimension (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000), I intend to construct and reconstruct our narratives from the remembered past in the new light of the present (Shields, 2005, p. 180), and connect people across time and place. Viewing our journey of learning to
teach in the United States as a process of becoming, I unraveled the interconnected strands of our narratives to explore how our identities were formed and changed over time.

The Role of Researcher and the Relationship with the Storytellers

Sometimes, at some certain points of my life, I had hoped that some of my thoughts and memories could be vacuumed from me, giving me a feeling of being reborn and seeing the world in a more neutral and objective way. Actually, I tried a couple times to get this feeling of being reborn, but the fact was, it turned out to be a daydream. I remained the same person I used to be a couple of minutes before. The truth is I can’t get my thoughts vacuumed. They can’t be cleaned out but can only be revisited. I guess, in this study, I can only access lived experience as both a researcher and a subject at the same time.

Just like every one of us is not beyond life, but part of life, a researcher is not an “accessory” of research but rather a subject of research. We can’t see the world purely through others’ eyes, as a matter of fact, we have to rely on our own eyes to constructively interpret the lived experience of those around us. In this study, the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2002). The researcher’s experience, personal practical knowledge, education, and perspective were adopted to link experiences of the participants. This subjective position would allow me to “not only [saw] what is happening but [felt] what it is like to be a part of the setting or program” (Patton, 2002, p. 268). Therefore, in this study it is both important and realistic to consider my role both as a researcher and a subject of the study.

In this study what I am trying to do is not to withhold my subjectivity or positionality but to release them naturally. In other words, I let them go. Peshkin (1988) said: “one’s subjectivity . . . [that fits] like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research
and nonresearch aspects of our life” (p. 17). My subjectivity and positionality are not something that I should be afraid of exposing, but something that should be accepted and clear. Accordingly, the data analysis methodology in this study is hermeneutic and carried out in a way that illustrates and expose my biases and preconceptions. My subjectivity is articulated by a disclosure of perspectives and viewpoints that could interfere with the interpretation of the storytellers’ narratives. As Guba and Lincoln (1989) proposed, in order to temper my subjectivity, I record my a priori constructions at the beginning of the inquiry and periodically as the study progresses. For this study my initial subjectivity and emerging constructions of subjectivity during inquiry were logged and announced, and I explained its potential influence on my work.

In narrative inquiry the relationship between researcher and participant affects the quality of the information gathered along with other factors. It’s very important to establish a relationship that evokes a feeling of trust between the researcher and the storytellers. Only if the storytellers feel safe and perceive the researcher as trustworthy will they open up and share their stories. In this study, I attempt to establish a relationship of trust that makes the storytellers feel free and relaxed enough to be themselves. In order to maintain access and obtain rapport (the relationship between the researcher and storytellers based on trust), the researcher needs to act in culturally appropriate ways (Glesne, 1999). The fact that I was born and grew up in China and teach Chinese in the United States gives me a “member status” and “member-based-knowledge” (Johnson, 2002, p. 108) which helps me establish rapport with the storytellers.
Trustworthiness of the Study

Qualitative research proposes different criteria to satisfy the challenge of validity. Lincoln and Guba (2000) propose that the authenticity of the findings can be achieved through a fairness that requires multi-vocality in the process of interpreting the data. The inclusion of multiple voices prevents the marginalization of storytellers and shows that the researcher’s voice always substitutes for the voices of participants (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). In this regard, Mishler (1990) suggests that the researcher make his/her interpretation visible by showing actual excerpts of the interview.

In this study, I make my analysis visible by displaying narrative vignettes and comparing stories, and by illustrating the discrepancies and fragmentation of identities in the storytellers’ stories. In this narrative inquiry, storytellers’ voices are switched, their backgrounds are fictionalized, and their identity-development stories are negotiated. Our stories are told within the same time-span and across different spaces and settings. I present each participant’s individual story in the storyline that narrates cultural and personal events, and represent our stories within a larger historical, political, economic, social and symbolic context (Van Manen, 1990). In this way, not only can our voices be heard but they can also be understood in relation to the larger socio-cultural contexts.

Within this study, I endeavor to be candid and self-reflexive about my experiences, as well as to look beyond myself to make connections with broader educational contexts and issues that situate individual experiences. I attempt to retell my co-participants’ and my stories in a way that the reader can make judgments about the meanings that I’ve ascribed. I seek to ensure that our stories are presented in a way that my “subject positions, social locations,
interpretations, and personal experiences” continue to be examined “through the refracted medium of narrators’ voices” (Chase, 2005, p. 666).

Crites (1986) proposes the notion of “invitation” while describing the “trustworthiness” of narrative study. He suggests that a good narrative constitutes an “invitation” to participate. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state a similar notion by saying that narrative studies should be read and lived vicariously by others. The most important criterion for a good narrative study is not trying to represent the truth, but rather, to evoke a sense of vicariousness from others. As a research method, narrative inquiry retrospectively shapes an individual’s lived experience through the process of narrativization. It is more concerned with the development of personal stories, plots, actions, and denouements than it is with the actual reportage of epistemic truths. Conclusions about truth are not primary concerns for narrative inquirers (Bailey, 1997; Bruner, 1991).

According to Bruner (1991), narratives and their interpretations are “trafficking in meaning,” where “meanings are intransigently multiple: the rule is polysemy” (1996, p. 90). Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) shares a similar idea stating that narrative inquiry doesn’t seek to unveil solutions, but instead aims to “gain increased understanding of the multitude of meanings that are created by practitioners and researchers working together” (p.78). Different from the logical, positivist tone of much academic writing, in this narrative inquiry our stories are narrated in a passionate, and emotional tone so as to reflect who we are and the value of our way of knowing.
Cautions and Ethical Issues

By being a Chinese language teacher, my position as an insider helped me obtain rapport, but at the same time, my insider status may have also prevented me from making the familiar strange. In this narrative study, I make the familiar strange by re-conceptualizing ideas. The give and take of the life-history narrative interviews help both me and my storytellers make new and deeper meanings of our experiences. Erickson (1986) argues that qualitative research allows the researcher “to make the familiar strange and interesting again” (p.121) because of its potential to investigate the invisibility of everyday life.

Narrative inquiry lets researchers get at information that they do not consciously know themselves. Analysis of the storytellers’ stories made deeply hidden assumptions come to the surface. In this study, I paid special attention to my own knowledge about the stories and reveal how incomplete and misleading this knowledge is to the comprehension of their stories. I had to learn how to use my own personal experience selectively, without being confined to it. I also needed to step back from being too engaged in the storytellers’ narratives. This required a period of deliberate separation from the teachers’ narratives during my analysis process and created a form of distance that allowed me to see freshly what I couldn’t see at first.

While conducting narrative interviews, I was awakened to the ethical tensions of asking my co-participants to publicly share their inner insights, viewpoints and vulnerabilities. In order to protect my co-participants from any risk, I assured them that their best interests would always override my research needs. I was prepared to avoid questions that would make them feel uncomfortable and offered to stop the interviews at any time. At the same time, I disguised their personal identities by using fictional names in this narrative inquiry. I allowed them to tell their
narratives in a way in which they felt comfortable. My approach to their narrative interviews was:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. (Spradley, 1979, p. 34)

Lieblich (1996) claimed: “What started as a research became a relationship” (p. 172). In the same way, I intended to develop a sense of trust between my co-participants and myself (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). I have acknowledged that in this study I’m not only a researcher but also one of the participants. I had known my co-participants for over ten years. We became friends when we were in China and were bound to each other by this study in the United States. This kind of trust and bond helped us feel more comfortable in telling our life stories and making sense of our lives together.
CHAPTER V
THE STORY TELLERS: CHINESE TEACHERS’ LIVES IN A CROSS-CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

And whether I go East or West,
Back against or gaze upon, It is always the River of Forgetting,
Always China on the other side of barbed wire—
A legend, a time-worn rumor
On some page, what page of my childhood?
— By Yu Guangzhong  (Rivers of Forgetting)

This chapter opens by bringing storytellers’ voices towards contextualizing and theorizing life experiences. Focusing upon situating one’s identity within the temporal context of a life experience, it starts with exploring my co-participants’ and my life experiences to tell and reveal who we were and who we were becoming as teachers (Edel, 1984). As I began unraveling our journey of learning to teach in a foreign landscape, it was stories that enabled me to understand the people we were becoming, and led me to wonder about how teaching in a novel school setting and country might shift our identities in a multicultural and global context. Each teacher’s narrative documents a unique journey and provides the story landscape for our journey of learning to teach in North America and the development of our emerging identity in an international context. Each teacher’s journey links East and West and marks the location in which each narrative exists.

As Hall (1997a) argues, everyone talks from somewhere. We all find roots in our identity, from which we see and understand the world. This study starts with my own narrative
upon my border-crossing experiences of foreign language learning and teaching, and my in-between identity as a Chinese teacher and an international student in the United States. In this study, my own narrative is used both as context and content. I seek to use it not only to reveal my cultural and academic background as well as the bilingual, bicultural nature of my life, but also to move beyond description to interpretation. As one of the storytellers in this study, I’m not only living in a complex dynamic of narratives but also part of them. This not only helps reflect my position as an insider, but also creates a narrative prologue to open up the other two storytellers’ narratives.

**Qiuxian’s Narrative**

**A Small Child with Big “Dream”**

I came from the western part of China. Before I went to college, my world was limited to the neighborhood where I grew up and the schools that I attended since I was five. For a little girl who had only been to Xi’an, a well known Chinese city famous for the Terracotta Army and the city of Chengdu, renowned for its spicy food, the outside world was totally unknown to me. For a “frog living at the bottom of a well [jǐng dǐ zhī wā]”, my world meant nothing beyond the bright moonlight in front of my bed. At that time, as a little girl, I didn’t know that “beyond the mountain is another mountain [shān wài yǒu shān]”. However, I did know that the world must be beyond what I could depict in my mind. For a “small” me, the world was big.

As I grew older, the world became smaller to me. I used to think that the world is too big to be knit together but now I can’t help but feel that the world is so connected: when 24 hours after I left Beijing and I was able to enjoy a cup of coffee at Starbucks in Chicago. There is a
very old Chinese saying: “Read ten thousand books, travel ten thousand miles.” I can’t say that I’ve finished reading more than ten thousand books, but feel confident saying that I’ve traveled well over ten thousand miles. Thanks to modern transportation and globalization, I have traveled to many cities in and out of China. Before coming to the United States, I’d been switching back and forth among four cities (Xi’an, Chengdu, Shanghai and Beijing) in China. Outside of China, I flew across the Channel to visit England. Now, the United States is my new home.

There is a Chinese saying: “Curiosity can kill a person.” From England I returned to China, after which my curiosity made me fly over the Pacific Ocean to study in the home country of the “American dream”. When I was a very little girl, I asked my father why America is called “měi guó” [beautiful country]? He said: “Because people translate it like this.” I said: “Why don’t they translate it into ‘chǒu guó’ [ugly country]? Is it because America is a beautiful country?” My father answered: “Well, I don’t know. I’ve never been to America before.” I asked: “Dad, can you send me to America to see if it is beautiful? I really want to know.” My father answered: “Well, you need to go to college first. Americans don’t like ignorant people.” My father didn’t give me a satisfactory answer. America still remained a mystery to me. For many years this question wandered in my mind until I finally stepped onto the soil of America.

The second factor that made me a dreamer is my interest in learning. Although I came from an intellectual family in China, I never expected that I would be able to pursue doctoral studies. I liked to ask questions but I was not good at doing what I’d been told to do. I loved learning but it was not hard for me to lose interest in learning things that were not fun. Although I cried asking my father to send me to elementary school after my fifth birthday celebration, I did
not have as much fun as I expected at school. I was labeled a smart kid but few adults expected me to become a cultured and learned woman. The fact that I’m able to pursue my Ph.D. studies surprised many.

**A Teacher Who Touched My Heart**

Although I was labeled as a smart kid when I was little, I didn’t enjoy learning and school as much as my parents had hoped. It wasn’t until junior high that I began to enjoy a warm relationship with one of my teachers and developed a strong interest in language learning. At that time, I was fortunate to meet with a very passionate English teacher who inspired me and later changed my fate. When Ms. Niu first appeared in our class, all of us just couldn’t help falling in love with her. It would be hard for many adults to believe in “love at first sight” but for many kids a beautiful smiling face with kind words could immediately shorten the distance between teacher and student and brighten their world.

When Ms. Niu taught us, she was a young and passionate teacher in her early twenties. Different from many other teachers in our school, Ms. Niu always had a smile on her face. And more important, she was nice to all the kids in our class. My desk mate was a troublemaker in class. Many of our teachers didn’t like him at all. He was often asked to stand in the hallway during class time. Unlike many other teachers, Ms. Niu didn’t treat him as a troublemaker. She always talked to him after class, trying to understand his difficulties in learning. She praised every little improvement in his study with the sweetest words. His English score was improved greatly with Ms. Niu’s kind encouragement.

I was not a dumb student but neither was I a “good” student in most of my teachers’ eyes. They considered me a smart student who didn’t put all her effort in learning. I think they were
right. I was the kind of student who always waited until the last minute to finish doing homework. I remember I played with my friends every single day of one summer holiday and wrote all my diaries on the last day of summer break.

As an average student, most of my teachers didn’t give me much attention. Their attention had been given to either the top students or the most academically challenged ones. Actually, at that time, as a carefree kid, I didn’t take it as a big deal. I actually took it as a good thing for me. At least, I could do something that I liked without getting too much attention. One pleasure I had in my mathematics class was to read my favorite novels while pretending to listen to the teacher. While some top students were fighting for excellence and some less capable ones were struggling in their learning, I was enjoying the freedom of doing what interested me. As a kid who didn’t have many ambitious plans for her future, I was satisfied with what I got and enjoyed being unnoticed.

But the coming of Ms. Niu totally overturned my peaceful kingdom. She changed the whole picture of my school life. I can still remember clearly the English class that changed my life direction. It was an early morning class. After reading an English essay aloud with her for a couple of times, Ms. Niu asked us read it aloud by ourselves. I was concentrating on reading the essay and didn’t notice that Ms. Niu was standing by my desk. With all the kids reading aloud at the same time, the classroom was noisy. However, with her sensitivity, Ms. Niu still noticed my voice. She recognized my talent in learning English. She asked us to stop reading and pointed at me to read the essay for the whole class. I might have been a mischievous kid but I was a shy student, especially in the classroom. In many cases, even if I knew the answer to the questions, I was too shy to raise my hand. However, at that moment Ms. Niu put me in the spotlight. She
encouraged me to give it a try with her warm smile. Although feeling a little bit shy, I encouraged myself to try not only because I liked Ms. Niu so much but also because I was excited to show my talent to others.

My performance was successful, which not only impressed Ms. Niu but also my fellow classmates. From then on, everyone in my class knew that I had some talent in learning English. I suddenly became a popular student in my English class. Interestingly, I myself began to enjoy the pleasure of being a top student, which I never got a chance to experience before. I started to put much more effort towards my English learning. Ms. Niu, at the same time, fed me with extracurricular learning materials in my spare time. Fortunately, my effort paid off. I became one of the top students in my class. I even got the chance to attend several large English speech contests held in our city.

Actually, my improvement in English began to influence my achievement in learning other subjects. I gradually transferred from an upper middle achiever to a high achiever in all my subjects except for mathematics. Although I was a kid without too much ambition, the pleasure of being a good student was something that I could hardly reject. It was Ms. Niu who found my talent in English learning and made me gain a strong interest in learning foreign languages and knowing about foreign culture. She opened a new window for a kid who was very curious to know about the outside world. She showed, in a powerful way, how the smallest kindness can make a big difference in a student’s life.

**Education: A Road to Discovery**

After finishing the Entrance Examination [gōo kǎo], like every other Chinese high school graduate, I was busy applying for college. Applying for college is an extremely important thing
in most Chinese students’ lives not only because it is a once in a lifetime chance for Chinese students who have been studying for this for ten years and more but also because it means a vital turning point that can determine a person’s future. In this regard, many Chinese parents are very anxious about the result of the Entrance Examination [gāo kǎo]. My father was no exception. He didn’t show his anxiety clearly but he was more excited and serious about which university and major to choose than I was. After much deliberation, he volunteered to pick economics as my major.

Unfortunately, my mathematics teacher in high school firmly believed that female students are not as good as male students in learning mathematics. He made his point clear by putting almost all his attention on his smart boys without noticing the girls’ need to learn mathematics. I had figured out a long time before that he didn’t like me: not because I was dumb but because I was a girl. I didn’t love mathematics enough that I wanted to impress him. Therefore, I chose to read novels in his class. I did it as a form of rebellion against his prejudice. Due to my mathematics teacher’s prejudice against girls and his lack of ability to make mathematics interesting, I gave up learning mathematics. However, my father, as an engineering professor, didn’t know about my poor performance in mathematics, probably because my excellent performance in the other subjects made it less obvious to my teachers and my parents. At the moment when I told my father that I didn’t want to study economics because I disliked mathematics, he was surprised and disappointed. Then he tried to persuade me to believe how interesting and fun it was to learn mathematics. However, it was too late for me to establish any confidence and desire to learn mathematics.
The other reason for me to reject economics was that I already had an idea about what I wanted to study in college. I’d made up my mind to study English Literature. Ms. Niu had opened a window to the outside world for me. I was curious to know about foreign culture and the bigger world. I owe thanks to my father because he didn’t force me to choose the major that he wanted me to study. I was like a bird flying out of her nest, finding the new direction in her life.

After four years of undergraduate study, I was faced with another important decision. With the knowledge and skills I learned at university, I would be able to find a job in an import and export company, or a company focused on international cultural exchanges. However, Ms. Niu’s influence showed its power again. Instead of choosing to work in industry, I chose to further my education. I applied for a master’s program in education.

My supervisor was conducting a research project on foreign language teaching when I was in this master’s program. I was both a master’s student and a teacher educator for her research project. I had a lot of opportunities to observe our experimental teachers’ class and exchange ideas with them about how to improve their teaching. The student teachers with whom I was working were all talented in their own ways. We ended up being good friends rather than keeping the distant researcher teacher relationship. When I was a kid, my perception of teachers was always from a student’s perspective. I viewed my teachers either as “cats” (I was the mouse, of course) or as “angels” (like Ms. Niu). No matter whether “cats” or “angels”, they were not human beings. After working with those teachers, I began to see them as real people with pleasures, struggles and hopes.
Those student teachers generously shared their stories with me and allowed me to write about their journey of learning to teach. One of my friends once asked me “My sister wants to choose an English learning class for my nephew. Which class do you think she should choose? Which method is the best to learn English?” I answered: “It doesn’t really matter which class or method you choose for your nephew. But it really matters who is going to teach him. Without a good teacher, the best method would become useless.” Actually, this is one of the lessons I learned from the stories of those teachers. Those teachers are not necessarily better teachers than others but their stories emphasize how important “the teacher as person” influences the way they teach. Their stories also gently pushed me to go ahead to learn about the teacher education experiences of Western countries. All the teachers in this research project expressed the desire to learn from the experiences of language teachers in Western countries. This actually helped me make up my mind to pursue my Ph.D. in America.

American Dream

My journey to the United States began as I started a doctoral program at Kent State University. For me, pursuing higher education in the United States was “my destiny”. My “Wheel of Fortune” was turning long after I first asked my curious question about why America is called “měi guó [beautiful county]” in Chinese. My motivation to study in America was due to my curiosity to know about the outside world, and more importantly, the people who inspired me. Without my beloved teacher Ms. Niu and the other teachers who generously shared their stories with me, I would not have developed the interest and passion to pursue my Ph.D. in America. Without them, I would not have had the courage and opportunity to step onto the soil of the United States to realize my “American Dream”.

Before I came to the United States, I used to have a lot of images and stereotypes about the United States from watching Hollywood movies and American soap operas. After living in the United States for a while, I came to realize that many of my earlier images were not accurate. For example, not everyone in America lives in big cities like New York. Most Americans live in suburbs which are normally miles away from what we would call a city. Other than Chinese food, most Americans know little about China and the Chinese.

Also, after living in the U.S. for a while, I began to understand American society in many aspects. However, all these discoveries/insights about America still remained on the surface due to the fact that my real contacts with Americans were situated between the campus and my efficiency apartment. My contacts with American professors and classmates in the academics didn’t reflect the complete picture of American society. I lived like an outsider in America. It felt like they were all around but I was not one of them. My understanding of American society really changed when I taught Chinese in an American public school.

**My American Life as A Chinese Language Teacher**

After receiving my job assignment to teach Chinese in an American high school, I was actually feeling more nervous than excited. As a teacher who used to teach at the post-secondary level, I didn’t have much confidence dealing with high school students, especially American high school students. Rebellious American teenagers on TV or in the movie “Mean Girls” didn’t leave me with a good impression. I was really shocked by what could happen in American schools after watching “Mean Girls.” The truth was that I scared myself with my own imagination about American teenagers before teaching in American public school.
Unfortunately, after teaching in an American public school for a while, I realized that the reality was even worse than what I expected.

The school at which I taught was located in a very poor community. I still remember my local American friends’ expression after I mentioned the name of the school where I was going to teach. They were all trying to be encouraging but I was able to detect the pitying looks on their faces. They couldn’t understand why William High School offered Chinese language classes at all. Generally speaking, for a country in which Spanish ranks as the top foreign language being taught in secondary school, Chinese is only offered in school districts with a deep multi-cultural commitment or background. William High School is definitely not one of them. Even after teaching at this school many teachers in William High School didn’t get it either when I chatted with them during the lunch break. One teacher teased: “I don’t get why those kids need to learn Chinese. Some of them can’t even learn English.”

However, to everyone’s surprise, over 100 students in this school signed up for Chinese class. As a new teacher in an American school, I was surprised when the Guidance office gave me the long list of the students who signed up for Chinese class. As a Chinese teacher who was eager to introduce Chinese language and culture to American kids, I was excited.

Unfortunately, the reality was another story. I realized that my thoughts were naïve after my first week’s teaching here. I was shocked to notice that many of the students in Chinese class had learning disabilities. Later I even found out that some of my students had severe language learning disabilities. If they had difficulties in learning English, then why sign up for Chinese class? This was the question that bothered me for a while. I couldn’t find an answer until I spoke with other foreign language teachers.
I was told that many students were actually “dumped” into the Chinese class by the guidance office because they had nowhere else to go. In this school foreign language courses are traditionally considered “accessory” courses compared with the core courses like math and English, foreign language classes have become the “dumping ground” for those “unwanted” students. This explains why so many students signed up for the Chinese class as an elective course. Later, I found this to be true after my conversations with my students. Like me, many of them didn’t know why they ended up in Chinese class. The truth was that they were put into Chinese class not because they wanted to learn Chinese but because they had nowhere else to go.

Another thing that discouraged me was that I felt misunderstood when communicating in English. Before I taught here, I was never aware of my nonstandard English. As a non-native English speaker I never felt “like a fish out of water” while discussing academic issues with American professors and classmates in or out of class. My non-native English status had never been a problem for me. However, this changed when I taught here. I noticed that there were always some students who couldn’t help laughing at me in class whenever I mispronounced a word in English. In order to make excuses for not doing class work or homework, some students tried their best to find any “confusion” in my directions in English. I felt embarrassed and sometimes angry toward myself.

During my first year’s teaching in there, I was feeling more discouraged than excited. The oversized classes with unmotivated students made my teaching chaotic. Before I taught Chinese, I always enjoyed teaching and being a teacher. After teaching for a year, I started to feel doubtful about myself and my teaching. Oftentimes I was feeling very discouraged to see that a good lesson plan couldn’t solve a lack of classroom discipline. Students’ behavioral issues
were so bad that I had to spend most of the time doing classroom management rather than teaching the content.

Despite all the bad feelings about myself and teaching I didn’t totally lose my hope in teaching Chinese to American teenagers. I still had some good students in my class. Although they were the minority in Chinese class, they gave me the encouragement that I needed to continue my teaching. They became the motivation for me to continue teaching Chinese in William High School. They were my hope.

During my second year’s teaching in William High School, things were getting a little bit better for me. First, the class size was getting a little smaller. This is very important for the success of the foreign language class. Second, with the help of other teachers, at the beginning of the academic year I finally got rid of some of the students who were not supposed to be in the Chinese class to start with. In my journal, I wrote:

My Chinese teaching is going well so far, better than I expected. I have better students in both Chinese I & II. I was told that many kids were “dumped” into Chinese class last year. They didn’t have interest or motivation to learn which made my teaching really challenging. However, fortunately, I have better kids this year. Most of them seem to have some interest in learning Chinese and Chinese culture. They have the interest and curiosity to learn. This really makes a great difference in my teaching. My teaching is no longer like playing the piano in front of a cow [duì niú táng qín]. My Chinese II is going well too. Most kids in my Chinese II actually want to learn Chinese. Plus, I only have around 14 kids in each class. I feel a lot easier and it’s fun to teach a foreign language to a
smaller group. I can really pay attention to each one of them and they can get more opportunities to practice.

Although things were getting a little bit better at school, classroom discipline still remained a big issue for me. The most challenging thing was that I still had quite a lot of students who just didn’t care about learning. My journal read:

I came to realize that the most difficult students are those who don’t have an interest or motivation in learning Chinese. I call them “I don’t care” type. They are like hard rocks. They can hurt your feelings. They are perfectly fine with only speaking English, eating and working in McDonalds for the rest of their life. Yesterday, I asked them to start a “Chinese Women’s Clothes Project”, one student said: “I don’t even care about myself. Why should I care about Chinese women? I want to speak English and listen to American music.” It is obvious that she only has one potato in her basket and she is fine with it.

Another thing that shocked me was the misunderstanding some American students had toward a foreign culture and people who are different from them. I wrote:

The other thing that I found interesting was how narrow-minded American teenagers can be. One day I asked them to fill in the states in an empty American map and indicate their location in Chinese. When I gave the worksheet to them, one kid said: “Do I need to write Chinese on it? I don't want to write Chinese on my BEAUTIFUL American map.” I was really shocked by what she said. It hurt my feelings as a Chinese teacher. Later this kid put “GOD BLESS AMERICA!” on her worksheet. This was the
kid who always talked about how we should get rid of welfare and immigrants, and the importance of speaking English in this country. What can I say?

I was shocked more by one dad’s comments about his daughter’s Chinese learning. When I asked his help for encouraging his daughter to do her Chinese homework, he yelled at me on the phone saying: “It’s America! Everybody should speak English!” As a foreigner living in the USA and a Chinese teacher who is proud of introducing Chinese to Americans, it was the most humiliating moment that I ever had as a Chinese language teacher. Where could I go in my heart or my head after such an insult?

The Facilitator

I had very mixed feelings towards teaching in America. Despite all the discouragement and hurt feelings, I still managed to have my pride and comfort as a Chinese teacher. Every progress that my students made in their Chinese learning, their motivation to learn Chinese, and their kind words to me made a great difference for me in my teaching. I can’t imagine how I could survive without them. They made me realize how important a teacher could be in his/her students’ lives. They made me understand that the value of being a ‘teacher’ is much more than belonging to a profession.

When a friend of mine told me about her bad experiences at an American school, I asked her: “Do you regret being a teacher? Will you choose to pay less attention to your students because their parents are mean?” She answered firmly: “I can’t. I am a teacher. I mean, teaching is a very special profession. You are working with people. Every time when I see the happy look on many of my students’ faces, I can forget all my unhappiness. You just cannot take revenge on your students even if they have very mean parents, even if you have a very bad
principal.” I was touched by those simple words. The teaching profession, in many people’s eyes, is not a great profession. But many good teachers, with their love and passion, are facilitating hope for society. This is the pleasure in being a teacher and what I love most about doing educational research.

People often say that “you would love China more after you leave China.” As a Chinese teacher teaching in America, I find it quite true. I never felt so much pride in being Chinese and being a Chinese teacher when I was in China. After teaching Chinese in America, I found my mission as a Chinese teacher. I can be a facilitator to promote better understanding about China among the American general public. As a Chinese teacher, I’m a facilitator to promote better understanding about Chinese in the American general public. “The way ahead is long. I see no ending, yet high and low I’ll search with my will unbending.” (Qū Yuán, 340 BC-278 BC)

Wumei’s Narrative

This is a learning and teaching story of Wumei that constitutes a part of her historical past and creates what she is and what she might become.

An Honor Student with A Desire to Learn

Growing up in a mid-western city in China under the watchful eyes of her parents, Wumei was a good child from day one. She developed an appreciation for learning from the time she was a small kid. She has always loved school and had fond memories of being in school. She was often ranked as a favorite student by her teachers. She kept her reputation as a good student till she finished graduate school. She lived in a self-contained cultural box and met every social expectation from Chinese society.
From the time she was a little, Wumei developed a desire for education and knowledge in general. Among many different factors, parental influences and societal expectations were the most significant in shaping her commitment to education. In Chinese society, formal education was considered as an obligation and a necessity if you wanted to have a promising future. Wumei grew up in a community and society which inspired her to pursue the highest level of education she could reach. Like many families in China, education was highly emphasized in Wumei’s family.

Wumei’s personal appreciation for learning and education eventually evolved into a desire for teaching. Becoming a teacher was always Wumei’s dream since she was a child at school. She liked school in general and she liked most of the teachers who had taught her. She felt that teachers are among the most respected people in the world. This is part of the reason that she later became a teacher herself. Wumei recalled:

I feel like it has been my dream since I started school. I’ve had this dream since elementary school. At that time, I always felt like teachers are the most beloved people in the world. You know, in a kid’s heart, it was like that the profession of teacher is very sacred and respectful. So you know, since I was a kid I had a thing for this.

Wumei developed a philosophy of teaching and conception of what a teacher should be from her experiences as a high school student. Her experiences as a learner back in China shaped her perceptions of teaching. Her perspectives on teaching were inspired by her high school math teacher. She expressed a desire to follow the path of this beloved teacher whom she described as “someone who touched my heart”.

A Teacher Who Touched Her Heart

There’s always a teacher who inspires a student in one way or another. For many Chinese who enjoyed learning, there was a teacher who left them with the deepest impression. For them, this teacher is the one who opened a whole new world to them. For Wumei, Mr. Li, her beloved math teacher, was THE ONE who inspired her to become a teacher. Wumei recalled:

There was Mr. Li in my high school. At that time he had just graduated from college and become a teacher in our high school. So he really had the passion to be a teacher. You could feel that he was like fresh air. He was really different from other teachers. He was just like the teachers you can find in the movies who really care about their students. He really had good communication with his students and his teaching methods were very flexible. At that time, I felt so happy to have a master teacher like him. He also taught us lots of learning strategies. Before he taught us my math was not very good. When I made mistakes he encouraged me and inspired me to try another perspective to solve the problem. He often told me the importance of doing well at school. The other teachers just often told you that you’ve got to go to college, but Mr. Li inspired me to go to college. He often told us that you would experience another kind of life if you went to college. At that age you felt it was a very fresh thought because no adult would talk to you like that. They often just told you to “go to college, go to college” but this teacher would tell you why you should go to college. He would describe to you what kind of new life you would experience
and what kind of new people you would come across if you went to college.

That’s why he gave me a very deep impression.

For Wumei, what made the greatest difference between Mr. Li and many other teachers was his vigor and passion in teaching. She said:

He had the youthful vigor and passion. I think that you can feel that kind of passion. It was very obvious. He was young and had great concern for his students. Now that I am a teacher I can really feel it. For example, if I had a good lesson plan and designed a lot of good activities for my students they would show me the good progress they made. You can feel it from the new words they use in their conversation and positive eye contact with them. Students are smart. They can feel your passion for your work. They can feel whether you put your heart in your work or not.

When Wumei was in high school, she was a high achiever in almost every subject. She showed a strong interest in learning languages. She said, “Generally speaking, I like learning languages very much. Chinese and English were my favorite classes when I was a student. I had an interest in learning languages.”

Because of her strong interest in Chinese, Wumei had no hesitation to pick Chinese as her major when applying for universities after “gǎo kǎo” (Chinese Entrance Examination). She even got an MA in Modern Chinese Literature. After getting her Master’s degree, Wumei was hired in the College of International Cultural Exchanges at North West University. Her responsibility was to teach Chinese to overseas students. With her love for Chinese culture and literature,
Wumei found her job very interesting and pleasant to do. She felt that she finally realized her dream of becoming a teacher, especially a language teacher.

**A Proud Teacher**

Many teachers who used to teach Wumei had no doubt that she’d be good at anything she chose to do. Everyone who knows Wumei believes that she is a good teacher. With her love for Chinese and teaching, Wumei proved them to be right. She loves her job. She loves being a Chinese teacher introducing Chinese language and Chinese culture to overseas students.

Before Wumei taught in the USA, she used to tell me: “There are no bad students but bad teachers.” As I mentioned before if someone else told me this, or if I read it in a book, I would take it as a joke. But I tend to believe her words, not only because she was always a perfect student but also because of the way that she loves her job. I believe it’s a blessing to love the job that one is doing, and Wumei just happened to have this precious gift. If this sounds too good to be true this was at least true before she went to teach Chinese in the US. For Wumei, Chinese language is her life-long love. It’s something that she cannot live without. For her, teaching Chinese is the best way to express her love for Chinese. She is determined to promote her love to the whole world. For her teaching Chinese is not only her career but more importantly, her passion.

With all her passion for Chinese and teaching, Wumei became a good Chinese teacher in her college after a couple of years. She enjoyed a very warm relationship with her students who came from all around the world to learn Chinese. “During all those years teaching Chinese, over 80% of my students established a very good relationship with me” (Wumei). She attributed her good relationship with students to her students’ intrinsic motivation to learn. She stated, “They
are adults. They travel long distances and spend a lot of money to study Chinese in China. That’s why you don’t really find a student who doesn’t care about learning Chinese.”

A good relationship with her students enabled Wumei to establish her confidence in teaching. I still remember an expression of confidence on her face when she told me: “Give me any student, I can teach him to learn.” This was Wumei, a good Chinese teacher who devoted herself to introducing Chinese language and culture to the outside world.

A Volunteer Chinese Teacher in Small American Town

Wumei’s journey to the United States began with participation in a teaching abroad program. The Office of Chinese Language Council International (known colloquially as “Hanban”) was going to recruit some volunteer teachers to teach Chinese in the United States. When Wumei’s dean told her about this news, she was excited and decided to give it a try. She told me about her motivation to make this decision.

First, the work is similar to what I did when I was in China, teaching Chinese. It’s like I’m continuing what I did before. But it is also different from what I did before. It’s kind of like the “expansion” of what I did in China…I wanted to expand my language teaching experiences. I wanted to feel what it would be like to teach kids. Teaching Chinese to overseas students has always been my professional focus. The experience of teaching Chinese to children is important in my professional development. Second, I think it is very important for me to have overseas teaching experience. When I taught in China, my students were immersed in an environment of target language. The result would most likely be very different from learning Chinese in their own country, in the
environment of their mother language. It would be a very interesting research project. Third, it’s also an opportunity for me to open my mind. After all, you are coming to America! I can also have the chance to improve my English.

Wumei is a Chinese teacher who was proud of her teaching. She had confidence in her ability to perform as a teacher. She had developed a level of confidence in her teaching ability and comfort with introducing Chinese culture and language to overseas students. She was also reassured by the hope that the training she received by Hanban would provide her with the necessary skills and information to teach effectively in an American public school.

However, unexpectedly, her early teaching experience in America was a daunting experience for her. She indicated that her cursory training from Hanban didn’t adequately prepare her to perform teaching tasks effectively, especially in terms of classroom management. She was expecting to have an American mentor who could help train her on classroom management in American public schools. However, this turned out to be a naïve expectation.

After her arrival at Chicago O’Hare International Airport, without time to recover from her jet lag, Wumei was put into class facing her American students who seemed like they had never seen a Chinese face in their entire life. For someone who had never lived in the US before, Wumei felt excited as well as nervous. Her initial excitement about teaching in a foreign country was quickly replaced by a feeling of confusion. She was overwhelmed by her new experiences in an American school. Shortly after arriving in the United States, Wumei was notified that she had to learn all the new school regulations and rules on her own. She felt like a confused kid transferring to a new school. She had no choice but to adjust to her new role as a Chinese teacher in a totally foreign environment. Moving from a proud Chinese teacher to a foreign
teacher who constantly felt lost, the reality of her teaching at an American school was not easy at the start.

Wumei recalled feeling frustrated and angry during the beginning of her teaching in the United States. Her new teaching load in her American school was much heavier than what she had back in China. As a new foreign teacher, she felt she was given a larger teaching load than she had first expected. She had to teach more than a hundred students each day at school. There were more than 30 students in each of her classes other than the high school class. For a language teacher who was used to teaching much smaller classes, this was overwhelming. Actually, what she didn’t like the most was not that she had to teach so many classes but that she had to teach classes at so many different levels, which was something with which she was not familiar. Wumei reported, “Mine are like from kindergarten, to primary, to middle school, and to senior high! Can you imagine that? In the morning I teach 4-year-old kids. One hour later, I meet 16-year-old juveniles.”

She was on her own to figure out what was expected of her as a Chinese teacher and what she should expect of her American students. She recalled:

I never got any instruction regarding what to do from the school. No orientation on how to teach, how to manage the classroom, literally nothing! The second day after I arrived, I was sent to school. I was expecting at least one week’s orientation to allow me to get used to the new teaching environment, but, no, I was just told: “Here is your schedule…” I was disappointed and scared.
Wumei felt utterly alien as well as invisible at school. For many American students who acted bewildered towards their new foreign teacher, Wumei’s existence was treated as something of a curiosity. Her new name at school was “the Chinese teacher.” She recalled:

Most kids in my school don’t know my name. They like to call me “the Chinese teacher”. Most kids in my school act like they have never seen an Asian face before. Whenever they saw an “alien” face that stood out among all other Americans at school, they knew it was “the Chinese teacher.”

Wumei also felt she was invisible at school because she was the only foreign teacher in the entire school district. She knew her students and some teachers at school, but other than that, she could barely pronounce the names of the people she saw at school. The only communication she had with her local American teachers was to say “Hi” in the hallways. Wumei said, “All the teachers in my school knew that there is a Chinese teacher, but most of them didn’t have any contact with me. The only contact they had with me was to say “Hi” politely if they saw me wandering in the hallway.”

After teaching for a while, Wumei’s nervousness for her new teaching environment dissipated a little bit as she created a support system and developed a teaching approach that was within her “comfort zone”. Her next-door neighbor, the Spanish teacher, was often patient and answered her “naïve” questions about the school and discipline issues. The local Chinese families constantly invited her to visit their families and drove her to grocery stores if needed. Her high school class made some progress in learning Chinese. All these made her frustration about the new teaching environment less intolerable.
Despite the fact that she was feeling very exhausted by her heavy teaching load, Wumei was still able to enjoy her teaching in some sense. The most precious enjoyment for her came from teaching her high school students. After a long day at work each day, her high school students gave her the relaxation she needed from teaching. Different from her middle school class, her high school class was made of students who loved to learn Chinese. For her high school students, they chose to learn Chinese of their own accord. She commented, “I love my high school class. Chinese was an elective course for them. They chose to learn Chinese because of interest. Therefore, they were highly motivated in their learning.”

The make up of Wumei’s high school class was also interesting. First, because the Chinese course was an elective course for them, there were only eight students in the high school class. Second, among the eight students, half of them were American born Chinese. And the other half were either those who were eager to learn Chinese language and culture or those who believe learning Chinese is going to benefit them in the future. Wumei observed:

Some of my high school students are American born Chinese. They feel like they should learn Chinese, or their parents made them feel this way. For them, Chinese is part of their culture. There were also some kids who did have a great interest in foreign cultures. They wanted to know about Chinese culture and learn the Chinese language. For example there was a kid in my class. He came to join my class pretty late but he was very interested in studying Chinese language and he was very talented in learning it. There were also some students who believed that learning Chinese would benefit their future career. It was mainly these three types of students. I remember there was a kid in
my class who told me that learning Chinese would increase his opportunity to get into a
good college. Therefore I think they all had great motivation to learn.

This really made a great difference for Wumei as a Chinese teacher. Her high school
class made her feel that teaching Chinese is no longer like “driving ducks onto a perch.” More
importantly, they made her feel fulfilled as a Chinese teacher. She commented:

They were all happy to be learning Chinese. They worked very hard and they
made lots of achievements that went beyond my expectations… it was such a good
surprise to see their progress in their Chinese learning, their passion for the Chinese
language, and their eagerness to communicate with local Chinese. All these left me with
a very deep impression and made me feel really fulfilled.

Her caring for her high school students seemed rooted in her own struggles against
feeling lost as a teacher. She felt happy to teach them. Because of them, her teaching in
American schools didn’t seem like complete suffering. When they were happy Wumei was
happy too. No matter what the motivation, everyone in that class was highly motivated, happy
and ready to learn. This was the most important thing for her as a Chinese teacher. This positive
teaching and learning atmosphere really facilitated Wumei’s good relationship with her students
and motivated her teaching. She recalled:

Many of my high school students describe me as a very nice teacher.

They said that I never showed them a disapproving face. They wrote: ‘She
always has a smile on her face’…They like me very much. Even their parents
know that they like me. They keep saying: ‘You are the best foreign language
teacher I have ever met!’
Students’ kind words really made Wumei feel proud of herself and enabled her to find her value as a Chinese teacher. She said:

They made me feel really good about my teaching. They made me feel proud of myself and being a Chinese teacher. Their achievement in their Chinese studies was a great reward for my work teaching. This was a big comfort to me. It made me find my value as a Chinese teacher.

The other factor that motivated Wumei to teach Chinese came from parents’ support for their kids’ Chinese learning. The most parental support Wumei got was from those parents with Chinese background. They gave her the most support and encouragement which she needed living and teaching in a foreign country. Wumei observed:

For those American born Chinese kids, I know their families very well because I was with their parents. We lived in the same town. Their parents were my friends who had immigrated to America from Hong Kong a long time ago. They’d already settled down in America. So their kids are Americans. They constantly go back to China for a visit. They also have a lot of relatives and friends back in China. They (parents) invited me to eat at the local Chinese restaurant a couple of times. One parent who had two daughters in my class invited me to eat twice at a local Chinese buffet. We chatted about this and that in Chinese. It was fun. They said that their kids like me very much so they wanted to know me.
Wumei was not only welcomed by parents with Chinese background but also those American parents who were very open-minded toward their children learning Chinese. She reported:

Some open-minded parents think that China is becoming a superpower in the world. Therefore, learning Chinese would help their kids become more competitive in the future. They think it is good thing for their kids to learn more foreign languages. Most parents of my high school students are very supportive. They are friendly towards Chinese people. Some of their family members have even been to China before.

The third factor that motivates Wumei to teach came from her mission as a Chinese teacher. Wumei thinks her job is sacred. She considers her role to be a disseminator of Chinese culture. She said her mission as a Chinese teacher is to “Let more people know about Chinese and Chinese culture. Have a ‘correct’ understanding of China.” I still remember an expression of anger on her face when talking about their students’ lack of understanding of China and the Chinese. She said:

I found out that many of my students know nothing about China. The questions they asked are very funny. They seem to think that we Chinese are still living in a primitive time ... In our school library, there are some brochures about China with pictures of Chairman Mao on it!! You know, very old pictures. Their impressions about China and the Chinese still remain in the middle of the last century!! Every time when I see those pictures, I feel like tearing them up. Their understanding about China and the Chinese people really needs to be updated!
This can explain why Wumei felt so happy and proud when her students could express themselves in simple Chinese. She stated:

For example, you can often see them speaking Chinese in the streets. Their passion for learning Chinese made me feel really glad, no matter if from curiosity or real interest. At least, they’ve got some opportunities to know about China and Chinese culture. I really felt proud of them.

Despite the enjoyment from teaching her high school students, just like many other teachers who teach in American public school, Wumei was often feeling frustrated and exhausted. Before she came to teach in the States, as a teacher who only taught adult students at the post-secondary level, Wumei was worried about her new teaching environment knowing that her students would be middle school and high school students. Unfortunately, most of her worries became true. No matter how hard she tried to get prepared for teaching in American public school before she came to the US, the reality of her teaching was still way beyond her imagination. As a Chinese teacher with rich teaching experiences Wumei was never aware of the existence of classroom management till the moment when she was “dumped” into a totally strange teaching environment. For a Chinese teacher whose major concern was focused on teaching content, all her confidence on teaching was seriously undermined by her defeat in the effort to maintain classroom discipline, especially in her middle school class. She reported:

…the most discouraging experiences were almost all about class management. I felt like I didn’t have enough experience for this especially when I taught the middle school students. I felt like I had to spend most of my time maintaining discipline. I seldom thought about class discipline before I taught
The students I taught in China had the motivation to learn Chinese. Their purpose was to learn Chinese. So there was no need to push them to learn. They spent a lot of money to learn Chinese. You don’t need to ask them to learn. There was no such thing like a learning challenged student. Therefore, I never thought about maintaining classroom discipline, like requests to be quiet, listen to the teacher, and do the work. But when I started teaching those middle school students, oh boy, you know, first it was a big class. Plus, many students were not interested in learning Chinese. They felt like they had to learn Chinese…I spent a lot of time in designing a good lesson plan. I planned to teach them some sentences. I designed some good class activities for them to do. But to my disappointment I had to spend most of the time maintaining discipline. They didn’t really pay attention to the teacher. They didn’t listen to the teacher. They didn’t want to do what they were asked to do by the teacher. In this kind of situation, I felt discouraged.

For a teacher who was used to teaching adult students who have a great motivation to learn Chinese, Wumei felt very discouraged by her middle school class. Surprisingly, Chinese was a required course for her middle school students. Therefore, among her 30 students very few of them had the motivation to learn Chinese. Under this circumstance, maintaining classroom discipline was a big issue for her, let alone adapting to the challenges of making them do their homework. Wumei observed:

I think some students did their homework but it was not very common. It was just like in class. Those who were interested always sat in the first row and those who didn’t
have any interest just sat in the back and were busy talking or playing with each other.

Of course, they didn’t do their homework. I assigned them some homework to at first. They either forgot to do it or forgot to bring it to school. Or they didn’t want to do it saying it was too hard for them to do.

Since most of her teaching strategies failed with regard to teaching middle school students later Wumei changed her strategy and asked her students to do homework in class. Before teaching her middle school students, just like many other teachers in China, Wumei had high expectations of her students. She had her teaching goals made but she realized that these goals were not realistic at all for her American middle school students after teaching them for a while. She said:

Therefore, I changed my teaching strategy. I asked them to do the work in class rather than after class. I decided to supervise them during their practice time. I could watch them practicing… It was impossible for me to set up a high standard for them. I just wanted them to have an opportunity to experience and explore Chinese culture. Therefore, I asked them to finish their practice in class. At least in class I can watch them finishing their work. In the past I was planning to teach them a certain amount of words and sentences in a year. And then I realized that since their motivation was different, their attitudes were different, I just couldn’t set teaching goals as usual. When I was in China, I sometimes asked my students to do an interview in simple Chinese. However, you can’t use the same method with American students here. It is a bit unrealistic. So I changed my teaching methods as a result of a lot of failures.
Other than the classroom management, the other thing that bothered Wumei was how little Americans know about Chinese and Chinese culture. Their understanding of China and Chinese still stayed in the 1970s. She stated:

I did have students who knew very little about Chinese culture. For example, when they saw me using a computer they were surprised that Chinese people also use computers. You know what I’m talking about? When I brought my computer to class, some kids were like “Oh…Chinese people also have computers.” Perhaps for many Americans their imagination about China and the Chinese people still remains in the 1970s.

As a foreigner living in America without family and friends around Wumei often felt lonely and helpless. Although reluctant to be separated from her family by distance, she acknowledged that her students’ improvement in Chinese, parents’ positive feedback regarding Chinese learning, and her mission to introduce Chinese culture to American society gave her encouragement to continue teaching Chinese. She observed:

… I felt that I had a very harmonious relationship with my high school students. I felt it was truthfully an enjoyment for me to teach them. I could always realize my teaching plans and goals perfectly. I really felt fulfilled. I think this is mutual because if students love learning their teacher would love to teach. If there is a good interaction in class, there would be close feelings between teachers and students. There was a Chinese kid who had his birthday party at home. We went to celebrate his birthday. We spoke Chinese in his house. Everyone was very surprised. They’ve learned Chinese for about a year. We kept talking in Chinese in class as much as we could. They could understand
most of what I said. We could basically communicate in Chinese. The local Chinese were very surprised. I also felt very proud. No matter what, they practiced so they could use Chinese in their real life. It’s different from just speaking Chinese in class.

Although Wumei was a very experienced teacher before she came to teach in the USA, she felt like some part of her teaching had been changed invisibly after teaching American students. For her, all these contributed to the accumulation and expansion of her teaching experiences. She said:

I feel that these things (changes) are invisible. I feel that I gained more teaching experiences. Therefore, I think this teaching opportunity really extended my teaching experience in regards to students’ age. I’ve experienced teaching kindergarteners, middle school students and high school students, all of them. So I feel like my teaching has been improved by these experience. It is also an extension of experiences in regard to regions. All these enriched my teaching experience.

The Communicator

For Wumei, the “pleasure” of teaching in the USA is not only about the enrichment of her teaching but also her personal life. She commented:

It was an eye-opening experience for my personal life. I made some friends and experienced American culture and life through my own eyes. I used to understand American culture and life from textbooks, watching movies, TV shows or even reading magazines. However, there is a great difference between fictional American life from the movies and TV shows and real American life from your own experience… Now whenever people talk about America I would instantly have some real feelings and
experience that I want to share. I have real experiences to support my opinions about American culture and life. I can either support or be against other people’s opinions about America based on my own personal experience. I think people should enrich their life by extending their real life experiences.

The other big “harvest” in her personal life was that she has made some friends with the local Chinese who lived in her school district. As Wumei described:

Most of the friends I made in America were Chinese. I think it is very related to my personal character. As a matter of fact, there’s some laziness in my character. I’m used to dealing with things that I’m familiar with and being friends with those who are similar to me. I really think it’s due to personality. I had a very good relationship with my host family because I lived in their house. But other than that, most of my friends were local Chinese people. Plus, because of my character, I often missed my family in China and I felt I could receive a kind of emotional comfort just by hanging out with other Chinese.

Other than the “harvest” in her personal life from teaching in the United States, for someone who almost never left home in the past Wumei also experienced some challenges. She said:

From the perspective of my personal life, I think the biggest challenge was that I was not used to a lot of things in America. You are suddenly exposed to a totally strange cultural environment including not only food but also transportation. You have to depend on others to do a lot of stuff. In America, other than some super big cities, you need to
totally depend on cars to go somewhere. Therefore, you feel that your world is so tiny.

For example, if I need to go somewhere, I’d have to ask others to give me a ride.

For Wumei, teaching in the States made her taste the sweet and bitter of life, which was
full of joys and sorrows. However, she never regretted her experience of teaching in an
American school. Although she may not want to be a public school teacher in North America
forever, she does want to continue her teaching career for the rest of her life. She stated:

I feel that I will continue my teaching career for the rest of my life. (laugh…) I really like my job. What I enjoy most about my job is that you feel like you are not only
a teacher but also a communicator when teaching students from all kinds of different
cultural backgrounds. When I teach them Chinese culture they also teach me their
culture. So for me, I’m not only a teacher but also a student. I told my students that we
have “hot pot” and my former French students told me that they also have their “hot pot”.
I feel like that I’ve also learned a lot from my students. It’s funny that French people also
have something like cheese “hot pot”. This really makes me happy. I feel that I really
enjoy this part of my job.

Wumei described her role as a “communicator”. Her steadfast belief about her role as a
Chinese teacher and her passion for Chinese teaching never left her for one moment. She said:
“If you had the passion, you would try your best. If you tried your best, you would become a
good teacher. You know, ‘If you work at it hard enough, you can grind an iron rod into a
needle.’” Despite many difficulties in teaching and living in America, Wumei still has the
passion to teach Chinese. It is her drive for teaching Chinese which makes her a better teacher
and enables her to make a big difference in her students’ lives.
Wumei experienced frustration, resistance and triumph in her teaching as a Chinese teacher in an American public school. With the desire to be a good “communicator” in introducing Chinese language and culture to the American public, she has forged her path to become a good Chinese teacher. Her border crossing teaching experiences led her to reflect on her own teaching life and develop identities that continue to be in process. As Holland et al., (1998) explained, “People have the propensity to be drawn to, recruited for, and formed in these worlds, and to become active in and passionate about them” (p. 49). Wumei’s narrative highlighted the possibility of transformation through reconciliation, tolerance, and resistance.

Her experience of being a Chinese teacher in North America is that of the sojourner, an isolated traveler traveling alone between the school and the host family. Her stories proved how an inspiring teacher made sense of her life experience. Wumei’s career trajectory in North America has been about engaging in emotional relationships with her high school students and surviving in a foreign environment with which she was not familiar.

**Xiaotian’s Narrative**

Xiaotian was born into a teacher’s family in a small city that is not too far away from Shanghai – the biggest city in China. She was a middle child in a loving family with an older sister and a younger brother. Her father used to be a teacher in a small city. As a former teacher, he was very strict with her and her siblings. Xiaotian’s mother was a good wife and loving mother from a Chinese point of view as you would see in many Chinese families. She was often quiet in the family and liked to listen to her husband. Like many Chinese parents, Xiaotian’s parents instilled a deep regard for education in their children.
The “Ugly Duckling”

Almost everyone who knows Xiaotian says that she was born to be a teacher, but the truth was Xiaotian herself was once a challenging student in high school. It was hard to believe but Xiaotian was an “ugly duckling” who was ignored by others till a teacher rescued her and made her build up confidence in herself.

Being a middle child in the family, Xiaotian didn’t attract much attention from her parents though they loved her dearly. She was the invisible one in the family. She was not the daughter who could stand out and be noticed. She stood in the middle without being recognized. Xiaotian’s invisible status in her family extended to school. She remained an unpopular student at school. She isolated herself from the popular people in her class and she was a loner at school. She was a lonely child without being recognized by her family or society. Xiaotian recalled:

In Chinese high school, teachers are responsible to certain groups of students who have a great potential to go to a good college. All those students whom they took responsibility for were my classmates. I had the same start with them. However, I was nobody’s responsibility, meaning that most teachers had given up on me. The considered me a “trouble maker.”

With a sense of pride at heart, she felt like “A good man in an evil society seems the greatest villain of all.” This indirectly caused her rebellious behavior in her teenage years. After entering high school she just didn’t feel like doing anything although she used to be a good student in middle school. She even enjoyed being left alone. She became a difficult teenager who didn’t want to be bothered. She turned bitter and couldn’t help but wallow in deep self-pity.
A Teacher Who Touched Her Heart

It was at just this time a teacher who left the greatest influence on her came into her life. He came into her life when she felt the whole world had given up on her. Mr. Zhang was Xiaotian’s homeroom teacher who taught her from middle school to high school. He knew that Xiaotian used to be a good student in middle school. He saw that Xiaotian had great potential. As a teacher who loved his students dearly, he couldn’t stand by and allow Xiaotian to continue to shut herself off from the outside world. He tried his best to talk some sense into her and made her open herself up to the outside world. For Xiaotian, Mr. Zhang’s kindness was really like “delivering coal in hard snowing winter” ( xuě zhōng sòng tàn). Xiaotian recalled:

He was the only teacher who didn’t give up on me. He made me feel that besides me, there is another person who has hope for me… He taught us Chinese at that time.

My grade was horrible then but he still didn’t give up on me.

It was a very dark period in Xiaotian’s life and it was Mr. Zhang who rescued her from the dark. As a mentor, he brought hope to Xiaotian. He made her see the great potential within herself. For Xiaotian he was not only a teacher, but more importantly, an educator with soul. He inspired her. He made her believe that a teacher can change his/her students’ lives in a good way. Xiaotian said:

Mr. Zhang was like a star in my dark sky. He rescued me. Because of my experiences as a student, I realized what an important role a teacher could play in making a good change in a student’s life.

With Mr. Zhang’s encouragement and help, Xiaotian was finally able to catch up with her class. She was no longer a “stray sheep” who couldn’t find her way into the light. Mr. Zhang
gave her an opportunity to be “reborn”. Xiaotian eventually found the new direction in her life. With all her efforts, to everyone’s surprise, Xiaotian made it to college. She was admitted to a teacher’s college in her hometown.

A Little Teacher with Big Dreams

Xiaotian’s father picked this teacher’s college for her thinking that she was not even able to pass The Entrance Exam for College. Luckily, Xiaotian, for the first time in her life, proved him to be wrong. Xiaotian later called it a “sweet mistake”. Because of this “sweet mistake” Xiaotian became a teacher by accident without carefully thinking about her future career path.

She started her journey to become a teacher. Xiaotian said:

After gāo kǎo (The Entrance Exam for College), my father picked a teacher’s college for me. At that time, you know, gāo kǎo was very hard. Only a few students could make it to college. When I saw my name on the Honor’s list of gāo kǎo in my school, I couldn’t believe it was true. I never thought that I was going to become a teacher.

Although becoming a teacher was not Xiaotian’s dream to start with, she decided to swim with the tide. After becoming a teacher she realized that teaching was a good fit for her. She enjoyed being a teacher. She enjoyed the feeling that she could change her students’ lives just like what her high school teacher did for her. Becoming a good teacher like Mr. Zhang was Xiantian’s dream. She said:
Mr. Zhang was a good teacher who was able to communicate with the students’ souls. I wanted to become a good teacher like Mr. Zhang. I was hoping that I could be a good influence on my students.

For her, a good teacher is not only a teacher who only passes on knowledge to his/her students but more importantly someone who serves as the engineer of human souls.

Xiaotian didn’t limit herself only as a teacher. She was a little teacher with big dreams. She saw herself not only as a teacher but as more of an educator. She stated:

I thought myself not only as a teacher but also an educator. I had bigger dreams.

I didn’t want to limit myself only as a teacher. I was even trying to write teaching materials. I found that there were a lot of things that I could do in educating students… I never limited myself only to be a teacher. I see myself as an educator.

After graduating from the teacher’s college, Xiaotian left her hometown and headed for Shanghai to pursue her goals in life. She took a job offer in Shanghai and became a faculty member in a local college there. After a couple of years teaching at this college, Xiaotian was ready to move to the next stage in her life. The marriage of curriculum and instruction was rooted in her desire to earn a doctoral degree. She applied for a doctoral program in a prestigious teachers’ university in Shanghai. She said:

I wanted to change my own fate. I wanted to go to graduate school. I wanted to use me as a role model to tell my students that you could change your fate. Then I went to graduate school and I had a better understanding of education. I even went ahead and got my Ph.D. in education.
After getting her Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction, Xiaotian chose to teach in a college in Shanghai. As a small town girl, she finally managed to hold her ground in the biggest city of China. She was no longer that invisible girl who was ignored by others but a little star who was ready to glitter. It was in this college where she started to think of herself as an educator who “transmits knowledge, provides for study and dispels confusion” (Hányù, 802). She committed herself to her teaching and students. She kept herself busy by writing and editing a lot of textbooks and teaching materials. She was feeling fulfilled as an educator.

**A Chinese Bride in an American Suburb**

Just when she was feeling more confident in her new role as educator, she met with her Mr. Right. Xiaotian’s Mr. Right, George, was an American born Chinese who fell in love with Chinese culture. When George – an engineer who grew up in the deep south of the United States, met with Xiaotian, their life changed direction.

They talked via Skype. They communicated in 90% English and 10% Chinese. They taught each other their native language. As such, they kept a long distance relationship for three years before they got married. After they got engaged, Xiaotian had to make a decision between love and career. As much as she loved her job in Shanghai, Xiaotian finally picked love over her career. She quit her job and moved to the US to live with her husband. She gave up enjoying the prosperity of Shanghai and settled down in a quiet American suburb with her husband.

It took Xiaotian a while to adjust to her new role as a suburban housewife after being an independent career woman. In order to fit into her new role, Xiaotian was determined to blend into the new surroundings with which she was not familiar. Xiaotian and her husband lived in a typical middle-class suburb. Almost all her neighbors looked nice, polite, and well-educated.
However, Xiaotian still faced a lot of misunderstanding about the Chinese and Chinese culture from her neighbors regardless of how friendly they were. She commented:

I feel like Americans still have a lot of misunderstanding about the Chinese and China here. The East and West do need more cross-cultural communication in order to have a better understanding of each other especially from American’s part… There is a good example here. Even though my neighbors knew that before I came to the States I was a college teacher, they still asked me if George (Xiaotian’s husband) and I had an arranged marriage. They even asked me if my mom could eat at the same table with us.

**The Chinese Language and Culture Promoter**

Her neighbors’ “curiosity” and naïve questions about Chinese made Xiantian speechless. She came to realize that there were still a lot of misunderstanding about Chinese and Chinese culture in the American public. She knew that it was not their fault but she felt it was her job to keep Americans informed about Chinese people and Chinese culture. The best way to achieve this was to teach Chinese to Americans. Luckily, Xiaotian found a part-time Chinese teaching position in a local school. This provided an opportunity for Xiaotian to acquaint herself with the American educational system.

Xiaotian held high expectations regarding her role as a Chinese teacher. As a former teacher, Xiaotian often thought of her teaching role as an educator. Teaching like an educator was the ideal that she held dearly at heart. It was Xiaotian’s mission to be the “engineer of the soul” to her students. She was determined to not only impart knowledge but also educate people. She stated:
Teachers in Chinese culture are not only expected to pass on knowledge but also to shape students’ minds. Teachers in Chinese society are often seen as the “engineer of the soul.” Therefore, every teacher in China not only teaches knowledge but also educates students to be well developed in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetics and labor education… As a teacher in China, you need to be able to communicate with peoples’ souls.

However, Xiaotian’s ideal regarding her role as a teacher was challenged fundamentally when she started to teach in America. She said:

After having been in the US for a while, I came to realize that America is deeply rooted in religious belief. Therefore, educating people falls into the hands of religion rather than schools.

In order to retain her professionalism, Xiaotian had to give up her ideal on teaching as an educator. She had learned to restrain herself and perform only a as a craftsman of instruction.

She stated:

As the saying goes, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Since I’m teaching here in America, it’s better for me to respect their regulations and social norms.

Otherwise, people would think that I’m not professional. Little by little, I restrained my role to be only a “craftsman of instruction.

However, Xiaotian is Chinese after all. Occasionally, she forgot her professional role and followed her heart to teach like a Chinese educator, and when she did she could feel the true happiness of being an educator. She said:
Whenever I followed my heart and taught my American students as a Chinese educator, I found myself very happy.

For Xiaotian, teaching is not a career that represents her professionalism but rather a mission that makes her feel proud of herself. In Chinese culture, “A teacher for a day is a [father] for a lifetime [yí rì wéi shī, zhōng shēn wéi fū].” In Xiaotian’s heart, she was not only “the Chinese teacher”, but more importantly, a life long mentor for her students. She said:

Here in the US, it’s the professionalism but not the authority or respect that determines the role of teachers. The teacher’s job here is to pass on knowledge and skills. Students here in the US also respect you but they don’t respect you as an authority or mentor. They respect you because of your professionalism. There is no such respect for teachers like “A teacher for a day is a father for a lifetime” in America. Teachers in America don’t enjoy this kind of respect at all… their respect to teachers is not the same way Chinese students respect teachers. After they leave your class, teachers and students are more like passengers in each other’s life. They are just friends who meet by chance.

Xiaotian was tortured by the totally different attitudes toward the role of teachers in the two cultures. As a Chinese teacher teaching in the US, she had to maintain professionalism and restrain herself from being a “mentor”. However, as an educator at heart she often thought of her role as a “good teacher and helpful friend (liáng shī yì yǒu)”. Despite all the discouragement of her role as a Chinese teacher Xiaotian still managed to retain some sense of dignity in her role as a teacher. In other words, she still taught like a Chinese teacher regardless of her professional
role as an expert in teaching Chinese. Luckily, most of her students appreciated her “Chinese”
way of teaching. She reported:

I always cherish my opportunity to teach Chinese here. Not only because I made
a lot of friends but also because I promoted Chinese language and culture as a teacher. I
often had a very good relationship with my students. Part of the reason was my
personality and another part of the reason was a Chinese teacher’s sincerity to my
students. Chinese teachers often think themselves as students’ elders. They have a warm
feelings about their students. Students of course can feel this as well.

To Xiaotian, the biggest reward of teaching Chinese in the US was that her teaching
connected her with the “outside world.” It promoted Xiaotian’s social integration and
assimilation into American society. She commented:

For me, the biggest reward is that I could connect myself to the world outside of
my house. I extended my social circle by teaching Chinese. I made friends with my
students. I came here to get married to my husband. I didn’t go to school here so my
social circle was pretty small. This job made me integrate into American society.
Through my job, I got opportunities to communicate with other people, to connect myself
to the world beyond my house and my family. I got to make friends with my students. I
got to know Americans and I got to know the system of American society. I got to
become a member of American society.

The other big reward for Xiaotian was that most of her students made her enjoy teaching
as a Chinese teacher. Xiaotian was lucky to teach post-secondary students in the US. Her
students paid to learn Chinese. Therefore, they shared one thing in common: they all had great
interest in learning Chinese culture and language. This really made a big difference in her teaching. Xiaotian and her students were motivated by each other. She observed:

The students in my class were most likely the students with a great interest in learning Chinese. They all love Chinese culture. They were highly motivated to learn Chinese. They attended my class because they already accept Chinese language and culture in their heart. One of my students who won the Mandarin Bridge grew up in China for quite a while. He has a very special feeling for Chinese and Chinese culture. My other friend, the dad of my son’s little “girlfriend”, his wife is Chinese. These examples show that they all like the Chinese and Chinese culture already. It’s like “Love me, love my dog.” I feel they all accept Chinese in their heart. I often called them “the pioneers of Chinese learning.” Most of my students had a global perspective. They were really open-minded. Therefore, most of my students made me enjoy my teaching. Most of my local friends are from my Chinese class. We make friends through my teaching and their learning. I got a lot of encouragement from them. I’m willing to teach them because they are willing to learn.

**The Cultural Bridge between America and China**

For Xiaotian, teaching Chinese in America is “happy when you feel pain.” Her enjoyment from Chinese teaching was often accompanied with some frustration. One of the biggest frustrations for her was some American’s “arrogance” toward foreign cultures. For Xiaotian, ironically, as the No.1 developed country in the world, American society is not as open-minded as it’s expected to be, especially in such a globalized world. She observed:
There is a saying that best describes this kind of social symptom: “The only thing I know is that I know nothing.” The problem is that when someone knows nothing about the world they believe that they know everything about it. The world is a process of balance. You think that living in such a globalized world Americans should know better about the world but the reality is the opposite of expectations. They don’t even go out of their house.

Because of this, Xiaotian made up her mind to promote Chinese and Chinese culture in the USA hoping that East and West could have better communication in this globalized world. She stated:

Culture is never a one-way path. Western culture also needs to communicate with the oriental culture. Oriental culture needs to learn from the advanced western industrial civilization. Western culture, on the other hand, also needs to learn the wisdom of the oriental culture. I feel like this is going to be the trend of the world. That’s why I’m here to teach Chinese because I want to become the envoy of propagating Chinese culture.

Xiaotian sees herself as a “cultural bridge” when it comes to define her role as a Chinese teacher in the USA. As she described:

My role is to let more people know about China. I don’t want my son to live in an isolated cultural island. I see myself my as a “cultural bridge”. Therefore, I need to improve my English in order to disseminate Chinese culture. I want my son to be bilingual. This is my identification about myself as a Chinese teacher.

In her childhood, Xiaotian encountered various situations and people who discouraged her either covertly or overtly. Instead of accepting the negative comments about her, she took
the positive position. As a teacher, she tries her best to instill the same attitude in the students within her classroom. As a cultural bridge, she is determined to promote Chinese learning in American society. Xiaotian’s life story allowed her to analyze and learn from experience in her own childhood. Connecting the present with the past allowed her to transform those inspiring moments of her life into empowering changes in her own teaching. Linking East and West inspired her emphasis on facilitating cultural exchanges between China and America. She stated:

I want to be a cultural bridge. I will try my best to integrate myself into American mainstream culture. I don’t have a so-called American dream. I came here because of my marriage. I came here because of globalization. My mission is simple and pure. I followed a big social trend to come here. I feel like it’s the social trend that produced this marriage. Therefore, it made me have a mission and a responsibility to be a cultural bridge.

Just like thousands of Chinese teachers living in America, Xiaotian’s journey of becoming a Chinese teacher in America can be best described as “bitter sweet”. During this journey, she’s felt happiness accompanied with frustration and discouragement. As Xiaotian mentioned, it’s not easy to be a Chinese teacher in America, but with all the encouragement from her students who are deeply in love with Chinese and Chinese culture, she is determined to be the cultural bridge between China and America.

Summary

This chapter is an attempt to portray how Wumei, Xiaotian, and I went through to become Chinese language teachers in America. In this chapter composed of the life-history narratives of Chinese teachers, I have focused, inward and outward, backward and forward, on
my co-participants’ and my own journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers. Looking back on our stories, I explored our footsteps in becoming a Chinese teacher and recalled the significant moments in our childhood and life history from our lived experience. I reached back into our upbringing in China to show how a Chinese spirit of knowledge and knowing made the cornerstone of our cross-cultural journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers in an international landscape. By tracing back some dynamics of the interaction between ourselves and our changing landscapes, I am able to deeply understand our feelings, experience, and hopes as Chinese teachers (inward); to associate with the changing context which we encountered (outward); and to connect our experience in the past, present and future (backward and forward). Our narratives share the common focus of the experience of individuals and the meanings that individuals construct in the world. My co-participants and I had undergone transforming experiences in China which in turn led to yet another cultural transformation in the move to the United States. Our cross-cultural journey which I have narrated in this chapter told what it meant to tell as we struggled to become bi-cultural teachers. My task in telling these stories was further complicated by learning to think narratively and by taking our cross-cultural journey as forever-flowing and ever-changing, a process which I detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER VI

INSIGHTS INTO PATTERNS OF CHINESE TEACHERS’
BORDER-CROSSING LIVES IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Stories are enfolding lessons.

Not only do they transmit validated experiences,
they also renew, awaken, and honor spiritual forces. ...

every ... story does not explain;
instead it focuses on a process of knowing.

(Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 77)

In the previous chapter, I presented a brief storyline of the teaching and learning
landscape in both cultural contexts in which the three Chinese language teachers’ stories were
situated and interpreted. In this chapter, I compare the accounts of Wumei, Xiaotian, and myself
regarding our lives and teaching as we lived in an international landscape to look for common
patterns or threads in the direction of inward, outward, backward, and forward (Connelly &
Clandinin, 2000). I outline the ways in which my co-participants and I learned to become bi-
cultural teachers, including encountering, adapting into, working within novel roles for teachers,
as well as gaining new perspectives on teaching. I discuss our stories of adapting to teaching in a
foreign country, the impact of our cross-cultural teaching experience and the development of our
teacher identities. Connelly and Clandinin write: “One learns about education from thinking
about life, and one learns about life from thinking about education” (1994, p. 145). To move
beyond description to interpretation, I map a descriptive terrain where our stories flow and
evolve into narratives about our teacher identity development. This will help to simplify the complexity and multidimensional terrain of our shared journey teaching in a new educational landscape.

I began my inquiry with the question: What does it mean and feel like to become bi-cultural teachers moving among different landscapes? Looking back at our stories, I analyzed the intersections and the interplay of the personal background with the cross-cultural experiences of the three Chinese language teachers as we went about teaching Chinese to American students. I explored how we encountered and worked within novel roles for teachers, gaining insight into new perspectives on schooling and different expectations for the role of teachers in America. I illustrated how our teacher identity can be perceived as constituted in teaching in a foreign environment. I wanted to capture our experience of becoming and being bi-cultural teachers in the United States. I engaged in this endeavor to reveal the trajectory of the three Chinese language teachers whose life and identities have been changed in the new cultural landscape.

Considering that the focus of this study is Chinese language teachers’ development through adapting into American cultural and educational settings, I intend to analyze our narratives based on the discussion of the interplay between the way we see ourselves and the cultural context of America. To start with an exploration of what we went through as Chinese language teachers in America, I let my analysis be guided by the need to confront how we see and experience the world (Gosh, 1996).
**Fumbling in the Dark**

I will begin with a discussion of our cross-cultural teaching experiences as we bumped up against a new culture of schooling and became socialized to our profession in an American context.

**Sinking into A “World of the Unknown”**

For Wumei, Xiaotian, and I, our orientation to the new culture and foreign environment in America was accompanied by mixed feelings. Teaching in America was sometimes exhilarating but often times frustrating. Navigating an unknown world, living far away from home and friends, and using English as our primary language with an accent was a daunting experience for all of us. At the beginning of our stay in the United States we all encountered challenges that made us feel uncomfortable about ourselves. We were plunged into a labyrinth of mysteries foreign to our experience. As international sojourners we all encountered difficulties in making meaning of a new culture in a foreign environment. Facing a language and culture that were unfamiliar to us, we all were haunted by unsettling feelings of panic, nervousness, disorientation, and loneliness, which subsequently impacted our ability to adapt ourselves in the new environment.

These emotions coupled with an incongruence between our preconceptions regarding teaching and the reality of our new teaching environment oftentimes accompanied us during our journey in the United States. We were exposed to different experiences that challenged our original beliefs regarding our professional and personal lives. As international sojourners, the greatest challenges we encountered once we disembarked in the United States were reflected in difficulties involving the shifts in our professional and personal lives in America. We all went
through life transitions that we were not familiar with nor fully prepared to undertake. All these transitions in our professional and personal lives took place simultaneously, which further complicated our overwhelming stress.

One of the challenges we faced during our initial adjustment phase was that of communicating. We didn’t understand people as well as we expected. In many cases, we didn’t have a clue about what other people were talking about, let alone understand their jokes. We quickly realized that not every American spoke the standard English of the newscasters on “Voice of America”. Although all the Chinese teachers in this study had spent years learning English prior to our arrival in the United States, we still encountered difficulties in understanding “real” English and being understood by others. Regardless of our confidence in English before we came to the United States, we felt like we were taking a shower while wearing a raincoat when communicating with Americans. As someone who was proud of her language abilities, Wumei often felt discouraged by her communication skills with Americans.

As a language teacher, I used to be very proud of my language and communicating skills, but after teaching in America, I felt my abilities fell short of my wishes. I felt my communication with Americans just remained on the surface. It felt like “scratching an itch from outside one’s boots.

At times, we were torn between our role as a Chinese teacher and what our students thought about us. We all wanted to be accepted and respected. Unfortunately, we were also aware of the fact that our role as a foreign teacher led us to be identified as outliers.

Our panic increased when meeting with the unfamiliar academic expectations of our teaching by our students. Our teaching in America carried underlying cultural assumptions
which required us to assume different personae in our teaching lives. For us, the classroom was a battlefield in which we had to shield ourselves with different beliefs, conceptions, and roles that we were not familiar with.

Oddly, we were given no direction, guidance, or supervision as new teachers by any authority in the schools where we taught. Though we were confident we knew the teaching content (Chinese language) very well and were also clear about our general responsibilities as a teacher, what wasn’t clear to us was what to do with students’ classroom behavior and resulting chaos. As Wumei described:

At work, my challenge was that I’d had no experiences teaching kids. I often found that I was not able to reach my teaching goals as I expected. I really felt disappointed by this. I thought it was a simple thing. I designed everything in a perfect way. You know I designed so many good practices and games but my students just didn’t cooperate. They didn’t buy into my ideas. So oftentimes I got lost. I didn’t know how to operate my class. You know, some students who are not interested in learning Chinese started to chat with each other. I didn’t know how to communicate with them. I feel that I really lacked those experiences. … I think it was mainly classroom discipline.

Student-centered teaching and learning is the mainstream mindset in American school settings. We found ourselves feeling nervous and uncomfortable when facing this mainstream teaching approach. Without an understanding of this different approach to teaching, we found ourselves confused and uncomfortable in our role as teachers. Xiaotian mentioned:
The teaching style back in China is very different than that in the US. A Chinese teacher would encourage students to be good listeners and “receivers” but an American teacher would encourage students to ask questions. There is a huge cultural difference here. I can’t tell which teaching style is better. What I can tell is that I don’t feel comfortable as a teacher any longer.

Xiaotian’s frustration resonated with me. In China, students are often times quiet in class. You have to encourage them to speak in public. American classrooms, on the other hand, can turn into a circus easily. Everyone is trying to talk in class. When I was in China, I hated the fact that our students were quiet and timid in public, but now I miss the classroom with quiet and attentive students.

Our feeling of stress also came from trying to respond to the needs and wishes of students. We were not familiar and found hard to understand students’ family issues and emotional difficulties. Therefore, we often felt a big distance between our students and ourselves. We experienced resistance from the enormous cultural power of our students, which created an invisible border for us to cross. I observed: Due to my cultural background, I found it very hard to have a better understanding of my students. The cultural and social values that I cherish dearly are often in conflict with theirs. We remained as the “familiar strangers” to each other.

The core experience of border-crossing teaching unwrapped by the three Chinese teachers during our initial stage was an overwhelming sense of insecurity accompanied by fear and anxiety. Loss of familiarity and dignity as a teacher was the common feeling in light of our struggles within American school settings.
Our stories noted difficulties with students that didn’t seem to take Chinese language class seriously, or seemed to be disinterested in Chinese learning. This shaped the way we viewed ourselves as Chinese teachers. Embedded in our perceptions lurked the issue of self-esteem as a teacher. As we attempted to adapt to the American classroom setting, we started to get confused and began to lose our sense of pride and feeling of confidence as a teacher. We became less certain about our learning and teaching ability when faced with the social and cultural differences in an unfamiliar setting. Being overwhelmed by our professional challenges at work, we started to lose our confidence in our ability to handle also personal issues.

As we attempted to adapt to American teaching, we went through a radical conceptual shift that touched our fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning. Our teaching beliefs, conceptions, and dignity as a teacher had not been challenged prior to coming to teach in America where we had to face curriculum change and different students. We experienced not only pedagogical but also cultural shock. We felt the shock while struggling to acclimate ourselves to a new and unfamiliar environment, and found ourselves thrown into “a world of the unknown” left to sink or to swim.

**Running Through the Fog**

Our struggles created a conflict between our expectations and the reality we lived out on a foreign landscape. We had to adapt ourselves to the culture of schooling in America in order to learn how to work within the American school system and comprehend specific curricular and behavioral expectations for teachers in the American context.

Instead of having received any cultural or pedagogical orientation to the American school system, surviving while doing was the common process by which all three Chinese teachers in
this study came to understand American schools. We endeavored to develop our identity while simultaneously learning to teach in American schools.

All three teachers in this study were formally trained as teachers in China and had only teaching experience in China prior to our arrival in the U.S.A. For all of us, it was the first time that we lived in a foreign country for more than a year. Our expectations of living in the United States were largely driven by the media and Hollywood movies. We entered America and American school settings with our own imagined ideas and expectations, and ignored the potential conflicts and challenges involved until the first day we were “thrown” into American classrooms.

Once we arrived in the United States, we realized quickly that our new reality was surprisingly different from our expectations. We were discouraged to see that we could not actually defend some of our beliefs that were based on our teaching and learning experience rooted in Confucian culture. We were thrust into facing cultural adjustment challenges on our own.

With the lack of effective orientation to our role and expectations as a teacher in American schools, we had to solve problems on our own and overcome depression, discouragement, and loneliness from our teaching and living away from our family and friends. In order to survive, learning to teach in America meant getting familiar with American schools and classrooms as quickly as possible.

We were often tricked by what we believed and the beliefs to which we were exposed. Being unfamiliar with the micro-culture of education in the United States embedded within the
larger macro-culture in general, it was hard to make sense of our dual roles both as teachers of Chinese and students of English with limited English skills and weak social support networks.

Our narrative illustrated some of the cultural differences between Chinese schooling and American educational landscape into which we attempted to adapt. Bennett and Bennett (2004) point out the importance of examining cultural differences in the intercultural adaptation process. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) created by Bennett (1986) explains how people tend to think and feel about cultural difference. In our initial phase of learning to teach in America, we remained in the “ethnocentric” stages of DMIS (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). In an ethnocentric fashion, we locked ourselves in our own cultural box and strived to preserve our own cultural views though we felt and realized the cultural differences. Although we went through cultural and teaching adjustments, we still had not yet moved beyond our previous fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning.

Our beliefs were fundamentally rooted in Chinese culture. To us three participants in this study, our teaching was the zone where we meditated the cultural differences between Chinese and American conceptions of teaching and learning.

A lack of interpersonal relationships and the support of social networks also brought challenges to our journey in the US. As Chinese who grew up in a society with close-knit social networks, we were not able to relocate ourselves in this highly “individualized” society. Living away from our family and friends and the support of social networks caused us to re-orient ourselves. Wumei said:

Although my host family and most of my American colleagues were nice to me, I still felt lonely and helpless sometimes. I felt it difficult to express my
hardships as a foreigner and Chinese teacher to them. A lot of it didn’t make any
sense to them. Whenever I felt discouraged or sad from my teaching, I could do
nothing but keep it to myself. It was not like in China where I could find support
from friends and family. When I talked with my husband on the phone, I
normally wouldn’t share my difficulties with him just because distant water
cannot quench present thirst.

Xiaotian had the same feeling though she had already settled down in the USA for five
years.

Although I got married here in the US, I still felt helpless sometimes.

Since I didn’t grow up in American culture, there was not a “social network” for
me to embrace here. America is a very individualized society. People clear away
the snow only in front of their doors. In China, I could count on my friends and
family to help me but here in America, I had to shovel the snow by myself.

We acknowledged the difficulties of developing trusting relationships with people, and
participating in what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as a community of practice, which “is
formed by people who engage in collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (p.
42). For Lave and Wenger (1991), “communities of practices” can’t be seen as the acquisition of
knowledge by individuals, but more as a process of social participation. We were often anxious
about how to achieve our teaching responsibilities without the social networks that we could
count on. Xiaotian shared how difficult it was to develop trusting relationships, “It’s very hard
to build close relationships with Americans who know almost nothing about China and Chinese.
Regardless of how polite they appear to be, you just can’t find common ground with them. You can always feel the invisible borders to enter their world.”

As international sojourners, we brought our cultural script with us to our new environment. Being embraced by our cultural script, we found hard to move beyond the “ethnocentric” stages of Bennett’s DMIS (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). We continued to interact within our own cultural paradigms in an ethnocentric fashion. Even as we strove to modify our teaching to cater to the new rules of teaching and learning in the American school setting, we could never abandon the unique cultural conceptions we inherited from our home environment. It is what made us who we are. Our belief system reflected the educational framework and cultural orientation of our home country – China. As Harman (1988) stated:

Every society ever known rests on some set of largely tacit basic assumptions about who we are, what kind of universe we are in and what is ultimately important to us. [These assumptions] are typically not formulated or taught because they don’t need to be—they are absorbed by each person born into the society as though by osmosis (p.10).

Our narratives showed that for Chinese teachers who moved from the peripheral social edges, entering into the center of such communities, building trusting relationships, and finding memberships was a very long process that likely wouldn’t happen early on. Our initial stage of learning to teach in America can be understood using Bennett and Bennett’s (2004) theory of ethnocentric stages of DMIS model where we were perceived and constructed as “others”. We were indentified by others as foreigners. We felt excluded from the American society. We separated ourselves from cultural difference to protect our pre-conceived beliefs and conceptions. We
tended to defend our preexisting beliefs inherited from Chinese culture and avoided cultural difference. This “othering” process prevented us from adapting into the culture of American schooling.

**Awake in an In-Between Landscape**

To some degree the teachers’ autonomy in the classroom setting heightened feelings of isolation and alienation, thus emphasizing our outsider status. Wumei, Xiaotian, and I described our experiences in the U.S. as “marginalized.” As we struggled to become bi-cultural teachers in the United States, our assigned identity as foreigner lead to dangers of increased marginalization. We all experienced marginalization both in and out of schools (Johnson, 1999). We considered ourselves to be outside of the mainstream culture in America. Our stories started at the margins of cultural powerlessness and had the potential for growing. Our journey of learning to teach in a foreign landscape occurred in the power relations between the mainstream and the margins, between conventional and othering practices.

Dwelling in the zone between cultural different traditions of education was not comfortable to us. In a new culture and place where people look different, life is unfamiliar, and language is strange one must constantly reposition oneself for new rules of discourse (Brock et al, 2006). Cross-cultural situations provide and ask for an excess of transgressions. This kind of “newness” creates a space for uncertainty between old assumptions and new contexts, making a new “displacement place” (Brock et al, 2006, p. 38).

Our journey of learning to teach in America and our perceptions of life and teaching in American school illustrate how teaching in a foreign country and school culture is also a process of learning cultural norms and educational expectations from the host and native culture.
Beyond feeling caricatured as foreigners with limited English proficiency with limited classroom management skills, it was the absence of membership in local social networks and the lack of understanding of the cultural values and social norms to establish a foundation to our teaching practice that frustrated us the most. These difficulties began at the beginning of our journey of learning to teach in America, and continued through our adaptation to a new environment. To sink or swim, this was the choice; no matter if we liked our new teaching environment or not, we needed to survive. In order to survive in American schools, we had to find a niche.

**Finding a Niche**

As Wumei, Xiaotian, and I committed ourselves to teaching Chinese in American schools, we developed similar story lines of survival in our adaption to American school system. We dwelt in the nexus between adapting to the American way of teaching and losing our familiar bearings of teaching. We lived in a zone between our external social context and our internal exploration for making sense of ourselves in the new environment.

**Learning to Live the Present and Future through Understanding the Past**

Eble (1988) contends:

> Learning and teaching are constantly interchanging activities. One learns by teaching; one cannot teach except by constantly learning. A person properly concerned about education will come to grips with the practical realities of both teaching and learning. (p. 9)

We initially reacted to different expectations for teachers by sticking to our own instincts as Chinese teachers. Hofstede (2001) argued that these preconceived expectations were the result of “mental programs” (p. xix), “people carry ‘mental programs’ that are developed in the
family in early childhood and reinforced in schools and organizations… They are most clearly expressed in the different values that predominate among people from different countries” (p. xix).

The way we approached our teaching was rooted in our life experiences prior to our coming to the US. We used these life experiences and the belief systems that we acquired from our previous life experiences to guide our teaching in the classroom. Stigler and Hiebert (1998) used the term “cultural script”. Delpit (1995) described the process of cultural scripting in this manner, “We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our view is simply ‘the way it is’” (p. 151).

Teachers’ early life experiences (Pajares, 1992) are critical in shaping their belief systems. Many studies have shown that teachers’ experiences and observations, inside and outside of school, in their earlier years as students themselves, tend to shape their unexamined beliefs about teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; McDiarmid, 1990; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Tillema’s (1995) study indicates that teachers’ prior experiences and beliefs about teaching often act as filters to new information in their teaching practice.

The cultural script of our previous life experiences was brought us not only a sense of comfort but also feelings of security. Our teaching was governed by our need to maintain security, familiarity, and control in our classroom. Regardless of being aware of the dissonance between two different teaching styles, all the Chinese teachers in this study acknowledged that we tended to use teaching methods that were comfortable and familiar to us. Wumei observed,
“Subconsciously, I often taught the way I was taught in China. It seemed natural and comfortable this way. It made more sense to me.”

Xiaotian felt the same way, “When I first taught American students Chinese, I felt like an ugly daughter-in-law who had to face her parents-in-law… It was like my natural instinct to teach in the way that was familiar to me.”

Teachers’ perceptions of their professional role tend to persist over time. According to Nespor (1987), teachers’ beliefs about education were affected by important episodes in their lives, such as a teacher who had a great influence on them in their early lives. In this study, we all acknowledged that our family members and especially former teachers played a critical role in shaping our teaching beliefs. Xiaotian recalled using her former homeroom teacher in China, as a role model for her teaching. She indicated that her teaching was shaped by this former homeroom teacher of her in high school, “He was like a role model for me. As my beloved teacher, he was a good influence on me. My teaching was inspired by him in a lot of ways. I gradually became a teacher like him.”

Wumei’s perspectives on teaching were inspired by her math teacher in high school. She described her teacher as “someone who opened her eyes to the world of the unknown.” His teaching approaches, connection to students, and rich knowledge of math were all inspiring to her. When I asked about her motivation for becoming a teacher, she shared how Mr. Li touched her heart and inspired her to become a teacher. She recalled, “Mr. Li. inspired me by his love of math, teaching, and more important, his students. He was a teacher who enjoyed being a teacher and valued learning. Mr. Li made me believe that a teacher could play a very important role in
one’s life.” With her encouragement and kindness, my role model, Ms. Niu, opened a new window into my life and inspired me to become a teacher.

However, our safety belt for teaching and role models couldn’t hold us for long if we were going to survive in American schools. A lot of our pre-existing teaching beliefs acquired from our previous cultural imprinting were frequently in conflict with what was valued in the American school setting. We came to realize that our efforts of putting “new wine in old bottles” might not be beneficial for our cross-cultural teaching. It is clear from our narratives that the challenges confronting us in our journey of teaching in a foreign environment were complex and couldn’t be solved only by learning from a guidebook or counting on the teaching inspirations we learned from our previous experiences back in China.

Though, our teaching oftentimes reflected the nexus between our past experiences in China and our reality of teaching in the United States, it caused us to develop some emerging teaching perspectives that we then used to guide our teaching in the classroom. As Phillion and Connelly (2004) pointed out:

Slowly, as they come to terms with the rhythm of school life and of the particular place in which they find themselves in the school, they begin to join in… they are well advised to go slowly, watch customs, check their own responses, observe and gradually begin to see where they might fit in… (Phillion & Connelly, 457-471)

Learning to teach in the USA was an active process that required reflection and a constant negotiating of preconceived beliefs as they related to a new teaching reality. Our
difficulties were reflected in failing to reconcile teaching approaches from different systems of education rooted in cultures with striking dissimilarities.

Our narratives showed an amazing amount of perseverance and creativity for surviving a difficult transition in the foreign environment. The kind help from our local colleagues also served as a life line assisting in our survival in American schools. Participation in the faculty meetings or discussions with other colleagues, especially other foreign language teachers, seemed to be useful for learning to teach in these schools. Teachers’ meetings and discussions provided opportunities to discuss issues, especially those about how to deal with difficult students. Chatting with other foreign language teachers during the lunch break also served as a stress relief time for us. In my journal, I wrote, “What I enjoyed the most during the day was to chit chat with other foreign language teachers during our lunch break. I learned a lot of teaching tips from them. We also gave each other comfort after dealing with some challenging students or classroom chaos.”

All these meetings and discussions with colleagues helped us to determine our roles and the expectations of us as teachers, and more importantly, how to deal with difficult students. Through trial and error, with the help of colleagues and encouragement from family and friends, we managed to accomplish our roles as teachers in the new environment.

Interaction with people from a similar culture was also one of the most important ways we could count on to get through our cultural adjustment after our arrival in the US. In our early stages of adjustment, meeting people from China or other non-native speakers did serve as our temporary social bulwarks against being overwhelmed and helped us with our orientation in the new environment. The relationships that we established provided timely help for us when we
needed it the most. We acknowledged that these valuable relationships were instrumental in helping us learn to teach in the United States. Wumei’s narrative highlighted the importance of developing valuable relationships with the local Chinese during her stay in the United States.

I did make some friends here but most of them were Chinese immigrants.

Local Chinese were the ones who reached out to help me. They invited me to visit their family, took me to grocery stores, and cooked delicious Chinese food for me. They were my social networks. They were my friends whom I could count on while teaching in America.

**Reclaiming Meanings – Bearings Lost and Bearings Regained**

Bennett (1986) explains how different cultures “create and maintain world views” and describes changes in each stage of DMIS (p. 25). Each stage of DMIS model represents a new way of experiencing cultural difference (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). We gradually moved beyond the three stages of ethnocentrism (*denial, defense, and minimization*) and started to reflect on what we believed about learning and teaching and how these beliefs shaped the kind of power and relationships in our classroom. Our movement toward the three stages of ethnorelativism (*acceptance, adaptation, integration*) represents a critical change in our intercultural adaptation process.

**Working within Novel Roles for Teachers**

As we developed new ways of thinking our teaching began to change. Wumei commented:

I used to give them homework to do without using class time but later I found out this didn’t fit those students. Perhaps for them being able to say a
couple of sentences, knowing a couple of words is good enough. For those motivated students, for example after they learned “mōma [mom]”, I taught them another similar word “jiě jie [elder sister]”. For those struggling students I only taught them one word. This is what we called “teach students in accordance with their aptitude.” This is the lesson I learned after a lot of discouragement. So I changed my teaching method to meet their need. This really liberates both the students and the teacher.

During this stage we were envisioning ourselves in our new roles. In order to determine what roles we should play in our new environment and what approaches were more effective in American classrooms, we had to adopt new ways of thinking that could prompt effective learning and teaching in the American school setting.

Confronted with perspectives that differed from our own, we shifted back and forth between who we believed ourselves to be and how others perceived us. Tierney and Rhoads (1993) described this process as a “cultural process” (p. 1) in which culture functions as a socializing agent (Kuh & Hall, 1993). As Banks and Banks (1997) argued, “In a sense, everything in education relates to culture - to its acquisition, its transmission, and its invention. Culture is in us and all around us, just as the air we breathe. It is personal, familial, communal, institutional, and societal in its scope and distribution” (p. 33). We tended to blend the person we believed ourselves to be with the one we thought others believed us to be (Bhabha, 1994).

Becoming socialized to the teaching profession in a foreign environment required us to gain a locally meaningful understanding of the role of teachers. We started to reflect on our role
as a Chinese language teacher. We began to redefine our roles as teachers and see ourselves in new ways. We had to determine the meaning of teaching in the US before being able to make sense of our role as teachers. We also had to find novel ways to work as teachers and interact with our students in the American school setting.

The negotiation and interaction with the students enabled us to examine our role as a teacher and look at our role as a teacher in a more complex perspective. We began to remove our “blinders” and see teaching beyond the Chinese cultural wall. Our initial expectations shifted. Our motivation for teaching was initially driven by a need to be perceived as confident, knowledgeable, respected, and competent by our students. As we evolved in our teaching role, this need was taken over by the needs of our students. We became more attentive to the needs of students rather than the teaching goals that we had to achieve. We were able to go beyond the “ethnocentric” stages of Bennett’s DMIS and started to move toward the “ethnorelative” stages in which we were exposed to and integrated more than one cultural perspective (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

The cultural shift entailed in our role as a teacher in America enabled us to envision ourselves from a complex perspective. To be recognized as a member of a community of practice, we aligned ourselves with the cultural norms and expectations of the role of the teacher as expected in the American school setting. Our narrative acknowledged that our teaching experiences in America enabled us to see teaching from multiple cultural perspectives. Our capacity to understand the worldviews of others in the school environment was extended. As we encountered new environments and reconciled new concepts with our past experiences, our teaching beliefs started to shift. This brought us to the “ethnorelative” stages of Bennett’s DMIS
model and enabled us to move up the scale to achieve greater levels of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

By reflecting on our teaching, change took place in our understandings of the roles of teachers and our bearings as Chinese language teacher in the new environment. We started to reclaim our bearings as language teachers. We came to accept the concept that a harmonious teacher-student relationship had to be built on a better understanding for the students’ needs and wishes. Gradually, we learned to develop and maintain a rapport with the students by a better understanding of the students. We began to accept and respect the cultural differences. We experienced a critical shift from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). “Characteristics of this shift is the subjective re-construal of difference as a ‘thing’ to difference as a ‘process’” (Bennett, 1986, p. 185). We mediated the cultural differences between Chinese and American conceptions of teaching, and achieved new understandings of our roles as teachers.

For Wumei, Xiaotian, and I, the journey of learning to teach in America was like a road of discovery. Our past experience as both a learner and teacher in China served as a springboard for our teaching during this process. Our teaching evolved as we merged teaching in the US with our teaching beliefs and we became more comfortable with our role as a teacher in the USA. Additionally, our understanding of our role as a teacher also became more complex. Our teaching experience in America enabled us to reflect on our stories to live by, which empowered us to rewrite the meaning of being a Chinese language teacher.
On the Way to Change - A Story of Looking Forward

Our narratives illuminate how we adapted to teaching in a foreign country, and the personal and professional tensions that we experienced as we attempted to cross the cultural and social borders to engage ourselves in our new settings. Our stories showed how cross-cultural teaching experiences provide teachers with an embodied and shifting cultural understanding of teachers. Learning to become bi-cultural teachers in America was a continuous process in which we constantly constructed and reconstructed meanings.

As we struggled to survive in the foreign landscape, we moved back and forth between past, present, and future. Often we experienced the loss of feelings of familiarity, lack of interpersonal communication and support of social networks, cultural and pedagogical difference, foreignness, and an identity crisis (Shaules, 2007).

Our stories highlight variations between American and Chinese approaches to teaching and learning. Our narratives illustrate how our foreign teaching situations and cultural interactions helped us to understand the challenges facing us and accept, adapt, and integrate with cultural difference in our new environment (Bennett & Bennett, 2004) while teaching from cross-cultural viewpoints. Our narratives highlight an integration of culture, teaching, and shifts of identity situated in cross-cultural movements.

Much like living a Chinese life style on an American landscape, our stories showed that we had to live in tension within our teaching. We were able to live out a different story of teaching on a new landscape. Most importantly, we were able to live out a life that we felt comfortable with. As we looked forward, we could see ourselves move beyond the stories, and see the hope, the strength, and the pride of being a teacher. It was through understanding our
past the we could prepare ourselves for the future. Our past exercised an important impact on our present experience and future action. Our journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers in America was a complex process in which we learned to re-think our past, understand our present and vision for the future. It was discovering that continued to keep us going. It helped sustain us in creating a forward looking story. We started to see our cross-cultural experience not as grim, but rather as opportunity. We were finally able to move beyond a reactive mode of always seeing the “other” and act in an ethnorelative fashion (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Our experiences have changed us. We started to see change as good. We were in the midst of searching for our stories for tomorrow.

**Fluctuating Identities in International Landscapes**

The self that comes to teaching is the foundation of becoming a teacher. Becoming a teacher involves not only teaching skills, but more importantly, the “teacher” identity in one’s life. As Chinese teachers who lived in an international landscape, our identity was something that hung suspended between our teaching and personal life. Teaching in America played a critical role in our identity formation. As we learned to teach in America, our identity shifted and changed. According to Mercer (1990), “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis” (p. 43). We were in crisis and thus in the process of searching for our identity.

**Border-Crossing Teachers**

The three Chinese teachers in this study dwelled in what Bhabha (1994) calls “in-between spaces”. As a teacher who straddled two cultures, we lived lives somewhere between our Chinese and American life. Dwelling the “in-between spaces” or what McWhinney and Markos (2003) describe as “liminal space,” we had undergone transforming experiences in China
and yielded yet another cultural transformation in the move to America. As a cross-cultural teacher, we often felt like we were living in the borderland. Teaching in America blurred the imagined boundaries and broke down cultural wall that we encountered. Our professional and personal life in America can best be described as a journey marked by attempts to knit together what was familiar and comfortable with the unfamiliar and strange.

Like many immigrants in the United States, we had to go through the process of adaptive cultural transformation. As outsiders to the “collective programming of the mind” (Hofstede, 2001, p.1), we felt greatly disadvantaged. The biggest challenge was to find a balance between our Asian cultural background and the American cultural environment. Through perseverance and endurance we tried to balance our native Asian culture with American culture in order to achieve a harmony among the multidimensional identities within us. It was in this process we learned about our new experience, anticipated our role, developed our perceptions of self.

As teachers encountering cross cultural borders, we were challenged to be acutely aware of preconceived beliefs and thus often experienced conflicts within ourselves. Aikenhead (1997) argued that crossing cultural borders requires renegotiations of belief as teachers understand the heritage, values of students, and the school subcultures in which they work. Individuals derive identity, “in great part from the social categories to which they belong” (Hogg & Abrams, 1998, p.19). We claimed our sense of belonging through aligning ourselves a little bit better with norms and expectations of the local members of our new terrain.

As Bhabha (1994) pointed out, teachers’ identities are not necessarily without homes, but rather inhabit many homes. Their homelands are territories of being and belonging, and rooted in their education, experiences and knowledge. Their identities permeate multiple borders across
time and space. As teachers who dwelled in a hybrid space between the institution and our lived history, the journey across those borders formed the nomadic identity that emerged. It was in the overlapping of the contrasting landscapes in our lives that a new sort of identity seemed to emerge and form. Resting with our new teaching realities and practice put us into a displacement space (Brock et al, 2006). Continual repositioning of our identity helped us to crawl out of the displacement spaces to reach new in-between spaces that created potential for the emergence of transformed identity.

The Power of Culture and Language

Our narratives show that we construct identity while navigating through American educational system and how we reconcile our own perspectives of who we are with others’ cultural values. Teachers as representatives of the cultural mainstream are expected to be culturally versed in their classrooms. Our narratives indicate that teaching and learning are largely related to mainstream culture as well as cultures of schooling. Our narratives illustrate the importance of cultural practices (Nasir & Cook, 2009) that led us to embrace our dual identities as both Chinese and teacher. This reflects the dimension of “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world” (Norton, 2000), and the ethnorelative stages of the Bennett and Bennett’s DMIS model in which an individual accepts, adapts and integrates to reestablish identity (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

Norton (2000) summarizes three characteristics of the subjectivity of identity as multiple identities, identity as a site of struggle and identity as changing over time. The agency of identity is glimpsed as we slowly re-positioned our identity as a Chinese teacher by taking on multiple identities. We constructed our identities through our roles not only as Chinese teachers
but also as learners of English. Our prior beliefs about learning translated into our ways of knowing. The making of our identity as a teacher in America was intertwined with our perceptions about what it means to be a good student. We sought to reconcile our conflicting identities as student of English and teacher of Chinese (Britzman, 1992).

Our foreignness was only foreign when juxtaposed with our new environment. As we adjusted ourselves to the new environment we encountered a community that perceived us as foreigners rather than teachers. We had to confront stereotypes about Asians as well as stereotypes we held about Americans, wrestling with difficulties associated with our English as a second language, dealing with different pedagogical and learning styles, and confronting the world views that were incongruent with the ones we held. Our narratives demonstrate how the multiple facets of identity are both revealed in, and composed by, the power of culture and language.

**The Interplay of Time and Place**

As I unraveled Wumei, Xiaotian, and my stories of learning to become bi-cultural teachers in America, I became aware of our ways of understanding our relationship to the world and constructing identity across time and space (Norton, 1990). The perception of teacher identity changes over time (Beijaard et al., 2000) and varies in different cultural contexts. In our journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers in America, Wumei, Xiaotian, and I experienced the interplay between time and place. Through our acquisition of cultural knowledge and acculturation into new bodies, we were able to re-envision meanings of self. Our stories have shown the link between educational contexts, self-images, and teachers’ teaching practices in the classroom.
Teaching in a different country brought about fresh ways of noticing and understanding our identities in a global society. Although we remained the same body, the context of our story to live by was shifted (Clandinin et al., 2006). Our sense of self became strengthened and clearer as others perceived us differently. The making of identity occurred as we integrated what was unfamiliar to us in the new environment with the familiar, that of our previous life experiences in China. We seemed to gain a new sense of self both as a teacher and an individual through our teaching practice in a cross-cultural context.

Our stories made it apparent that people are not born as teachers; rather, people are made into teachers. Our professional identity is formed “in and through social practice, constructed and reconstructed over time and place” (Green & Reid, 2008, p. 20). Norton (2000) described identity as a place in which “a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). We dwelled in an uncertain, yet hopeful, in-between place where lines were blurred, living on the “margins” where we had to constantly negotiate our sense of self.

Our narratives illuminated how our personal and professional efforts in a new country enabled us to shift our perceived identity as teachers and as individuals. Holland et al. (1998) stated that improvisational agency could be viewed as “the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present” (p.18). Personal characteristics emerged over time through our daily interactions with our students, their parents, and school staff and faculty in American schools. It was situated in “historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed worlds” (Holland
et al., 1998, p. 7). The interplay of place and time within socially, historically, and culturally constructed worlds led to the possibility of our improvisational agency and emerging identity.

Our narratives align with research which acknowledged that personal and professional identities were closely connected for border crossing teachers (Allexsaht-Snider, 1996). We seemed to gain a sense of self as a cross-cultural teacher and an alien via our participation in teaching in the U.S. We all felt more Chinese by living and working in the United States. Our narrated experiences of life and teaching in America illuminate how teaching in a foreign country and school culture was associated with the re-orientation of our personal and professional identity. Our identity was woven into our storied lives as we moved across real and symbolic borders.

This study concludes by showing how the interplay of time and place shapes teacher identity and highlighting the external context in which personal changes takes place and new teacher’s identity emerges. Our stories show that identity is relational as well as experiential, and individual as well as social. Our stories provided an illustration of residing in multiple intersecting identities. Our professional and personal lives have been changed in multiple ways as we taught in a foreign country. For all of us, globalization provided a continuity of experience that placed us in a foreign professional and personal landscape.

**Conclusion**

This study explores the three Chinese teachers’ lives and identity development amid the changing landscapes of the last few decades. The three Chinese teachers grew up in the rapidly changing landscapes and encountered cultural, educational and language challenges as they moved between environments. Their lives were changed with multiple cultural movements,
flowing from landscape-to-landscape, culture-to-culture. Identities were awakened, transformed and developed as these landscapes were merged and changed through the course of cultural experiences.

I discuss our narratives in order to expose similarities and commonalities as well as divergences and differences in how we adapted to, acquired, and integrated cultural norms and expectations into our cross-cultural teaching practices, and also how our teaching practices helped to shape our personal and teacher identities. I find myself on a job of discovery. Through reflecting on our “stories to live by”, I am able to reconstruct the meanings recovered in our stories. I begin to see some light. From inquiring into our stories, a few things become enlightened. Despite some variations, our narratives highlight a number of resonant themes related to our journey of instruction in international landscapes. The following concerns have been particularly significant in our journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers in America:

Firstly, our identity development occurred through the lenses of our role as a teacher, merging past experiences with the new experience of teaching. Our learning and teaching experiences in both countries served as a tool to shape our perspectives on what it meant to be a teacher and make sense of our identity as a teacher. The shift of our perspectives on teaching and the role of a teacher was driven first by a need to survive in the American school setting and then by the determination to bring back our pride as a teacher.

Secondly, our journey of learning to teach is rooted in whom we perceived ourselves to be and complicated by the necessity of integrating multiple intersecting role identities. The gap between the realities of teachers’ lives and our perceived role as teachers enabled us to re-think, re-present, and re-create ourselves as teachers.
Finally, our identification as teacher occurred as we grew from teaching and living abroad and moved from a narrow, simplistic understanding concerning what it meant to be a teacher to a broader and more complex orientation.

The environments that teachers in China and America inhabit contain many differences related to the unique cultural and historical developments of the two nations. The cross-cultural teacher participants in this study lived in a zone between two educational traditions, where they observed and experienced the cultural and educational conflict and blending of the two nations. There is a growing number of similarities as a result of globalization and the increased influence of internationally connected and interdependent economies. As for teachers’ work lives in the changing landscapes, there are two immediate impacts. First, as teachers are struggling to cope with educational efficacy and public credibility, their work has been largely intensified through focusing on the management of diversity, through classroom and behavior management issues, and through compliance activities required for accountability. Second, as teachers turn to an industrial model of teaching with tests and standardized pedagogy for performativity, there is a retrograde re-commodification of knowledge. The cocktail of accountability, compliance, and work intensification has turned teaching into a neoclassical form of commodity fetishism.

In this and the previous chapter, I discussed the findings of this inquiry into the professional experience of the three Chinese teachers, including myself, who became bi-cultural teachers within two vastly different landscapes. Our stories led me to realize that acculturation and enculturation processes took place interchangeably. As Wumei, Xiaotian and I moved back and forth between acculturation and enculturation, our identities were changed, transformed, yet remained.
Learning to teach within two landscapes is like a loop, making it hard to tell which is the beginning and which is the end. It is a recursive and non-linear process. Our journey of becoming bi-cultural teachers in the United States is not only about discovering but also about looking back to move forward. During this being and becoming process, we moved back and forth between Eastern and Western cultures, and searched for the potential of our interrupted lives while improvising our teaching between multiple landscapes.

As Wumei, Xiaotian, and I told and retold our lives in the United States, we began to realize that our past is part of our present and future. We started to gain a new perspective for who we are – our identities in America. Learning to teach in two landscapes that have different cultural norms and educational beliefs, Wumei, Xiaotian, and I began to look forward.
CHAPTER VII
IMPLICATIONS BEYOND THE STORY ITSELF

*Life can only be understood backwards,*

*But it must be lived forwards.*

Soren Kierkegaard (1996, p. 63)

Situated in and across cross-cultural school settings, this study reflects on the development of international professional practice for cross-cultural teachers or teachers working in multicultural curricular settings, leading to a more deeper perspective on teaching and curriculum. Throughout our varied cross-cultural teaching experience in the United States, our narratives illuminate lived classroom scenarios of teachers living and teaching in foreign countries. In bringing to light issues regarding the construction of ambivalent identities (He, 2006), as well as cultural “borderlands” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1997), this study contributes to the literature on the preparation and development of educators as well as teacher education programs for those who will be teaching abroad.

This study provides a glimpse into the ways in which our past experiences inform our present practice, and our identities emerge from the telling and retelling of our stories of experience. By exploring cross-cultural interpretations of foreign teaching experience, this study highlights the potential importance of developing personal and professional perspectives on cross-cultural teaching practices.

Our stories to the extent that they are linked with identity development, conceptualization and multicultural theorizing indicate some of the potential issues that teacher
education programs may face in the preparation of teachers for an increasingly globalized world. Globalization has been impacting school environments and teaching practice in a variety of ways. Living in an increasingly globalized world, teachers’ professional development may involve movement across national borders. The migration of teachers has become more common due to a global professional market. As I attempted to illustrate, the stories of teachers’ migration share some universal features which may be transferable to other contexts.

The broadest implication to be drawn on this study is a need for discussions that link globalization, cross-cultural experiences, teacher education, teacher learning, and multiculturalism in the school setting. In this study, I endorse Banks’ (1998) suggestion for teacher education programs to be aware of student teachers’ personal experiences and cultural knowledge. Due in part to globalization, teachers are facing a growing concern of creating teaching and learning environments that are culturally responsive (Gay, 2000). Since cultural identity is a part of teachers’ “personal practical knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 59), teachers’ cultural identities play an influential role in implementing a curriculum that is culturally responsive (Gay, 2000). Located within cross-cultural multiculturalism (He, 2002, 2006), this study demonstrates how intercultural teaching experiences may impact teachers’ cultural identities. By exploring the connection between teachers’ cultural identities and their teaching practices, this study contributes to the field of education by examining teachers’ culturally based practical knowledge and possible implications for multicultural schooling in a world affected by globalization.

While this study may be a first step, further research needs to be conducted in order to contribute to our understanding. Part of the issue lies in the fact that, while informative, this
study is limited in scope since it only details the life experiences and narratives of three individuals teaching and learning in an international context. It is well beyond the limitations of this dissertation to explore how teachers’ personal stories and reflective practice as a form of teacher professional development (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) can be relevant and effective to teachers working abroad and what teachers’ personal stories contribute to a wider educational audience in the larger context of international landscapes. Obviously, more teaching stories of cross-cultural teaching and revelation need to be made public in order to enrich our understandings of cross-cultural curricular situations, as well as to promote teacher professional development in a culturally diverse world.

Despite the fact that this study is limited in scope it has shown that there cannot be a complete understanding of the challenges that face teachers working in a foreign context without first understanding a necessary element of history as it relates to current teaching practice. I suggest that it is only through the continued investigation of how personal histories influence present practice that we can hope to have a more complete picture of the act of teaching in a multicultural, globalized world.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX

CONSENT FORM

BORDER-CROSSING AND TEACHER IDENTITY
Appendix

Consent Form

Border-crossing and Teacher Identity

Principal Investigator: Qiuxian Zheng

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose: This study represents research for a dissertation project by the principal investigator. The purpose of this study is to better understand the cultural and social landscape of teacher identity construction in the global context.
研究目的：本研究为本研究人进行的博士论文研究。这项研究的目的是为了更好地了解全球化背景下教师身份认知的社会文化视野。

Procedures: Study participants will engage in in-depth interviews with the principal investigator. The purpose of the interviews will be to better answer how teachers’ cross-cultural experiences effect the way they understand their teacher identity. Each interview will range from 1 to 2 hours. Participants do not have to answer any questions which they find too personal or discomforting. There is no penalty for refusing to answer any questions.

研究程序：研究参与者将会参与本研究者进行的深度访谈。访谈的目的是为了更好地了解教师的跨文化经验如何影响她们理解自身的教师身份认知。每次访谈会进行一至两个小时。被访谈者不必对涉及私人隐私以及令他们感到不适的问题给予回答。拒绝回答任何问题不会导致任何惩罚。

Audio Tape: The interviews will be audio taped for the purpose of transcription. After transcribing the interviews, all participants will be assigned a pseudonym for the analysis of interviews. Once transcription is complete all the recordings will be destroyed or deleted to ensure the privacy of the individuals involved in the study. There will be no identifying information linked to participants in any way.

磁带录音：为了笔录的目的，所有访谈会都被录音。笔录完访谈后，所有被访谈学生将会被冠以化名来进行访谈分析。笔录一旦完成，所有访谈录音将被销毁或抹除以期保护本研究参与者的隐私。任何身份识别信息都不会与被访谈者挂钩。
Benefits: The benefits of this study include better understanding how border-crossing teachers’ identities are shaped by their cross-cultural experiences. It is hoped that this study can shed light on the development of global education and broaden our understanding of teaching across cultures.

获益：本研究的获益包括更好地了解教师的跨文化体验如何塑造她们的跨文化教师身份认知。希望本项研究能对教育全球化有所启示，并能扩展我们对跨文化教师的理解。

Risks and Discomforts: There are no risks associated with this project beyond those that the participant would encounter in everyday life. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any questions without fear of penalty or reprisal.

风险和不适：本研究并不会对参与者的日常生活构成任何风险。研究参与者可以随时退出研究，他们也可以拒绝回答问题而不用担心受到任何惩罚或对他们不利的举动。

Privacy and Confidentiality: No identifying information will be collected. Your signed consent forms will be kept separate from your responses in a secure office and responses will not be linked to you in any way.

隐私和保密：本研究不会收集与参与者身份相关的信息。您所签署的同意书将会与研究数据分开保存，您的回答也不会指向您的身份。

Voluntary Participation: Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new,
relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation. Participation in this research project or a decision to end participation will in no way affect any of your course grades.

自愿参加：是否参与本研究完全取决于参与者。参与者有自由任何时间决定退出研究。参与者退出本研究并不会对您造成任何损失或惩罚，未来也不会影响您任何利益的取得。您将会被告之影响您的健康，社会保险或者继续参加本研究的自由意愿的任何新的，相关的信息。参加本研究项目或选择终止参与本研究不会影响您的学业成绩。

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about this research you may contact Qiuxian Zheng at 330-672-7850 or Dr. Vilma Seeberg at 330-672-2294. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330-672-2704.

联系方式：若对本研究有任何问题，您可拨打330.672.7850和Qiuxian Zheng联系。您也可拨打330.672.2294与Vilma Seeberg博士联系。本研究已获肯特州立大学伦理委员会批准。若您对研究参与者的权利或对本研究本身有任何不满，请致电伦理委员会：330.672.2704。

Consent Statement and Signature: I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent form will be provided to me for future reference.
知会陈述和签名：

我已充分见证了知会的程序，并相信我已完全知晓。我已充分了解本项目和参与者的指责并已主动承诺参与本项目

________________________________________  ________________________
Participant Signature                                                              Date

参与者                                                                                       日期
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