

**A Tale of Two Teachers: Chinese Immigrant Teachers' Professional Identity  
in US Foreign Language Classrooms**

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## ABSTRACT

This study looks at Chinese immigrant teachers' identity through the theoretical framework of the figured worlds, aiming to explore how the Chinese immigrant teachers navigate the cultural and educational practices and negotiate their professional identities in the figured world of foreign language classes in the US public schools, and how the two competing storylines of "Chinese" and "American" teacher interplay in the teachers' identity. Two Chinese immigrant teachers were interviewed and observed in their classrooms over a period of four months. The findings revealed the uncertainty and figuring involved in the inscribed acts and meaning regarding the "American" and "Chinese" pedagogical storylines of teaching, and the situated processes of the figuring, positioning, and choices made by the immigrant teachers. The teachers' professional identities are complex and highly contextualized, reflecting positioning in multiple memberships and orchestration of various discourses in the "space of authoring" in the cultural worlds of the schools. The study contributed to immigrant teacher research at the age of global migration.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

A teacher, is one who propagates the doctrines, imparts professional knowledge, and resolves doubts (Shizhe, chuandao, shouye, jiehuo ye).

--Han Yu 768-824 A.D.

I begin this introduction with an aged aphorism in the Chinese culture about the role of the teacher. Popular for over one thousand years, the conception remains deep-rooted in Confucian cultures and societies and bears on the identity of Chinese immigrant teachers explored in my research, even though my study may also serve to challenge the essentialist approach to understanding of cultural and educational beliefs and practices.

#### **Historical Context of the Study**

My research interest in Chinese immigrant teachers was a direct result of the recent and unprecedented rise in Chinese language education in the US. The last few years have seen a sharp increase in demand for Chinese language programs and teachers in K-12 schools across the country. A national survey in 2000 by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) estimated that 5,000 students were learning Chinese. In 2008, an estimated figure at 50,000 makes Chinese far and away the fastest-growing foreign language taught in the public schools (Matus, 2008). Parents, students and educators recognize China's emergence as an important country and believe that proficiency in its language can open opportunities. This mushrooming of interest is not occurring in the heritage communities, but in places that do not have significant Chinese populations. By 2010, rough calculations based on a government's survey suggest that 1,600 American public and private schools are offering Chinese, and the

numbers are growing exponentially, which is changing the language education landscape of the country (Dillon, 2010). With this huge demand arises the issue of supplying eligible teachers for these programs. Over the last few of years a large number of immigrant and international Chinese teachers have entered the teaching profession in US public schools. What happens in the classrooms to a Chinese immigrant language teacher coming from different cultural and educational backgrounds? How do they navigate the unfamiliar educational settings? How are the various Chinese cultural and educational beliefs maintained, changed, or abandoned in the process and in what ways? The new cultural encounters in the educational settings have brought new questions to the changing landscape of the language teaching profession which calls for educational research.

### **Immigrant Teachers' Professional Identity and the Chinese Culture of Teaching**

Social identity theory holds a conception of multiple and evolving identities as on-going and situated construction, and studies on teacher identity have begun to focus on membership and social intelligibility (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Gergen, 2001), which involves on-going construction and negotiation (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004; Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia, 1999). For immigrant teachers working in unfamiliar school settings, the issue of membership and social intelligibility stands out as they navigate between two different cultures, and social marginalization is often observed in their professional lives (for example, Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004; Galindo, 2007). In their processes of negotiating the new school context, immigrant teachers are often confronted with the competing pedagogical storylines in their background cultures and in the new school contexts (Feuerverger, 1997; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006), such as the

“Canadian pedagogical style” and “child-centered methods,” although the meaning and nature of these storylines are seldom clearly defined, and their relation to the situated practices unexplored.

Like immigrant teachers from other cultures, Chinese immigrant teachers most probably experience the processes of navigating the cultural differences and storylines in the new educational contexts. Meanwhile, the Chinese teachers may also have their own unique dimensions of experiences in this process due to the distinct educational culture in the Chinese context. The Chinese educational culture is often associated with an authoritarian teacher image in the contexts of centralization and collectivism (Biggs, 1996; Ho, 2004). In the Chinese context, where motivation and classroom management are not central issues in the schools, and the uniform goals of high stakes exams and pressure propel students to diligence and hard work, teachers generally command the Confucian respect and authority from the students and their parents. Many different educational practices exist, such as test-oriented teaching, heavy assignments and physical punishments (Zhang, 2004). Given the distinct educational landscapes, some assert that “There is clearly the potential for a conflict in the cultures of instruction for those involved in Chinese language education in the US” (McGinnis, 1994, p.18).

The assertion that immigrant teachers necessarily follow the practices of their native culture, however, can be questioned, and research studies are needed in place of assumptions. At the same time, comparative education studies on the teaching cultures also tend to give unclear pictures of the teaching practices, reflecting the same confusion between storylines and situated practices. In comparative studies on Chinese conceptions and practices of teaching and learning (Absalom, 2003; Biggs, 1996; Ho & Hao, 2008;

Pratt, 1991; Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Wing, 1996), some researchers believe that the Chinese culture of teaching is one that strongly emphasizes passive intake and rote memorization while interactive or creative types of classroom behavior are not emphasized. Teachers tend to follow a “virtuoso” model, where the teaching act may resemble an artistic performance; however, teaching and learning does not go beyond “transmitting knowledge” (Mok, Chik, Ko, & Kwan, 2001). Others, however, question the popular beliefs and assumptions. Ho (2001) points out in a study that the meaning of teacher authority and punishment in the Confucian context may be different from the Western contexts, and teacher-student relationships, although relatively lacking interaction in the classroom, feature much teacher-student interaction outside the classroom with informal discussions and collective activities. In the mean time, authoritarian behavior and student-centered thinking are not necessarily incompatible. Similarly, some argue that the typical method of teaching in Chinese contexts is not simply transmission of superior knowledge but utilizes considerable interaction in a mutually accepting social context (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). The contextual nature and contradictions revealed in these studies suggest the likewise complexities in immigrant teacher identities in cross-cultural settings.

A few existing studies on Chinese immigrant teachers in the Western contexts have not provided us with the depth and understanding that address such complexities (Curdt-Christiansen, 2006; De Courcy, 1997; Pailliotet, 1997; Santoro, 1997). De Courcy (1997), for example, studied a graduate level Chinese classroom in Australia, in which the teachers were observed as employing monotonous, whole class teacher talk, which was poorly received by the students. According to the author, the teachers and learners in

the program were working with different scripts: the teachers using their traditional Chinese way of teaching, while the students attempting to learn in their traditional Western context. The conflicts described in the study, however, seemed more like language and culture barriers and incompetent teaching due to the absence of any experiences or training, than a difference in teaching scripts, while the real “scripts” needed more in-depth examinations. The study was limited to interviews of four students, while the teachers’ perspectives were left out of the study, and the details in this process of encounter of the pedagogical storylines (scripts) as well as the nature of “traditional Chinese” and “traditional Western” ways of teaching were left unexplored. The study by Santoro (1997), likewise, recorded negative, “racist” comments on a Chinese student teacher by her Australian cooperating teacher, without interviewing the Chinese teacher or conducting classroom observations.

While presenting the immigrant teachers’ experiences and practices, including their struggles and processes of adaptation in the school settings, in most of the studies, important aspects of professional identity and its social and dynamic nature were left unexplored, and many questions are still unanswered. The present study is an attempt to explore the complex processes. My study is situated in the larger contexts of studies on comparative studies on Chinese and Western education systems and studies on teachers’ professional identities. The immigrant and diaspora experience is having one of the largest influences on the construction of contemporary identities (Hall, 1990). Teachers’ professional identity is no exception, and bears on the nature and quality of education in the age of globalization and multicultural schools.

### **Figured World: The Theoretical Lens**

Many existing studies on teacher identity lack a theoretical conceptualization of the identity as multiple membership and situated negotiation. My study attempts to deepen the understanding of the identity in the school world by adopting the theoretical lens of the figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). The theory of figured worlds believes that people live in cultural worlds with their figured or imagined social narratives and storylines. In a figured world, identity is “a central means by which selves, and the sets of actions they organize, form and re-form over personal lifetimes and in the histories of social collectivities (Holland et al., 1998, p. 270).” Identity in the figured world has both a figurative aspect, which involves enacting, negotiating and contesting the storylines, and a positional aspect, which involves assigning an identity position to one’s self or to another. In the cultural worlds of the schools, therefore, teachers’ identities are negotiated and enacted through continued participation in the storylines of teaching, and the identities involve the teachers’ positioning relative to socially identified others in the schools. Examining the conception of identity in the figured worlds provides a theoretical lens to my study and fresh insights into the negotiation of identity. By acknowledging individual as well as collective interpretation of the storylines in the figured world of school, we may gain a deeper understanding of these storylines and their place in teachers’ identity and practices.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to examine the professional identities of Chinese immigrant teachers in US foreign language classrooms through the theoretical lens of the figured worlds. In addition to more in-depth research on immigrant teacher identity, the study fills a few other gaps existing in current research on immigrant teachers. Even

though the identity of foreign language teachers has generated interesting research (Armour, 2004; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Kumagai, 2007), there has been little research on immigrant foreign language teachers in the Western context. In addition, very few studies have specifically explored Chinese teachers' identity in the public schools and in the US context. Most of the existing studies are conducted in other countries, especially Australia, Israel and Canada (for example, Curdt-Christiansen, 2006; de Courcy, 1997; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). The present study tried to fill in these gaps given the precious opportunity for research in the present rise of Chinese language programs in the US. With the help of the theoretical framework of the figured worlds, the educational practices were observed as carrying specific and situated meanings, and cultural encounters were seen as figurative and positional enactment of the professional identity, highlighting the complexity beneath the grand storylines of the "American" or "Chinese" ways of teaching.

Specifically, my research includes case studies of two Chinese immigrant teachers in Chinese foreign language classrooms in US schools. The two participant teachers were both Chinese immigrants from Taiwan who have taught for less than two years in the foreign language classes in the US public schools. The two teachers, who were very different in age, immigrant background, and professional experiences and training, formed an interesting and complementing pair of participants for the two case studies. Case study as the methodology is "a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27), which is richly descriptive and highly contextual. Through relatively long term participant observation, document collection and interviews, which spanned a period of

about three months, I tried to understand the processes of negotiation of the teachers' professional identities through the theoretical perspective of figured worlds, which sees identities as lived characters in cultural worlds. Hence, the "tale" in my characterization of the study. As some researchers put it, "All teachers have their own stock of stories, examples and moments, remembered with a shudder or a smile, that contribute to their sense of professional identity and guide their actions. We describe this response as aesthetic" (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 719). For me this aesthetic and the caring effort on the part of the researcher to understand it is a foremost concern in this research study.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis contains five chapters. The first chapter provides the general background and purpose of the study. The second chapter presents the literature review in which I examined the figured worlds as the theoretical framework that guides the study, theorization of teachers' identity, and current research on language and immigrant teachers' professional identity, which combine to inform the present study and lead to the specific research questions. The third chapter introduces the methodology used in the study, including research design, participants and research sites, and methods of data collection and analysis. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter four as two self-contained single cases, each with its own emerging themes, and cross case analysis that focuses on more theorizing and contrastive analysis. Chapter five concludes the thesis by reiterating the contributions of the study to existing research and stating implications and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter consists of three parts: the exposition of identity in the figured worlds as the theoretical framework that guides the research, theorization on teachers' professional identity, which lends background and useful conceptions to the study, and current research on the professional identities of language and immigrant teachers, especially Chinese immigrant teachers in the Western context. All three parts combine to lead to the questions of the present research.

#### **Identity in the Figured Worlds**

##### **Identity in Practice**

To explore teachers' professional identity, it is necessary to clarify the concept of social identity adopted in this thesis and its definition in the theoretical framework of figured worlds, which is the guiding framework and lens of observation and interpretation in the study.

Social identity theory holds a conception of multiple and evolving identities as on-going and situated construction. It is not something that exists within a person, but is constructed through social networks and derives from group membership (Hansen & Liu, 1997; McNamara, 1997; Sarup, 1993).

The notion of identity as membership and participation, which is central to the concept of social identity, is best illustrated in Wenger's theories of community of practice and situated learning (2008). The theory believes identity is situated and practiced in social context, and its negotiation is part of the formation of a community. A community of practice has three dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Members of the community collectively engage in social events and

activities, and share the experiences and their interpretations of the activities. Wenger further summarizes identity into five aspects of meaning: negotiated experience, community membership, a learning trajectory, a nexus of multi-membership, and a relation between the local and the global. In other words, identity is a reflection of multiple community memberships that is continuously negotiated, and the process is one of situated learning in which the community participants move from peripheral membership to more central positions. Reconciliations among memberships and discourses are involved in the process, and identity is defined through the constant and joint social participation in the community repertoire of established practices.

Drawing on these conceptualizations, the theory of figured worlds recognizes identity as membership and participation situated in collectively formed activities. It emphasizes “identity in practice”: “Identities are the imaginings of self in worlds of action, as social products. They are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5) and is “a central means by which selves, and the sets of actions they organize, form and re-form over personal lifetimes and in the histories of social collectivities (p. 270).” As in the theory of community of practice and other socio-cultural conceptualizations, identities within figured worlds are historical developments grown through continued participation in the positions defined by the social organization of those worlds’ activity.

### **The Figured Aspect of Identity**

The concept of “figured world” is based on Bourdieu’s social practice theory and concept of “habitus” (1977) and drew on the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin on social activities, self, and discourse. A figured world is a socially produced and culturally

constructed “realm of interpretation in which a particular set of characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Three important concepts outline the theoretical conception: First, it is a realm of social life that is culturally constructed and forms various frames of the social world. Second, Members or participants in the realm are viewed as actors or characters who engage in the social acts and employ agentic choices therein. Third, Meanings are assigned to the range of social acts by the actors, which involves the collective memories and significances placed on history, customs, traditions and values evolved in that particular social realm or frame, constituting shared narratives and storylines. These are summarized by Holland et al. as “culturally constituted of conventional events, improvised but recognizable acts, and talked-about characters” (1998, p. 125).

These concepts were illustrated in the author’s own ethnographic research. Skinner studied Naudada, a mixed-caste Hindu community in central Nepal, and found for Naudada’s women, the figured world of domestic relations was dominated by a narrativized account of the life path of a good woman, from being a hard-working and obedient daughter, a devoted, diligent, and son-bearing wife, to appropriately dying before her husband. The meaning of characters, acts, and events in everyday life was figured against this storyline. Growing up as a female in Hindu Nepal involved learning these storylines in daily life and in rituals, and women were interpreted and evaluated against this narrativized world with its ideal woman and her life course, although at the same time conventions were also questioned in various daily acts and discourses.

In the figured worlds, the shared narratives and storylines are also termed

“inscribed acts” and serve to mark social identities in the world, such as certain knowledge and skill for a profession, in the same way that competency defines the identity in a community of situated learning. According to Holland et al., these inscribed acts are important in the figured worlds as they essentially serve to affect and organize behaviors and evoke the sense of identity. “It is a process of personal formation that occurs via cultural resources enacted in a social context” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 282). In the figured world of college romance, for example, a set of agents (attractive women, boyfriends, lovers, fiancés) engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state (flirting with, falling in love with, dumping, having sex with) as moved by a specific set of forces (attractiveness, love, lust). These inscribed acts affect the behaviors of the members of the figured world and evoke their sense of identity in the world of romance.

The figurative aspect is centrally important to identity in the figured world, which develops in relation to the worlds of “storylines, narrativity, generic characters, and desire” (Holland et al., 1998, p.125), where meanings are continuously speculated, assigned and contested, and uncertainty often rules in the mutual engagement in the behavioral routines and the inscribed acts. Researchers have already problematized the notions of community based on a mutuality of interests and communal support in teacher workplaces (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004; Little, 2002). The theory of figured worlds extends the concept of “community of practice” to “worlds,” with a figured or imagined nature of the social narratives and storylines. Instead of established communities of practice with joint enterprise and shared repertoires (Wenger, 2008), the figured worlds are open to interpretation and contestation in practice, leaving room for individual interpretation in addition to identification with the world. By recognizing both the

collectively and individually figured nature of the social worlds, the theory opens a space for interpreting social enterprises and their associated meanings.

### **Positioning: The Relational Aspect of Identity**

In addition to the figured aspect of identity, the relational aspect of identity is equally important in the figured worlds. Compared with figured identity, the concept of positional identity is much more developed and accepted in social cultural theories, which posit that people constantly take up, assert, and resist identity positions that define them as well as mutually assigning their positions in social interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In the same way, Holland et al. believe that the positional identities “have to do with one’s position relative to socially identified others, one’s sense of social place, and entitlement” (1998, p. 125). People place themselves in the social fields with a sense of the “hereness” and “thereness” of people (p. 271). Drawing on Bakhtin’s views, the theory suggests that the individual is constituted by the social, that consciousness is a matter of dialogue and juxtaposition with a social Other.

In the Hindu Nepal community in Skinner’s study (Holland et al., 1998), for example, scolding was an everyday activity directed at girls for transgressions and problems. These scoldings involved the expression of generic concepts (radi—widow), meanings (shame), and evaluations (lazy) commonly applied to women’s behavior, which became the girls’ embodied sense of the treatment they received in the positions afforded women. It was an activity of positioning that served to identify and entitle, making the children’s actions intelligible in light of the social storylines and asserting the relative positions in the social world.

Borrowing from the positioning theory in discourse analysis (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005;

Davies & Harre, 2001), the theory of figured worlds recognizes the means of positioning through discursive construction, as shown in the example of the scolding activity, in which people are positioned through the discursive practices and the individual's identity is generated through the learning and use of these discursive practices. In the process, selves are located as participants in the jointly produced storylines. Positioning, however, takes place not only as narrativized or discursive placement, such as the scolding as an everyday activity in the Hindu community. It also happens through access to space, activities, and genres. Perspectives are tied to a sense of entitlement or disempowerment to the particular spaces, relationships, activities and forms of expression that together make up the indices of identity. One example in the case of the Hindu community in Nepal is the restricted access of lower-caste people to the kitchens of higher-caste households, which placed people in the social fields with different entitlement. By emphasizing the relational nature of identity, the positional aspect of identity complements the figurative aspect in capturing the process of identity construction in the figured worlds.

### **From Improvisation to Orchestration**

The theory of figured worlds draws on Bakhtin for its interpretation of social and dialogic discourses, especially the concepts of heteroglossia, which refers to the co-existence of social-ideological contradictions in discourses, and the related concept of internally persuasive discourse. Contrary to authoritative discourse, which is fused with political and institutional power, internally persuasive discourse is “tightly interwoven with one's own words” and always reveals new ways to mean in new contexts (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345-346).

While Bakhtin emphasizes the struggle among multiple discourses, the theory of the figured worlds understands people's reaction to the multiple discourses as improvisation, which is "an expected outcome when people are simultaneously engaged with or pushed by contradictory discourses" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 17), and "potential beginnings of an altered identity" (p. 18). Struggles among contradictory discourses, especially in new contexts, result in responding to choices and actions that lead to the construction of new identities. A most dramatic example of identity improvisation is given in the study in the Hindu community in Nepal (Holland et al., 1998), when a low-caste woman scaled the outside of a higher-caste house when invited by the researchers to go up to the balcony, instead of going through the kitchen and up the stairs. For the researchers this presented a spectacular improvisation in the face of problematic situation, between the subject position of a welcome guest by the researchers and another position as a bearer of pollution to the higher-caste household. For the researchers this was a significant act that implied an altered identity on the part of the Hindu woman, as well as to other members of the community, eventually contributing to the possible rewriting of caste storylines.

In line with the musical overtone of improvisation, the process of negotiation of the discourses is framed as "orchestration," which in turn creates the "space of authoring" in the figured worlds. Authorship is a matter of orchestration, of "arranging the identifiable social discourses/practices that are one's resources in order to craft a response" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 272). If improvisation is individual reactions and choices, orchestration involves negotiation and ways of response to multiple available social discourses. Compared with Bakhtin's concepts of language and discourse, less emphasis is placed on the distinction

between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, and collective storylines take the place of institutional discourses, although the same process of dialogic negotiation and struggle is characterized.

The results of the orchestration and authorship become what Holland et al. term as “making worlds” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Through the authorship, or social play, new figured worlds may come about, and new social competencies develop in newly imagined communities. The ability to sense the figured world becomes embodied over time, through continual participation. By means of such appropriation, objectification, and communication, the world itself is also reproduced, forming and reforming in the practices of its participants.

### **Cultural Artifacts: Tools of Identity Construction**

One pivotal concept in the theory of figured worlds is cultural artifacts, a concept inherited from Vygotsky for explaining semiotic mediation of social behaviors.

According to the social psychological theories, people use symbols to organize and manage their own and others’ behavior. These symbols, or artifacts, are used to objectify or concretize other contexts of activity, even when they are literally absent (Holland et al., 1998).

The meaning of cultural artifacts, which can be material or conceptual, are collectively attributed by social groups. Examples in the studies by Holland et al. (1998) include the poker chips and life stories of Alcoholics Anonymous, the “sexy” clothes and gender-marked stereotypes of the world of romance, or patients’ charts and medications in the world of mental health care. These artifacts have been manufactured or produced and continue to be used as part of, and in relation to, intentional human actions. They are

the means through which the storylines and inscribed acts in the figured worlds are concretized.

The figured worlds rely upon cultural artifacts as mediators in human action. As social constructions or products of human activity, they may become tools engaged in processes of cultural production. Cultural artifacts gain a kind of force by connection to their social and cultural contexts. They evoke the worlds to which they were relevant, and position individuals with respect to those worlds. People constantly produce artifacts that may become important in refiguring cultural worlds. Poker chips, for example, in their association with the figured world of Alcoholics Anonymous, afforded certain ways of thinking and feeling about sobriety and about the people who employed them to mediate their relation to alcohol and drinking. It is their capacity to shift the perceptual, cognitive, affective, and practical frame of activity that makes cultural artifacts so significant in human life (Holland et al., 1998).

People in the figured worlds are creators and appropriators of cultural artifacts that they and others produce. A central question to ask in research on figured worlds is the process of their mediation and appropriation. “We consider the practical artifacts of the moment—the verbal, gestural, and material productions—emerging from the situation, and ask how, and to what extent, these artifacts might be taken up and, in later events perhaps, become conventionalized or made into culture” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 17). As the tangible embodiment of the figuring of the narratives and storylines, this process of appropriation becomes one of the most intriguing aspects of the figured worlds.

Examining the conception of identity in the figured worlds provides a theoretical lens to my study and fresh insights into the negotiation of social identity. The theory,

however, has not dealt specifically with the conception of teachers' professional identities in the contexts of the schools, which has its own special dimensions and situated meanings. Since a great amount of research in the field of educational studies has explored teachers' professional identity and presented their own theorization of the identity, in the next section I will look into these research for concepts and specific understanding that they have to offer on the teachers' professional identity, which combines with the theory of figured worlds to inform my study.

### **Theorizing Teacher Identity**

#### **Defining Teachers' Professional Identity**

Teachers' professional identity is essentially the "who" question: who is the self that teaches? In the research literature a range of definitions has been given to teachers' professional identity, often elusive and used in different ways. Knowles (1992) characterized teachers' professional identity as an unclear concept in the sense of what, and to what extent, things are integrated in such an identity. While some researchers emphasize teacher knowledge and pedagogical expertise as the defining character of teachers' professional identity (Graham & Young, 1998), others see professional identity as separate from professional knowledge and learning (McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006). Other definitions include self image (Vogt, 2002), a list of professional attributes (Gaziel, 1995), teacher belief (Bullough, 1997), teacher's role (Goodson & Cole, 1994; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998), or multiple elements including roles and relations (Beijaard, 1995).

Adopting the social identity approach, many researchers began to define teacher identity as located in the teaching community (Goodson & Cole, 1994; Galindo, 1996). In

their research, teacher identity involves relations and interactions in the teaching community. Teachers' professional identity has to do with how teachers feel they are seen through other people's eyes—in terms of their status, standing, regard and levels of professional reward (Hargreaves, 2000). It is a set of attributes that are imposed upon the teaching profession either by outsiders or members of the teaching community itself (Sachs, 2001). Rather than a matter of internal self-perceptions, it is a process of social intelligibility (Gergen, 2001). From a narrative approach, some researchers see identity as authored self in teacher stories, which feature evolving roles and interactions in the landscape of schools (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

The focus on membership and social intelligibility helps us respond to the question of what are integrated in the concept of teacher identity. It is not the professional knowledge or attributes, or even the working place relationship in themselves that constitute the teacher identity. Rather, it is the memberships reflected in these attributes, perceptions and relationships that define the teacher's identity. Since professional identity is a matter of where within the professional array of possibilities a particular person is located (Coldron & Smith, 1999), teacher identity is a matter of where a teacher is located within the array of possibilities in the school and teaching worlds.

### **On-going Construction of Teacher Identity**

Some researchers point out that the dominant notion of “professional identity” appears to build on a simplistic and instrumental model of teacher development (Dillabough, 1999). Many studies on “formation” of new teachers and their professional identity more or less assume a “core” professional identity which the teachers acquire through a process of internalization and socialization (Angelle, 2006; Bell & Gilbert, 1994;

Kuzmic, 1994; Marshall, Turvey & Brindley, 2001; Tafa, 2004; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). The traditional perspective viewed teacher learning as a cognitive issue and a transmission process (Richards, 2008). Kostogriz and Peeler (2004) argue that given the complexity of school places which are embedded with multiple socio-cultural groups, internalization and socialization cannot adequately explain the processes of identity construction for teachers. Instead, the school space is lived in the daily reality of local, routine and situated events of the classroom, and multiple and situated identities are involved in contexts. They proposed that studies of teacher identities should focus more on the process of becoming rather than being, reflecting the complex interactions between meanings, values, and discourses (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004). Some researchers believe a shift has already taken place in theoretical perspectives on teacher socialization towards more dynamic, interactive, and dialectical conceptualizations of what it means to become a teacher (Richardson & Placier, 2001).

Some research studies have explored this process of becoming and the negotiation of meanings in teaching. In a study on bilingual teachers' professional identity using the theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), for example, Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005) observed the negotiated meaning of the bilingual teacher identity. They found the range and different ways of participation of the teachers in the teaching community from being a full member to a nonparticipant. The continuum of participation showed that bilingual teaching was not a set of standards but as different ways of being and engaging, and teachers' professional identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences. In many studies the construction of teacher identity often has a discursive nature, emphasizing the dynamic and emerging

side of language and identity (Davies & Harré, 2001; Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000; Kumakai, 2007). Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000), for example, studied how two university lecturers textually constructed their professional identities in their classrooms, positioning themselves as experts, while using self-mockery as expressions of equality. In this process professional identities become a moment to moment construction and negotiation instead of a final stage of being.

The concept of multiple and contradictory identities is also explored in research and studies. Pennington (2002) points out that teaching reflects its context and is context adaptive at the level of individual events and classrooms, as well as at the level of the school, the society, the individual teaching field, and the teaching profession. Teaching identity is not only multiple or hyphenated, but also layered with the teachers' multiple voices as past students, present employee, and member of the teaching profession in general, and the voices compete in the Bakhtinian sense for the expression of identity. Some researchers argue for the need to critique the narrow ways in which identities are conceptualized in schools and advocates for the need to consider heterogeneous and contradictory notions of teacher identity (Subedi, 2008). In his own study on South Asian teachers in the US public schools, Subedi clearly demonstrated this heterogeneity and the layered nature of their identity, through the ways in which the teachers responded to the educational discourses in their respective schools and chose to identify or distance themselves from both the mainstream and their own ethnic group cultures.

Given the possible multiple discourses, teachers' identities are often presented as a struggle because they have to make sense of varying and sometimes competing perspectives, expectations, and roles that they confront and adapt to (Beijaard, Meijer, &

Verloop, 2004). In this ongoing process, legitimacy becomes an aspect of the negotiated identity. Coldron and Smith (1999) point out that identity as a teacher is partly given and partly achieved by active location in social space, a way to make sense of themselves in relation to other people and contexts. “Being a teacher...is a matter of acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated” (p. 712).

Some studies have looked into the process of acquiring the socially legitimated identity. A study by Grossman, Smagorinsky and Valencia (1999) was an example of teachers negotiating legitimate discourses in the school settings and how the cultural settings of preservice and inservice environments mediate the process of learning to teach. The researchers found multiple and competing desired outcomes often coexist within a school or classroom setting, though typically some predominate. For example, a minority student teacher resisted the pedagogy of reflective writing in the teacher education course by frequently citing Delpit’s advocacy of explicit teaching for minority students who are not fluent in the codes that are required for school success. The dilemma reflected the conflict between two strong competing discourses and no easy solutions or answers could be prescribed in defining a socially legitimated identity for the new teachers. In another study, Olson (2000) used narrative inquiry to study practicum stories of three preservice teachers in Canada as they attempted to author their own curriculum stories with students. Each student teacher had to negotiate her legitimate curriculum stories within curriculum stories already in progress in her cooperating teacher’s classroom. The issue of legitimacy is especially salient in the studies on immigrant teachers, which will be discussed in details in later sections.

### **Teacher Agency**

Related to the process of negotiation in identity construction is the issue of agency. Unlike the socialization view, which emphasizes teachers' conformation to the subculture and structure of the school, the social identity view believes that it is necessary to address the relation between agency and structure in order to construct a plausible view of teachers' professional identity. The tension between agency and structure is already reflected in some of the studies cited in the previous section (for example, Varghese et al., 2005; Grossman et al., 1999), and in many other specific analyses of teaching (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Giroux, 1992; Goodson, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994). With the multiple and competing discourses and the constant issue of legitimacy involved in teaching, choice and decision are inevitably central to the profession, and agency is enacted in the process. Examples of fields of choice specific to teachers' work are forms of classroom organization and styles of pedagogy, including innumerable daily decisions about content, instruction, assessment, interactions, and management (Monzo & Rueda, 2003). By choosing some and rejecting other possibilities in various professional fields of choice, a teacher affirms affiliations and makes distinctions that constitute an important part of his or her professional identity. Even within a nationally defined curriculum, teachers have to make many decisions about curriculum content and emphasis, and about the values conveyed by stories and examples they use in their lessons, the rules they set down, and the priorities in their decisions (Coldron & Smith, 1999).

In addition to classroom choices and decisions, teacher agency in the schools is also reflected as their identification with the profession, in either conscious or subconscious ways. Sloan (2006) used the framework of figured worlds to study teacher identity and agency, exploring the varied ways three teachers read and responded to

accountability-related curriculum policies. The author believes that the degree to which the three teachers exhibited teacher agency within a school world depended on the degree to which they identified themselves with the figured world of school and the amount and quality of their knowledge, both professional and personal, of curriculum and pedagogy. Among the three teachers, two strongly identified themselves with the figured world of school, by self-authoring a teacher identity with a professional status, or commitment to the profession and to children, while another loathes associating himself with the school world.

Maclure's study (1993) highlighted the crisis of teacher identity and agency in the context of primary and secondary schools in the UK under contemporary social and economic pressures. The teachers' identity was seen as a "resource" that they use to explain, justify and make sense of their own conduct, values and circumstances, and relation to others and to the world, thus an instrument of agency. The researcher explored the "spoiled and subversive identities" of the group of primary and secondary teachers, and found that the teachers associated negative qualities with their profession, such as dullness, lack of respect, and diminishing sense of control, and some chose to deride their own status. We might argue, however, that the capacity to negotiate the contemporary school discourses and choose to adopt the "subversive" identities was precisely a form of agency achieved by these teachers. Still other forms of agency are achieved in selectively making visible the ethnic identities (Subedi, 2008) or personal identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997), which will be discussed in later sections. Whatever form it takes, teacher agency plays a crucial part in their ongoing negotiation of the professional identities.

### **Teacher Identity in the Figured Worlds**

From the perspective of the figured worlds theory, teachers' identities are negotiated and practiced through continued participation in the storylines defined by the social organization of the school world. The identities involve the teachers' positioning relative to socially identified others in the school, their sense of the school place, and their entitlement within the school. The framework provides a new perspective on teacher identity while complementing the socio-cultural theorization of teachers' professional identity in existing research. The on-going construction and interpretation of identities are part of the individual as well as collective figuring of the "inscribed acts" and the constant positioning of self and other, while putting more emphasis on the dynamic and uncertain nature of the process. Legitimacy is involved in positioning of self and others and in access to places, resources and genres. The competing discourses are viewed as multiple storylines that are orchestrated in the creation of new meanings and making of new cultural worlds. In addition, the theme of agency finds an explication in improvisation in the theory of the figured worlds. Holland et al. describe how Bourdieu's theory posits a strong connection between agency and improvisation:

"Bourdieu (1977a) makes improvisation the predominant form of agency. He argues conclusively that it is fruitless to make up a set of cultural rules to account for people's behavior. The material and social conditions of activity vary in a plenitude of ways; even in highly restrictive environments, it is difficult to avoid unusual combinations of people and things. ..Our bodies are repositories of a complex set of associations-of actions (movements), figures (categories), and contexts (environments)—sedimented from experiencing concrete instances of their combination, their work together. ... Agency lies in the improvisations that

people create in response to particular situations, mediated by these senses and sensitivities. They opportunistically use whatever is at hand to affect their position in the cultural game” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 279).

In this conception, teacher choices can be seen as dynamic and situated acts of improvisation in response to the social situations and actions in the schools. Choice of certain curricular materials or modes of their presentation, for example, can be either planned or spontaneous responses to a variety of the school discourses based on the teacher’s senses and sensitivities; so are the subversive stances adopted by the teachers in the Maclure (1993) study.

The potential of the theoretical framework will be further illustrated after the next section, in which I look into current research on language and immigrant teachers’ professional identities, including a limited number of studies on Chinese immigrant teachers in the Western contexts. These studies reflect the processes of negotiation and teacher agency in implicit or explicit ways, although different groups of teachers have specific dimensions of the professional identity in their own fields of teaching or their own cultural or ethnic status. I examine the findings from these studies in greater detail, which will inform the present study on what is known or needed to know about language and immigrant teachers. This knowledge, combined with my theoretical interests, will lead to my focus and research questions.

## **Current Research on Language and Immigrant Teacher Identity**

### **Professional Identity of Language Teachers**

The identity of language teachers is grounded within contextual social, cultural, and historical circumstances (Cross, 2006). In this section of review on foreign language

teachers' identity I will focus on two related aspects of their identity: the teaching of culture and the interplay between their personal and professional identities.

**Teaching culture in language classrooms.** Language teachers are considered cultural workers (Giroux, 1992), as they are involved in the construction of cultures and cultural identities in their teaching and in the language curriculum and textbooks they use (Herman, 2007; Kramsch, 1993; Leeman & Martínez, 2007; Train, 2007). Some researchers believe that culture is the core of language teaching while at the same time it is “difference, variability, and always a potential source of conflict when one culture enters into contact with another” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 1). Second language teachers are presented with the challenge of having to negotiate their own identities as well as those of their students through developmental phases in two languages and cultures. All of the classroom actors mediate and construct their identities through their participation in the language classroom, the profession, the curriculum, and the community (Mantero, 2004). The teacher's whole identity is at play in the classroom; it is a crucial component in determining how language teaching unfolds (Varghese et al., 2005).

The cultural differences negotiated in foreign language classrooms form a special dimension of the teacher's identity. A challenging task posed for second language professionals is to negotiate the concept of cultural difference, which is a complex notion that both promote understanding and bring about misunderstanding of other cultures (Kubota, 2004). Kumagai's (2007) study of a Japanese language teacher's classroom discourses exemplifies this process of negotiation. The teacher was positioned by the students as the information provider given her responsibility as the instructor as well as the Japanese cultural expert in class. In a classroom scene of discussing the encoding and

writing conventions of Japanese *katakana*, the teacher was uncomfortable with the topic, used phrases to make her explanations elusive and tentative, and shifted the discussion towards a less controversial direction, in order to avoid revealing biases that exist in Japan towards nonnative speech. The teacher explained to the researcher that she did not want to present the negative images of Japanese people and at the same time also wanted to protect her students from being seen as foreigners with strange accents using *katakana*. In the process the teacher's multiple and conflictive identities were constructed, as a native Japanese teacher caught between presenting and protecting image of her own culture and teaching and protecting the identities of her students, and distinction between the Self and the Other were negotiated and contested in the discourse.

Similarly, Duff and Uchida (1997) believe that in foreign language classrooms, issues of socio-cultural identity and representation are very important, because foreign language teachers commonly discuss the social and cultural aspects of other ethnolinguistic groups, and they constantly position themselves with respect to those representations. In their study on teachers' construction, conceptualization, and interrogation of their own socio-cultural identities and practices in an adult EFL program in Japan, an American teacher was observed in the process of identity construction through teaching culture. Themes taken up in his class included nonsmoking campaigns, gun control, women's rights, and the technical production of television, and U.S. situation comedies, television shows, videos and cartoons were used. The class was characterized by humorous monologues, with the teacher on stage at the front assuming the role of talk show host, which was a representation of U.S. popular culture and classroom culture. According to the researchers, the students' identities were naturally transformed through

membership in this local classroom culture. At the teacher's encouragement and by his example, the students were socialized into a fun-seeking classroom culture quite at odds with the norms for Japanese women, and they began to laugh out loud and play jokes with the teacher. Both the teacher's and the students' identities were constructed and negotiated in the classroom context, and the teacher indeed guided the students' identities through a different culture. A female American teacher in the same program, by contrast, refused to lend herself to the discourse of foreign teachers as cultural informers and entertainers. She avoided self-disclosure, intimacy and familiarity with students, and did not want to assume the role of a guidance counselor that her learners seemed to expect. Her own personal experiences contributed to her lack of identification with what might be portrayed as conservative mainstream U.S. cultural values. Instead, she wished to highlight her identities of English language teaching specialist and student of Japanese language and culture. In this case her professional identity was at play in the form of reticence and resistance.

**Personal vs. professional identities.** Some researchers believe there is confusion between the "personal side" and "professional side" in teachers' identity. What counts as "professional" is related to ways in which teachers relate to other people (students, colleagues, parents) and the responsibilities, attitudes, and behaviors they adopt as well as the knowledge they use which are more or less outside themselves (Beijaard et al., 2004). From the view of social identity, however, it might be difficult to separate the professional identity from the personal, since identity is a constant positioning simultaneously pushed by multiple discourses. For language teachers this is especially true, when the subject of teaching, language, is inseparable from the identities of its

speakers. In the Kumagai study, for example, the personal identity of the teacher as a native Japanese person came into play when she chose to present a more positive image of Japanese people. Many other studies on language teachers have explored the interaction of the multiple identities, including personal identity. Morgan (2004), for example, studied his own teaching experiences in a community ESL class in Canada and saw his teacher identity as an image-text produced through the everyday practices of schooling, co-created by both teacher and students and subject to subversion and transformation. In this process, his own personal identity became intertwined with the formalized instruction, teacher-student interactions, and attitudes and expectations in class. His white male status gave him advantage and legitimacy in representing the mainstream Canadian culture, and his own personal life, such as his family life, his hobbies, and his favorite movie stars all became the topics of classroom discussions and part of the “image-text” of his teacher identity. The identity became a classroom resource, a text to be read by multiple participants and in turn challenged group assumptions around culture, gender, and family roles in the community ESL program.

As evidenced in the Kumagai and Morgan studies, language teachers’ personal identities often take on an ethnic dimension. This dimension is most clearly reflected in Armour’s study (2004) on the “identity slippage” of an Australian woman, and how her identities as a Japanese language learner, user and teacher developed and interacted with each other. The overall negative assessment of her Japanese language ability has been a decisive factor in defining her as a Japanese language teacher. She felt insecure about her language proficiency and did not feel legitimate. She was positioned as an apprentice based on the content taught when she was a novice Japanese language teacher while a

skilled French and German teacher. She felt it was easier for an Australian person to feel comfortable about pretending to be French, but not Japanese. It was what she taught that characterized her identity, rather than how she taught it. The study showed the teacher's native and target languages and cultures could affect the perception of her own authority and effectiveness as a teacher, and her personal ethnic identity played a central role in the perception.

The inseparability of their identity from the cultures they teach and their personal identities is one of the most important aspects of language teachers' professional identity. Seen from the social identity perspective, on-going construction of the teachers' identity is achieved in the process of teaching the language and culture, involving the negotiation of membership and legitimacy, and positioning in both the native and the target cultures.

### **Professional Identity of Immigrant Teachers**

In the present study, the term "immigrant teachers" refers to teachers who teach in a culture and school system in a different country from where they were born and grew up. Researchers have found that educational and life experiences had a decisive impact on teachers' actions in and outside of the classroom (Britzman, 1991; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Goodson, 1992; Henry, 1998; Schubert & Ayers, 1992). Teachers' worldviews have been shaped by the sociocultural and historical contexts of their lives. This background impacts teachers' beliefs about education, content, instructional strategies, and interactions with students, and the experiences and beliefs the immigrant teacher potentially brings to her teaching are markedly different from those of mainstream teachers (Monzo & Rueda, 2003). Students classroom behaviors and teachers' expectations may reflect different norms for culturally appropriate behaviors

(Hinkel, 1999). As Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) puts it, “Knowledge of a place—where you are and where you come from—is intertwined with knowledge of who you are” (p. 338). Given the influence of their background, their unfamiliarity with the new culture and school system and lack of experience and even the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) in the school system, their professional identities are bound to take on some special dimensions.

**Marginalization.** A prevailing assumption about immigrant teachers is that they face challenges adapting to the new school system. These teachers are considered ill-equipped to teach locally, their language proficiency and professional knowledge often doubted, and the experiences and educational beliefs they bring to the new context are often seen as possible causes of tensions or difficulties (Remennick, 2002).

Unsurprisingly, a recurring theme in studies on immigrant teachers has been the teachers’ feeling of professional, social, and cultural alienation and isolation in their process of initiation into the new context (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2003; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Galindo, 2007; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Seah, 2002; Tellez, 1999). A study by Feuerverger (1997), for example, was made on heritage language teachers from various countries in the “marginalized” Heritage Language Program in Ontario, Canada. It was found that while some teachers showed a sense of confidence in their teaching skills and were respectful of the pedagogical and social needs of the students in their classrooms, some others felt trapped and insecure in their positions, and could not relate to the educational context in which they were operating. All of the teachers held in common a sense of marginality and isolation in their respective schools and within the educational program. Some of the participants had a very limited

understanding of the meaning of teaching in North America, an often fuzzy and uncertain concept of the students, and only a weak sense of themselves as “legitimate” teachers.

Researchers believe that the process of adapting to a new community is dependent upon forming effective relationships (Gee, 2001), and the nature of these relationships bears on participants' ability to share common experiences that potentially lead to a sense of belonging (Alfred, 2001). Kostogriz and Peeler (2004) approach immigrant teachers' professional identity from the angle of “spatial struggle,” featuring workplace relations and mutual positioning of the self and other. While positioning is a universal process of identity construction, as discussed in the previous section, and struggle and coping with competing perspectives is a constant theme for all teachers (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1992; Roberts, 2000; Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998), immigrant teachers often experience additional challenge in the process of positioning.

Alienation can, however, take on a more positive light, when the differences are part of the immigrant teachers' opportunities for learning. Elbaz-Luwisch's study on immigrant teachers in Israel (2004) found that the immigrant teachers were likely to develop an awareness of teaching and schooling in the new culture that other teachers may not have. Some teachers struggled with alternating moments of belonging and alienation when they experienced the differences. One teacher in the study coped with it by carefully observing what aspects of her personal style had to be adapted. The teachers realized that learning the codes of behavior was always important, when inappropriate behavior arose as a result of misunderstanding of language or culture, even though for teachers who had not been schooled in the culture the process was doubly complicated and more self-conscious.

**Ethnicity and identity.** The minority ethnicity of many immigrant teachers is often an important part of their professional identity. Studies have shown that teachers' native language and culture can play complex roles in their professional lives (Beynon et al., 2003). Researchers believe that teacher candidates must have an ethnic consciousness whereby they connect with ethnic membership issues (Flores, 2001), and the manner in which minority interpret their cultural identity plays a critical role in their identity as educators (Galindo & Olguín, 1996). For ethnic minority teachers, their minority experiences act as a "bridging identity" toward their teacher identity formation, which affects their self perception and how they relate to the students and the colleagues (Flores, Clark, Guerra & Sanchez, 2008). Some researchers believe that the shared or different ethnicities between the teacher and the students can either become a bonding factor for communication or an estranging one that calls for the display of differentiation, a point that awaits further validation in studies (Pennington, 2002).

Some research studies show that non-mainstream ethnic, gender or religious identities are often coded as being non-legitimate teacher identities. Johnson's study about a Mexican immigrant teacher (in Varghese et al., 2005) showed how the teacher was keenly aware of her own ethnic status and felt labeled because of the ethnicity imposed upon her. In another study, Subedi (2008) examined how two female South Asian teachers questioned dominant interpretations on what counted as teacher legitimacy and authority, and how racial, ethnic and gender identities play into the work lives the two long time public school teachers. One of the teachers in the study, for example, consciously countered the ethnic identity discourse by making a point of avoiding her ethnic food and dresses in the schools. The teachers selectively made visible

as well as down played their ethnic identities to claim their rightful identities as legitimate teachers, which the researchers believed gave them a sense of dignity and power.

The ethnicity of minority immigrant teachers is an important aspect of their professional identity in terms of their authenticity, legitimacy, visibility and their social bonds with the students and the other members in the school community, and remains central in the process of their identity negotiation.

**Competing pedagogical storylines.** A prevalent theme in the studies on immigrant teachers is the competing pedagogical storylines in their background cultures and in the new school contexts. In some studies the storylines are briefly defined. For example, in the studies by Feuerverger (1997) and Myles, Cheng, and Wang (2006) on immigrant teachers in Ontario, the “Canadian pedagogical style” was defined as “child-centered instructional methods,” while immigrant teachers were by contrast used to the “regimented system.” In other studies the storylines are presented in more details. Remennick (2002), for example, studied Russian immigrant teachers in Israel, who perceived Israeli schooling as having flexible curriculum, lesser weight of homework, and the lack of formal authority of the teacher compared with the Russian context. Other perceived differences include emphasis on independence and creativity instead of mechanistic accumulation of knowledge and students’ rights and diversity. The ways that the teachers negotiated the differences and participated in the practices in the new school contexts formed their new teacher identity.

While a convenient attribution, the conceptions of these pedagogical storylines often reveal vagueness of meaning upon closer examination. The study by Myles, Cheng

and Wang (2006), for example, revealed a non-child-centered approach by a Canadian cooperating teacher, rather than by the immigrant teacher in practicum, putting doubts on the “Canadian pedagogical style” as a clear and unquestionably practiced concept. In addition, a direct pairing of teaching practices with one’s cultural background can prove arbitrary and problematic. One study by Monzo and Rueda (2003) on a Latina immigrant teacher to the US found the teacher described her own role as “nontraditional,” even though she did not define what was “traditional” or “nontraditional”: she believed that the teacher sometimes is “a mother, a psychologist, a friend, and a companion,” which she termed a “more symmetrical relationship (p. 83).” She allowed kids to stray off task for a few minutes and called this a way of showing mutual respect. She was not observed singling students out with a question. Instead, children were allowed to choose whether they wanted to respond to questions. The authors concluded that the teacher’s “beliefs regarding teaching and learning stemmed from her own experiences and the meanings she constructed from them: Her strong support of bilingual education, her amplified view of the role of teachers, her sensitive appraisal of students’ needs, seem a direct consequence of her own experiences as a student” (p. 89). These beliefs also were informed by her reading of the educational literature, teaching experiences and the dominant meritocratic ideologies that prevail in the US. Here the assertion of influence and “direct consequence” of schooling experiences in her home country was not well grounded, since it is not apparent why beliefs like support for bilingual education or sensitivity to students’ needs are necessarily results of schooling in a Latina country rather than the US. We can expect that teachers’ professional identity is much more situated and complex than a clear mapping of cultural attributes could characterize.

An example of more nuanced studies is made by Seah (2002) on immigrant math teachers in Australia, in which the teachers were observed to encounter value differences and conflicts in the math classrooms. One immigrant teacher from Romania, for example, emphasized teaching procedural knowledge rather than conceptual knowledge in her classes and was regularly reminded by the principal to teach “the Australian way,” although the principal was not able to describe what this teaching style entailed. Another encounter of value differences was the teacher’s approach to posing questions to students in class. The teacher used a great number of questions directed at the whole class, aiming to generate thinking and learning, as she used to do in Romania, and any student could offer response any time. The practice, however, was not well accepted by the students, who were less conversant in the basic computational skills and also were used to raising their hands to answer questions. As a result, the teacher adapted to the needs and sometimes switched to more teacher-centered questioning.

When presented in the concrete daily practices, the educational cultures take on more specific and situated meanings, highlighting the complexity beneath the grand storylines. In the same study, another immigrant teacher from Africa was observed to employ teacher-centered approach and find the Australian classes much more student-centered than in his home country. Characteristics of teaching practices, such as teacher-centered or student-centeredness, are not simply attributed to countries or cultures; instead, their meanings are found to be subject to perceptions and changes, and the teachers’ professional identities are negotiated in these processes. In the next section, in which I focus on the studies on Chinese immigrant teachers, the same negotiation of culture, ethnicity and pedagogical storylines are present, although in more cultural

specific ways and more closely tied to the topic of the present study.

### **Professional Identity of Chinese Immigrant Teachers**

**The Chinese culture of teaching.** With respect to instruction, clearly there exist distinct ethnic-specific cultural preferences for learning that teachers bring to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Lipka, 1991). In the case of Chinese immigrant teachers, the Chinese culture of teaching has generated much research because of the assumed distinct instruction patterns and teachers' roles in the Chinese context. A great number of studies have focused on various aspects of the Chinese conceptions of teaching practices, most with a comparative stance with Western practices (Chalker & Haynes, 1994; Chan, 2003; Dahlin, Watkins & Ekholm, 2001; Ho, 2004; Ho & Hau, 2004; Jane, 2001; Lingbiao & Watkins, 2001; Liu & Barnhart, 1999; McAdams, 1993; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Zhang, 2004). It is often believed that the Chinese culture of instruction strongly emphasizes passive intake and rote memorization rather than interactive or creative types of classroom behavior. Regarding the professional identity of Chinese teachers, it is generally assumed that they are more authoritarian and teacher-centered than their western counterpart (Biggs, 1996; Ho, 2004), more "parent-like" (Ho & Hau, 2004), following a "virtuoso" model, where the teaching act may resemble an artistic performance; however, teaching and learning does not go beyond "transmitting knowledge" (Mok et al., 2001).

Comparative studies, however, tend to focus on individual teachers whereas the larger school, social and cultural contexts might be the more crucial factors in the culture of teaching or teacher identity. Pratt et al. (1999), for example, studied Chinese and expatriate Western teachers' professional identities in the higher education sector in Hong

Kong. The Hong Kong teachers characterized effective teachers as having a close, protective relationship with students, while the Western expatriate teachers framed the relationship in terms of institutional roles and responsibilities. For the Chinese teachers the primary responsibility was to take students systematically through a clear set of tasks, high in structure and directed toward examination. Western teachers by contrast perceived teachers as “facilitators” of student learning and emphasized classroom activity. We might wonder, however, how much of the conceptions were shaped by the different ethnic and residential status and assigned tasks and roles of the teachers, rather than by the teachers’ inherent beliefs. A “close, protective” relationship (p. 248), for example, might not be the frame of identity at all if the same Hong Kong teacher becomes an expatriate teacher in a British school.

As in the case of studies on immigrant teachers, comparative studies on teachers often attribute teaching practices to ethnicity and cultural values, rather than seeing them as contextual. Ho (2004), for example, argues that Australian teachers attribute students’ behavior problems to individual causes, such as effort and ability, which reflects individualistic values; while Chinese teachers place more emphasis on self-discipline and family factors which is characteristic of collectivistic societies. Min, Sellnow and Venette (2006) compared the compliance-gaining strategies used in Chinese classrooms to US classrooms and found American teachers tend to stress personal enjoyment to gain compliance while Chinese teachers tend to appeal to students in collective terms. We might question these attributions while acknowledging certain cultural differences. For example, why is effort necessarily individualistic while self-discipline collectivistic? What are the teachers’ underlying assumptions and is there possibility of

misinterpretation?

While the cultural narratives of teaching practices are widely found in the research literature, some researchers remind us of the historical nature of the teaching practices, which points to an additional contextual factor and further questions simple cultural attribution. The whole class teaching method and teacher talk prevalent in many East Asian countries, for example, was also largely characteristic of Western schools before the 1970's, which Hargreaves termed the pre-professional era (2000). At the same time, there are also possible differences in meanings and implementations in these practices. For example, certain whole-class methods in the East Asian context, such as “sticky probing” (questioning an individual's understanding at some length in front of the rest of the class), exhibit an effectiveness that was not generally associated with the whole class approach in the Western context (Hargreaves, 2000).

A further look into the teacher practices also reveals more complexity in the teaching practices and interpretation. Ho (2001) points out in a study that the meaning of teacher authority and punishment in the Confucian context may be different from the Western contexts, and teacher-student relationships, although relatively lacking interaction in the classroom, feature much teacher-student interaction outside the classroom with informal discussions and collective activities. In the mean time, authoritarian behavior and student-centered thinking are not necessarily incompatible. Similarly, some argue that the typical method of teaching in Chinese contexts is not simply transmission of superior knowledge but utilizes considerable interaction in a mutually accepting social context (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Pratt et al. (1999) also found in their study that conceptions of effective teaching in

higher education are likely to vary across cultures, as do conceptions of “self,” “learning,” and “teaching” in general. For example, teachers from Hong Kong and expatriate Western teachers have very different views on what is “foundational knowledge,” which points to the deep cultural, historical and philosophical roots of teaching and education. With the difference in the conception of “knowledge,” for example, a simple contrast of “transmitting knowledge” with “facilitating understanding,” might become problematic. These observations question the dichotomous cultural distinctions and attribution of meanings across contexts, which is helpful to research on the immigrant teachers.

**Chinese teachers in the Western context.** Some researchers believe that the paucity of research on Asian American teachers and Chinese American teachers is troubling (Sheets & Chew, 2002). Others have studied Asian American’s resistance to selecting teaching as a career, paradoxically out of deference toward teachers as moral guides and perfect role models that ordinary people cannot live up to (Gordon, 2000). Studies on Asian or Chinese immigrant teachers in the US are even more scant. Of the few studies conducted on Chinese immigrant teachers in the Western contexts, including Australia, Canada, the UK and US, the ethnicity discourse and pedagogical narratives of Chinese teaching do come up, although more in-depth observations from an emic perspective remain much needed.

***The alienation and racist discourse.*** Pailliotet (1997) conducted a case study of a Chinese heritage preservice teacher’s professional development. The study revealed that the teacher faced many difficulties in her education program and preservice teaching: conflicts among past and present experiences, language and communication problems,

home/school tensions, financial concerns, social isolation, and stereotyping and prejudice. She always sat quietly in class and had difficulties communicating with her professors. She failed her student teaching after an observation by her professor, even though she displayed deep content understandings and sophisticated teaching practices. While the young teacher's struggle seemed to come from a combination of immigrant status, financial status and personality, her distinct Chinese background culture and schooling played an important role in her experience. For example, "being quiet," which had a negative and decisive impact in her experience, seemed to be the stereotypical Chinese cultural trait, more or less implied in the study. In addition, the study showed complexities brought about by multiple factors in a Chinese immigrant teacher's experience and their possible contribution to her professional identity.

Santoro (1997) examined the experiences of two Chinese-born and educated postgraduate students on a three-week ESL practicum in separate Melbourne, Australia secondary schools. The study focuses on the student teachers' relationships with their supervising teachers, and compares the ways in which the student teachers are positioned and the identities constructed for them by their supervising teachers. For overseas-born-and-educated student teachers, the difficulties associated with making the transition from student teacher to teacher are compounded by unfamiliarity with the Australian education system. Conflicts between the student teachers and their supervising teachers were described, which featured what was categorized by the author as "racist discourse." One of the supervising teachers, for example, attributed less professional respect and status to the Chinese student teacher and to other overseas-born-and-educated teachers, especially non-Europeans. She believed "they've all got their own problems," ranging from class

management to lack of knowledge of subject content and Australian culture and lack of English. Chinese teachers were positioned as being inadequate and inferior: “In China they just stand up at the front and teach and you pick it up or you don’t, too bad... [Europeans]... would have some problems, but they’d be very different because the class dynamics would operate a lot different to your village school in Lebanon or Asia.” The study, however, only interviewed the supervising teachers, and what is termed by the researcher as “racist discourse” was not further examined through classroom observation or interviews of the student teachers. It is not clear whether the student teachers were indeed displaying inadequate and inferior performance because of their education and cultural background. How much truth about the Chinese teaching culture is there in the “racist” discourse? How were the class dynamics operating in the student teacher’s classes and what were their “problems”? How was the teachers’ identity being negotiated through learning? Presentation of the “racist discourse” alone doesn’t address the needed inquiry into the issue.

In the study by Sheets and Chew (2002) on Chinese American teachers, the teachers often sat silent in school meetings because they believed that nobody would listen to their voices and it was a form of resistance to remain silent to the ethno-centric remarks by the other teachers. If being “quiet” and “silent” was characterized both in this study and the Pailliotet study, in the Santoro study the Chinese teachers’ voices were not heard. What is in and behind the silence needs further research.

*The Chinese pedagogical storylines and scripts.* The Chinese pedagogical storylines are often present in the studies on Chinese immigrant teachers. Two studies made on Chinese teachers in Canada and Australia both discussed the use of the

traditional Chinese ways of teaching. Curdt-Christiansen (2006) studied a heritage Chinese program in Montreal and examined how the teacher-student communication mediated teaching, learning and heritage language acquisition. The classes were observed to be teacher-centered and controlled, maintained by a question-answer mode of interaction. From the author's observation, the Chinese heritage school was a model outside the larger context of mainstream Canadian schools, and the immigrant teachers' professional identity took on many of the traditional Chinese features of authority and transmitter of knowledge, which was not welcomed by the Canadian born heritage students. Chinese literacy practices were also observed in the language instruction. The teachers, for example, encouraged reciting of texts and their quoting in essay writing, which are traditional practices in Chinese literacy education. The "Chinese" pedagogical practices were defined by the author as teacher authority and a focus on knowledge transmission. As discussed in previous sections, in addition to questioning the definitions of teacher authority and knowledge transmission, we might look into the contextual factors in the teachers' pedagogical decisions in order to better understanding their practices. The teachers' perspectives were not included in the study, although one might infer that negotiation was on-going in the teachers' curricular and instruction choices in a school setting both outside the Chinese context and the mainstream Canadian model, probably supported and guided by parent and community decisions, with students who shared with the teachers the same heritage while at the same time grew up in a different mainstream culture. There seems to be more complexities in the teaching practices than a simple "traditional" narrative of Chinese pedagogy.

Another study (De Courcy, 1997) was done on a graduate level Chinese immersion program in Australia, in which the Chinese teachers were put into the classes with little experience with immersion teaching or Australian school contexts. Conflicts were observed at various levels of the class, from procedural routines to interpersonal communication. The teacher was also observed as employing whole class teacher talk and decontextualized focus on form and grammar, which were poorly received by the students. The Australian students interviewed pointed out that the teacher did not check whether the weaker students were understanding, or respond to signals of non-comprehension; they took an affront to students' questioning or expressions of needs, and failed to be positive, encouraging, and supportive. The researcher interpreted the conflicts as the results of students and teachers from different cultures working with different scripts. The teachers used what the author perceived as a traditional Chinese way of teaching, employing monotonous teacher talks, while the students attempting to learn in their traditional Western context, expecting more communication and dialogue.

While revealing the encounters and conflicts in the cross-cultural educational setting, the study didn't go beyond the "cultural shock" stage of the pedagogical encounters, leaving many questions to be asked. One might argue that the cause of the failure of the program, such as unclear expectations and inability to attend to students' needs, seemed more like language and culture barriers and incompetent teaching due to the absence of training, than a difference in teaching scripts. The real "scripts," in the mean time, call for more in-depth examinations. While the study did not formally interview the teachers, one participant teacher was quoted commenting on the changes of conceptions of teaching and learning while in the program. She expressed that she

discarded and modified some conceptions and acquired some new ones after some serious mental debate. One of the key concepts she learned was the student-centered approach. Obviously, the teacher's "mental debates," struggles and adaptations were a valuable experience and journey in her professional identity. What were the contents and processes of her mental debates, and the discarded and modified conceptions? What were the possible interpretations or misinterpretation of "student-centered approach" and other conceptions of teaching? Inquiry into these questions would give us deeper insights into the different "scripts," or pedagogical storylines.

*Negotiation of the context.* A few studies have looked into the process of negotiation in the new school contexts by the immigrant teachers. A study by Wu (2006) examined immigrant teachers in Chinese community schools in the UK, and found that the teachers' own experiences of being in the UK had deep influences on their perception of teaching and their relation to and expectation of the students. Two teachers who had been through a formal British schooling system, for example, expressed empathy toward their students and stated that getting the students motivated to learn the Chinese language was their goal, as contrasted to other teachers who wanted to teach "the language," "the four skills," and "communication." Because motivation and retention were not a concern in the Chinese school system, the author believed that experiences in the culture gave the teachers a better understanding of the students' needs and the teachers' roles in the new context.

A more in-depth study by Yang (2008) was made on the researcher's own experience of teaching Chinese as a foreign language at the college level in the US. The teacher/researcher had thought that he could teach the Chinese language and culture

because he knew his own culture well, but he experienced various problems and conflicts in the process of teaching. Some students were not satisfied that he was from Taiwan because they were more interested in the Beijing culture and accent. Trying to adjust his accent, he felt “weird” losing his own identity of being Taiwanese. Sometimes the students went into aggressive political arguments and as a teacher he had to work hard to maintain order and progress. There were also conflicts between the communicative model of teaching he learned in academic courses on language education and the actual drilling model of teaching carried out and required by the program. The author also found that the Asian students in his class were passive and inattentive, while the American students were “respectful,” “obedient,” and more hard-working, reversing his original assumptions. The study showed multiple discourses at work and the interplay between multiple identities in the teaching practices of an individual teacher. Assumptions were challenged and struggles and self-doubts were common in the process of identity construction.

### **Research Questions**

The depth of observation and analysis in existing studies on immigrant teachers or teacher identities in general has yet to be reached in studies on Chinese immigrant teachers. As illustrated in the previous section, important aspects of professional identity and its social and dynamic nature have been left unexplored in the research.

In addition to focusing on these unanswered questions, a theoretical conceptualization of social identity is also crucial for a deeper understanding of the teachers’ identity. While presenting the immigrant teachers’ experiences and practices, including their struggles and processes of adaptation in the school settings, most of the existing studies have not explored identity as multiple membership and situated

negotiation, and practices are often reduced to the “grand narratives.” In the research on immigrant teachers in various countries, for example, “Canadian way of teaching,” “Australian way of teaching,” and “Chinese way of teaching” repeatedly come up as a school discourse, either briefly defined or described in practices. No study, however, has addressed the nature or contested meanings of these storylines. Using the theory of figured worlds, we can argue that instead of being static and shared conceptions, these storylines and teacher identities within are open to interpretation and are invoked, animated, contested, and enacted in practice. By acknowledging individual as well as collective interpretation of the storylines in the figured world of school, we may gain a deeper understanding of these discourses and their place in teachers’ identity and practices.

The theory of figured worlds has a lot of potential for the study of immigrant language teachers. It helps us see the elusive conceptions of teaching as “figured” by the practicing teachers. The moment-to-moment negotiation, improvisation and orchestration of the teaching storylines are rich processes to investigate. The emphasis of the theory on culture and cultural construction is fitting for study of immigrant language teachers, whose professional lives closely involve two different cultures, possibly in conflict. Cultural artifacts is an especially rich concept to explore, since in the classroom of immigrant language teachers cultural artifacts abound in both the native and the target cultures, from various pedagogical tools to cultural objects and practices being introduced.

A study on Chinese immigrant teachers in the US foreign language classrooms can also fill a few other gaps existing in current research on immigrant teachers. Even though the identity of foreign language teachers has generated interesting research

(Armour, 2004; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Kumagai, 2007), there has been little research on immigrant foreign language teachers in the Western context. The additional involvement of immigrant language teachers with two cultures and the possible interplay between the immigrant status and that of the language teacher add to the dimension and complexity of their professional identity. In addition, very few studies have specifically explored Chinese teachers' identity in the public schools and in the US context. Most of the existing studies are conducted in other countries, especially Australia, Israel, and Canada (for example, Curdt-Christiansen, 2006; de Courcy, 1997; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). What happens in the US classrooms to an immigrant language teacher coming from the Chinese cultural and educational backgrounds? Studies are needed to fill in this gap and the present rise in Chinese language programs in the US gives us a precious opportunity for the research.

Given my research interest and the questions and gaps in existing research, my study will examine Chinese immigrant language teachers' professional identity in the US public schools through the theoretical framework of the figured worlds. My research questions include:

1. How do the Chinese immigrant teachers navigate the cultural and educational practices in the figured world of foreign language classes in the US public schools?
2. How is the professional identity of the teachers negotiated and agency achieved through use of cultural artifacts and improvisation in their classroom teaching?

3. How do the two competing storylines of “Chinese” and “American” teacher interplay in the Chinese immigrant teachers’ identity and how are they invoked and enacted in classroom practice?

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study. It begins with the research design and rationale of the study, including the definition, purpose and characteristics of qualitative case studies, and the participant selection. The methods of data collection, including participant observation, interviews, informal talks and document collection, will be discussed, followed by description of the data analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion on the rigor of the qualitative case study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

#### **Definition of Case Study**

The methodology used in this study is qualitative case study. Compared to many methodologies that have clear disciplinary lineage, theoretical orientation and systematic techniques, case study is vague in definition. As Merriam points out, “those with little or no preparation in qualitative research often designate the case study as a sort of catch-all category for research that is not a survey or an experiment and is not statistical in nature” (1998, p.18). While there is no uniform definition of case study, most definitions of case study stress the single, bounded and specific nature of the object of study. For example, one definition is as follows: “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Nisbet and Watt say that case studies include “a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle” (Nisbet & Watt, 1984, p. 72), and “the study of an instance in action” (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1980). They are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual,

program, event, group, intervention, or community or “a spatially delimited phenomenon observed at a single point in time or over some period of time” (Gerring, 2007, p. 19).

While many other methodologies are defined by their systematic techniques, case study is open to different methods. As Hitchcock and Hughes point out (1995, p. 316), “case studies are distinguished less by the methods that they employ than by the subjects/objects of their inquiry.” The “bounded unit” is the most important feature of case study. In my own study the “bounded unit” in each case is an individual—a single immigrant teacher, which is an intrinsically bounded, complex and functioning unit, and the study is a spatially delimited phenomenon (her own classroom) observed over some period of time (three months). My observation was conducted in the teachers’ classes and limited to what happened in the classrooms. In my interviews and informal talks with the teachers, incidences and experiences outside the classrooms sometimes were brought up, but they were not the focus of my study, even though they were equally important to the teachers’ professional identities as the classroom experiences. I aim at an intensive, holistic description of the bounded unit, which will be detailed in the sections to follow.

### **Purposes and Characteristics of Case Study**

Merriam (1998) summarizes the purpose of case study as follows: to describe and analyze a case in its complex and comprehensive ways, to reveal its characteristic properties, to achieve understanding of the social group, and to discover regularities in its structure and processes. Similarly, Sturman (1999) points out that case studies investigate the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance. It is the aim of case studies to understand, to identify critical elements, and to find plausible interpretations (Wolcott, 1994). All these characterizations

point to understanding of the bounded unit with complex dynamic and interactions. In my own research the purpose is to understand the professional identities of Chinese immigrant teachers with the complex dynamics and unfolding interactions of events and relationships in classroom settings, and to find plausible interpretations of the dynamics using the theoretical perspectives of the figured worlds.

Case studies have their own characteristics, which are featured in the present study. These characteristics include:

(1) They are richly descriptive. Case studies may give rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case and provide chronological narrative of events relevant to the case; focus on individual or group actors and seek to understand their perception; and highlight specific events that are relevant to the case (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). They serve to illustrate the complexities of a situation with information from a wide variety of sources (Merriam, 1998). The two single cases in the findings chapters in my study are richly descriptive with both general narratives and specific highlights over the observed period of time.

(2) They are highly contextual. Knowledge learned from case study is different from other research knowledge in that it is more concrete, more contextual, and more developed by reader interpretation (Stake, 1995), and they recognize the complexity and embeddedness of social truths (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). In my own findings, the descriptions and interpretations are highly concrete and contextual, and fully recognize the embeddedness of teacher identity.

(3) They are particularistic. The particularistic nature can suggest to the reader what to do or not to do in a similar situation. It can examine a specific instance but

illuminate a general problem (Merriam, 1998). It is important for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves, and the products of the studies may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent reinterpretation (Cohen et al., 2000). In my research findings, the rich description will help the reader gain a sense of the situation and provide room for subsequent reinterpretation.

Compared with quantitative studies, the advantage of a case study is that we gain "thick, critical descriptions" in specific contexts and with concrete details, in the hopes of making visible and meaningful the complexity of what is usually not seen (Erickson, 1986). This is another reason this methodology was chosen for the present study. In addition, the theoretical perspective of the study of figured world (Holland et al., 1998), as discussed in chapter two, determines that the study has a socio-cultural lens which sees identity as a contextual, cultural, and evolving phenomenon. The descriptions in the findings chapter are always made through this theoretical lens.

### **Participants**

The study has two participants, who were selected based on my research criteria and the principle of information rich cases in which we can "learn a great deal about matters of importance and therefore worthy of in-depth study" (Patton, 2002, p. 242). The two participant teachers, who I call Amy and Meiling, are both Chinese immigrant teachers of Chinese as a foreign language classes in the US public schools who have taught for less than two years. Both teachers responded readily to my recruitment letter and showed generous hospitality to the research. They welcome visitors to their classes and take pleasure in sharing their views and experiences in interviews and informal talks, which proved invaluablely helpful in the process of my data collection.

At the time of the data collection, the first participant teacher, Amy, was a first year teacher in a suburban high school who just completed her Chinese licensure program. She had lived in the US for fifteen years and has an American husband, which brought interesting influences to her perspectives and professional identity. The second participant, Meiling, was a younger teacher in her mid twenties who received a Master's degree in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) but ended up teaching Chinese in an urban middle school because of job availability. While Amy came to her job after years of planning, Meiling got her job quite by chance. Although both are from Taiwan, the two teachers form an interesting pair of participants for the two case studies. They had great differences in age, immigrant background, licensure status, and professional experiences and training. The research findings in the later chapter show that they form a very interesting contrast in various ways and the two cases complement each other in bringing insight into the professional identities of Chinese immigrant teachers. Each teacher is represented as a case and their similarities and differences are further highlighted in the cross case discussion.

In terms of my relationship as researcher to the participants, there was also some difference in the two teachers. Amy had been an acquaintance of mine for two years, since we took a class together in the language education program. I was familiar with some of her personal experiences before the study. She was also a participant in an interview study I conducted on immigrant teachers' professional identity prior to the present research. Meiling was a total stranger before she responded to the recruitment letter. The different degree of familiarity with each teacher may have influenced my understanding and interpretations of my observation. In my data analysis and presentation,

however, I tried to let the concrete descriptions and examples speak for the cases, rather than forming any conclusions ungrounded in the data.

### **Research Sites**

The Chinese programs in both schools were opened in the surge of new Chinese programs in the large Midwestern city where the participants worked. Amy's school is a suburban school with predominantly white students, although the Chinese classes have a high percentage of students of color. The front page of the school website says that the school is named by Newsweek magazine as one of the top public high schools in the country, and boasts a Curriculum that features college credit offered under a Post-secondary Enrollment Options program, as well as through the College in the Schools and Advanced Placement courses. Amy is the first teacher in the program, which started that year, and is responsible for the curriculum development in the program. The class I observed was a level I Chinese class with 27 students, who came from different grade levels between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The class met five days a week, from Monday to Friday between 11:00 am to 12:00 pm.

Meiling's school is an urban Middle school with a high percentage of students of color, although reversely, her class had quite a few white students. The front page of the school website highlighted that the school is proud to be an IB (International Baccalaureate) school: "As an IB school, our teachers and students focus on what it means to be a community of learners. Through the IB Learner Profile, our students and staff use a common language to describe and identify behaviors of successful learners, and we strive to be Inquirers, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Communicators, Principled, Open-Minded, Caring, Risk-Takers, Balanced, and Reflective." Meiling is in the second

year of her teaching career here. She had a predecessor in the program although like Amy she is also responsible for the course design for both the level I and level II Chinese she is teaching. The class I observed was a level II Chinese class with 15 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. The class met five days a week from 3:15 pm to 4:00 pm.

My own role in both classrooms was one of participant researcher. In Amy's classes, I sat at a table at the front corner of the classroom to observe and take notes, wearing the school volunteer pass. Amy introduced me as a Mandarin speaking volunteer and a researcher in the class to the students. Occasionally she asked me to lead the class in pronunciation reading, or to take a student out for makeup quiz when she was busy. Once in a while a studious student would come to me for a quick question about their work. In Meiling's class, which had a horseshoe seating, I sat at one side of the room with the students, therefore more invisible. When the class did projects, I would walk around and look at their work. The students never asked me questions, although they would answer when I asked them questions. A couple of times Meiling posed questions to me, "our guest," about my home city Beijing or mainland China. As time went on both classes became used to my presence and I began to feel like a member of the classes who learned more and more about each student, even though they were not my research and observation focus.

### **Data Collection**

Among the strategies in case study, one of the most commonly used is triangulation, which is "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 112). Data collection for my study was triangulated and included classroom observations, interviews, informal talks

and collection of related documents which spanned a period of about three months. The first interview with Amy took place in a previous study early 2009, and the participant observation started in late October, 2009 and lasted until mid February, 2010, with a short Christmas break in December. The interviews and participant observation with Meiling was started in mid November, 2009 and lasted until the end of February, 2010, with the Christmas break in December. The observations for each case covered part of two semesters, which had the advantage of including the observations on final projects, the Chinese Spring festival, and certain changes in teaching practices across semesters, as will be shown in Chapter 4.

### **Participant Observation**

I conducted participant observation in both classrooms twice a week over a period of about three months. The observations were audio recorded, and I also took detailed field notes for each observation. I always tried to add immediate notes after class and listen to the audio tape, took additional notes, and transcribed parts of the recordings. The classroom observations provided data on the teachers' classroom practices. The audio recording of classes served to aid my memory as I often noticed some aspects of the activities and interactions that I did not realize on the spot, or even caught remarks that I was not paying attention to in the class. The recording and transcripts also enabled me to give in-depth analysis at a more micro level. During the process, focused observation was the most important aspect of this method of data collection.

Participant observation is less structured and more complex than researcher framed interviews, therefore requiring more skill in focusing in order to acquire useful data. Wolcott thus describes participant observation in qualitative studies: "Qualitative

researchers, like others whose roles demand selective attentiveness, pay special attention to a few things to which others ordinarily give only passing attention” (1992, p. 22-23). During participant observation, “The data that begin to emerge as the participant observer interacts in the daily flow of events and activities, and the intuitive reactions and hunches that participant observers experience as all these factors come together” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 200). Selectivity is very important in the observation; otherwise the researcher will be overwhelmed by the amount of visual and audio information available on an observation site. This was especially true for my observation in the classrooms, which was filled each moment with activities and interactions. All of the activities and interactions were rich in meaning, although I needed to be highly selective in the observation, focusing only on events that were relevant to the immigrant teacher’s identity. For example, while a teacher’s lesson plans and teaching style are most salient and important in the classroom, they are only relevant for my observation when they bear on her membership in the different educational cultures.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest developing codes on a range of phenomena—acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships, and setting, which helped me gain a more comprehensive view of the participant sites. They believe the application of qualitative methods to the study of education organizes codes along the following specific lines: (1) setting/context: general information on surroundings that allows you to put the study in a larger context. (2) definition of the situation: how people understand, define, or perceive the setting or the topics on which the study bears. (3) perspectives: ways of thinking about their setting shared by informants. (4) ways of thinking about people and objects: understandings of each other, of outsiders, of objects

in their world. (5) process: sequence of events, flow, transitions, and turning points, changes over time. (6) activities: regularly occurring kinds of behavior. (7) events: specific activities, especially ones occurring infrequently. (8) strategies: ways of accomplishing things; people's tactics, method, techniques for meeting their needs. (9) relationship and social structure: unofficially defined patterns.

In my own observation I paid attention to all these aspects. I recorded the contexts of the classes and the physical settings across the semesters. Activities, processes, and events were carefully observed and perspectives and strategies were noticed and often further inquired upon in interviews and talks. I paid special attention to rapport and interaction between the teacher and the students. At the same time I always remembered that the most important thing is to identify what must be observed in order to shed light on possible answers to the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). I made observations in relation to my research questions on the teacher's identity and their negotiation of the school context. In the classroom setting, for example, I paid attention to the decoration and spatial arrangement of the rooms as related to how the teacher used them as cultural artifacts or chose to conform to or alter the shared practices in the school community. Similarly, instructional activities are also observed regarding what choices were being made and how they possibly related to the teacher's membership resources, and how they changed through time as evidence of navigation and negotiation of the unfamiliar educational practices.

Corresponding to observation focus, the content of my field notes included space, actors, activities, objects, acts, events, time, goals, and feelings (Cohen et al. 2000). The notes for each class consisted of a chronology of class activities, including brief

description, quotation or paraphrase of remarks. It also included commentary on my feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, and working hypotheses, which were an important part of the data collection and initial analysis (Merriam, 1998). I also included a lot of reflection on the descriptions and analyses that have been done, comparison with previous observations, points of clarification, and possible lines of further inquiry in subsequent observations and interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The field notes have proved crucial in my data collection and initial analysis.

### **Interviews**

The interview is a major source of data collection in case study. In my study, three interviews were conducted during the data collection period for each participant teacher, each lasting between forty-five minutes to one and a half hours. The first interview was done at the beginning of the study, focusing on the teachers' experiences in the Chinese language classrooms, their insights into teachers' identity, and possible interpretations or misinterpretation of "American way" and other conceptions of teaching (Appendix). The second interview was done in the middle of the participant observation period, based on the classroom observations and ongoing data analysis, including rationale for the observed classroom practices and decisions. The third interview served as a wrap up, with additional questions regarding practices as well as further clarification of some important questions.

Except for the first interview with Amy, which was done in English for a previous interview study on the same topic, all the other interviews were done in Chinese, which had the advantage of more ease of speaking and richness in expression on the part of the participants, although both teachers tended to switch to English with the key concepts and

common practices in the American schools, when the Chinese language lacks a commonly used equivalent, such as “project,” “presentation,” or “behavior room.” Amy, for example, would use the English words “timing,” “dominate,” “individualist,” in her Chinese sentences, or sometimes completely switch to English. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. The transcription was mostly done in English. However, some phrases and sentences, when they seemed more meaning and culture laden, were marked with the Chinese expressions, such as Meiling’s evaluative terms discussed in the findings chapter. This method was reflected in the interview data quoted in the findings.

In conducting the interviews I tried to follow the approach of responsive interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), in which the interviewer and interviewee, both as human beings, form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer. The goal of the research is to generate depth of understanding rather than breadth; and the design of the research remains flexible throughout the project. Researchers not only need to continually examine their own understandings and reactions, but also to create new questions for each interviewee because they need to tap the distinctive knowledge of each interviewee. The researcher shows empathy and caring interest in the content of what the interviewee is saying and the emotion expressed. Interviews should aim at thoroughness, depth, detail, and nuance (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Because of my genuine interest in my research topic and congenial relations with each teacher, I was able to maintain a responsive approach in the interviews with the teachers. Except for the initial interview, the interview questions were based on my observations and interactions with each teacher instead of being predetermined, and I was able to

inquire into nuances rather than more generic stories. Meiling's stories of her relation and interactions with the students, for example, were rich in details, and a simple story of banning chewing gum in her class involved different perceptions of certain acts and the role of teachers, students and even parents, and I believe my own fascination with the stories contributed to the teachers' willingness to share them in the interviews.

I used semi structured interviews in my study, which are particularly well-suited for case study research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In these interviews, in addition to posing predetermined questions, researchers ask follow-up questions and probes to gain deeper insights into issues of interest. In each interview I conducted, I prepared about six main questions that I believed to be most important for my research topic. For example, I asked each teacher about her conceptions of the "American way of teaching" and discussed with them the meanings of authority and respect, as these were central and important for my research question. In designing the questions, I also anticipated the subsequent analysis and thought about what information would be needed in the analysis, and designed the questions to ask for relevant information and detailed examples.

The follow-up questions were developed during the interviews asking for explanation of themes, concepts, or events that the interviewee had introduced. They were matters that seemed most important to the interviewee and that spoke to the research question. When I hear oversimplifications, new ideas, relevant stories, or missing information, I asked follow-up questions. This required me to be very clear about my research question and focus and recognize important information when it came up in the interviews. Probes serve to keep the interview on topic, signaling the desired level of depth, and asking for examples or clarification (Ruben & Rubin, 2005). In my own

interviews the follow-up questions had proved most helpful in data collection and findings. For example, in the interviews with Amy, the concept of equality and independence often came up, while in the interviews with Meiling, the narrative of being a moral teacher was repeatedly brought up. These conceptions were participant initiated and important in each teacher's professional identity, therefore closely followed up in the interviews and eventually contributed to the themes in the research finding.

### **Informal Talks**

Informal talks with the teachers were another important source of data collection in the study. As with the participant observations, I kept notes of these talks and added my own comments and interpretations. Because I often arrived early and stayed a little while after the classes, I had the opportunity to talk with the teachers before and after the classes. I often asked casual questions about planning or activities for the day, which would be too fragmented or maybe trivial to bring up in the formal interviews while nevertheless contributed to my understanding of the context and practices. Sometimes the teachers would initiate certain reflections or comments on their own classes. Even though not planned or recorded, I followed the same responsive approach in these talks, which often reflected the teachers' perceptions and insights in spontaneous ways, and sometimes also helped me identify topics or questions to bring up in the formal interviews. Amy's concern about students' assignments, for example, was constantly shown in the after class comments she made to me, which contributed to one of the themes in her case.

### **Related Documents**

During the period of participant observation, I collected handouts and assignment sheets used in both classes as well as some additional documents when available, such as Amy's classroom policy that she wrote and posted on the front board and her parent invitation letter for the Chinese New Year party. These documents provided additional information on the teaching practices I observed, allowed me to examine them in detail, and sometimes also informed observation focus and interview questions. The handouts and documents were also recorded in the notes for further analysis.

The triangulated methods of classroom observations, interviews, informal talks and collection of related documents spanning a period of three months complemented and enhanced each other in the data collection process and proved a good combination to help me tackle my research questions. The interviews and talks gained focus and depth because of the observations, while the observations gained deeper understanding because of the comments and interpretations supplied in the interviews and talks.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a process of sense making and discovery. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) term the discovering ability as "theoretical sensitivity": the ability to recognize what is important in data and to give it meaning. It comes from two sources: first, from being well-grounded in the technical literature as well as from professional and personal experience. Second, it is also acquired during the research process through continual interactions with the data. "The root sources of all significant theorizing is the sensitive insights of the observer himself" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 140) and "conveying an understanding of the case is the paramount consideration in analyzing the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 193). In my own process of data analysis I tried to gain this theoretical

sensitivity through continual interactions with the data. This process began with the first day of data collection and continued on an on-going basis until the completion of the research.

### **Ongoing Analysis**

Researchers agree on the importance of ongoing data analysis while conducting data collection. Data collection and analysis in qualitative case studies are simultaneous activities. There is no particular moment when data analysis begins; analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations (Stake, 1995). In addition, data collection should be planned according to findings in previous observations. The final product of the research is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the volume of material that needs to be processed; data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating (Merriam, 1998). In my own research I followed and greatly benefitted from this method of on-going analysis and progressive focus, which helped me make more in-depth and specific observations as time went on.

For me data analysis actually began as early as the very moments of site observation and the interviews, as the focus of my attention and the follow-up questions that directed the interviews were already based on real time analysis of what was observed and heard in the class and the interviews. The next step was doing preliminary analysis in the field notes, which included initial impressions, reactions and interpretations of the data, questions I had about the data, comparison with previous data, questions for future observations and interviews, comparison between two cases, and

preliminary coding. The analysis sometimes resulted in paragraphs of writing that were very helpful in clarifying my thoughts and interpretations.

For example, in an early classroom observation (October 21, 2009) with Amy, after recording how she was teaching pinyin (phonetics for the script used in mainland China) and traditional Chinese characters (used in Taiwan) in class, I wrote: “Is using/teaching pinyin related to her professional identity? What about traditional characters? What are the considerations behind both choices? Practical? Other considerations? How does she emotionally relate and react to both choices?” In subsequent observations and interviews I paid attention to her remarks and reactions to teaching pinyin and gained the observation that she did not actually attach much importance or emotion to its selection over the Taiwanese phonetic method, therefore the choice did not make an important piece of data in the final categories and themes. As the volume of data grew I employed more and more constant comparison in the analysis, both with previous data and across the cases, as different practices between the two teachers often raised my awareness of their choices and perceptions.

### **Analysis of the Interviews**

Unlike the observations, the interviews were more concentrated data and I conducted more focused analysis and coding after each interview, trying to develop preliminary categories and themes for each interview before more data collection and the final intensive stage of data analysis. I usually took down my first impressions after the interviews, which consisted of the highlights and most impressive parts of the interviews and my own initial reactions. I added additional impressions and comments into the notes while doing the transcription, as the close recording of the words often brought more

reactions and new thoughts. After the transcription, I did the coding of the transcript in Word documents, using color coding to mark the transcript, such as “Taiwan practices,” “characteristics of the students,” “Different practices,” “learning,” “cultural artifacts,” “educational beliefs,” “membership,” “interaction with students,” “parents,” etc. Often a comment or a section of the interview received multiple codes because they simultaneously reflected different aspects, and sometimes I also had difficulty deciding the codes or which a more important aspect was. After repeating the reading process a few times, I gained a sense of some preliminary themes arising from the interview, which were examined and later combined with other interviews and data sources.

### **The Intensive Stage of Analysis**

This process of on-going data analysis and progressive focus continued throughout the data collection period. In the more intensive stage of data analysis when data collection was completed, I followed the three steps of data analysis:

First, I brought together data from various sources in the case. In most case studies, because of the multiple sources, the data might present disparate, incompatible or contradictory information. In the process of data analysis all the information about the case should be brought together—interview notes and transcripts, field notes, preliminary data analysis, and other documents: all the major information that will be used in doing the case analysis (Merriam, 1998). In my data analysis process the data from different sources did appear disparate at times. For example, although Meiling talked in the interviews in length about the shock and tension she experienced regarding classroom discipline, I did not observe such incidences in my classroom observations, or any conflicts and confrontation between her and the students. However, the apparent

contradiction actually provided helpful insights into her professional identity, which could be interpreted as growth and improvement after the initial period of shock, although the experiences were quite indelible in her own memories. It also reflected a candidness in sharing her past experiences, even though they were not pleasant ones, in addition to the fact that her own perception (for example, what is a “wild” student) might be different from that of the researcher or other people. Evidences of other contradictions in different data sources or in different pieces of data exist, as will be shown in the findings chapter. Instead of seeing them as inconsistencies to be resolved, I believe they served to enrich the findings as a normal state in the process of figuring the cultural world, in which acts and practices are pushed by multiple discourses and subject to situated meanings.

Second, repeatedly reading the data. The researcher should read through all the field notes, transcripts, documents, and other materials carefully and repeatedly. In the process researchers should keep track of hunches, interpretations and ideas, record any important idea that arises (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). For me this was similar to the on-going data analysis, except it was more intensive and comprehensive, and involved more comparisons among the data sources.

Third, I looked for emerging concepts, categories and themes. This central part of data analysis is a sensitizing process that brings out phenomena that are not readily apparent (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In the process, it is possible to look for both preexisting categories and additional emerging categories, and find instances of concepts and themes that participants did not present in a single word or when we have to infer the concepts or themes from a broader statement (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). There are many

places in the data where the researcher can look for concepts and themes: Those that participants frequently mention; those emerging from comparing interviews and incidents; concepts and themes already identified may suggest new ones—related themes or what the existing themes collectively imply, missing ideas, or parallelism in ideas; figures of speech, slogans and symbols, and stories (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

In my own data analysis, I looked for concepts and themes from all the available data and sources, and established categories and themes for the two participant teachers as two single cases. For each case, based on the ongoing data analysis of the observations, talks and documents and the initial analysis of the interviews, I already had preliminary concepts and categories formed for the case. For example, the concepts of classroom discipline were salient in both cases, and doing assignments was an important theme for Amy while membership in the American culture was important to Meiling.

Categories are most commonly constructed through the constant comparative methods (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Units of data are grouped together and the researcher looks for recurring regularities and organizing them into categories. The categories should reflect the purpose of the research; be exhaustive, mutually exclusive and sensitizing; they should also be conceptually congruent. The categories were then grouped into major themes that outline the finding in each single case. In my own study the grouping of categories was one of the most challenging stages of data analysis. As the classroom incidences and the narratives in the interviews often bore multiple coding in data analysis and belong to more than one category, breaking them up into finer pieces of data or piecing them together under one theme involved constantly judging whether and how the text provides an instance of the theme for which we are looking (Rubin & Rubin,

2005). I needed to go back and forth between the data and the emerging themes and frequently move pieces of data around, as well as adding and deleting the pieces when the emerging themes changed in the process of analysis. Many classroom incidences and narratives, for example, would fit both the classroom discipline theme and the student teacher relation theme, while at the same time they were always a reflection of the teacher's membership in the school culture. The teacher's role of pushing students to work, as another example, is hard to separate from her authority and students' respect. These eventually involved making the judgment and decision on how to break up the data and which aspect of the incidence was the most important. Grouping the categories into themes was also complicated because of the interrelation between the categories and the decision involved in what themes are more important and answer the research question. For example, characterization of the "American" students was an important category in the finding for both teachers, although it became an important element in several themes rather than forming a theme in itself in the single cases.

In the end I established five themes for each single case, and each case was a holistic, intensive and thick description of the case that explored the teachers' professional identity and emphasized both recurring practices and critical incidences during the data collection period.

### **Cross-case Analysis**

In a multiple case study, there is an additional stage of analysis to the within-case analysis: the cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). A multi-case study seeks to build abstractions across cases, and the researcher attempts to see processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and

thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After the case analysis for each participant teacher, I conducted a cross-case analysis, and the categories and patterns of finding in each case were compared and contrasted. While the data were mainly analyzed thematically in single case, it was re-read through the theoretical concepts of figured worlds in the cross case analysis, which was organized around four themes based on the framework of figured worlds: Figuring the American school; positioning: Who is the Chinese teacher; orchestration of discourses; and the making of the a Chinese language class. The analysis served to deepen the understanding of both single cases and provide more powerful explanations to the teachers' professional identity. For example, the different choices by the teachers were compared and interpreted as different ways of improvisation in the enactment of identity.

In discussing qualitative research, Wolcott (1994) lists a number of different ways to approach data analysis, including: (1) Highlight the findings: highlighting certain information presented or using the sharper focus to present new material or a finer level of detail. (2) Display the findings: using graphic presentation. (3) Flesh out the analytical framework that guided the data collection. (4) Identify patterned regularities in the data. (5) Compare with another case. (6) Evaluate; Compare with a standard. (7) Contextualize in a broader analytical framework. (8) Critique the research process. My single case analysis identified patterned regularities and highlighted the findings, while the cross case analysis attempted to complement the single case analysis through fleshing out the analytical framework and comparing across the cases. The result was a deeper understanding of the teachers' professional identity, especially given the interesting

contrast between the two single cases.

### **Theoretical Framework and Data Analysis**

The theoretical framework of figured worlds played an important part in my data collection and analysis. My research questions were framed in terms of navigating the figured world of the US public schools. As discussed in earlier sections, the participant observations were made in relation to my research questions. For example, instructional activities were always observed regarding what choices were being made and how they possibly related to the teacher's membership resources, and how they changed through time as evidence of navigation and negotiation of the unfamiliar educational practices.

In the process of data analysis, important concepts in the framework often became tools of coding and categorization, such as the concepts of "cultural artifacts" and "inscribed acts" of cultural worlds. The concept of the school as a cultural world with both figured and positional aspects of identity framed my discussion in both the single case and cross case analysis. Certain cultural artifacts used in the classrooms became good examples of the figured nature of the school as a cultural world, and the theoretical perspective both lent deeper insight into the story and was fleshed out in the analysis. The theory also provided direct framework in the cross case analysis, in which the four themes lent stronger insights into the school world and the teachers' identities. The theoretical framework has proved most helpful in my study.

### **Rigor**

Rigor in the framework of traditional positivistic research is reflected in internal validity (how research findings match reality), external validity (the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations, similar to generalizability) and

reliability (the extent to which research findings can be replicated), although these concepts may have limited applicability to case study and qualitative research in general (Merriam, 1998). Reliability, for example, in the traditional sense is hard to achieve because qualitative research does not assume that there is a single, static reality that can be accessed repeatedly by different researchers. Because such reliability is not possible in qualitative case studies, the issue of “subjectivity” and “bias” are often discussed as factors affecting the rigor of case studies.

Qualitative researchers try to define “subjectivity” and “objectivity” in qualitative terms. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that “subjective” refers to what concerns or occurs to the individual subject and his experiences, qualities, and dispositions, while “objective” refers to what a number of subjects or judges experience. In this sense, the usual criterion for objectivity is in fact intersubjective agreement. Being objective means collective judgment on a phenomenon can be agreed upon by multiple observers, rather than an individual observer being without bias.

Many qualitative researchers point out that the traditional notion of bias and value free observation is in fact not possible (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Wolcott, 1994). Researchers cannot really conduct studies with no values, commitments, theoretical perspectives, or world views. There is no possibility of “pure” description; the researcher might try to avoid intentional bias, yet all descriptive accounts of data are filtered through perceptions and the researcher’s selective lens. However, within the researcher’s theoretical perspective, stock of cultural knowledge, and particular vantage point, findings can more or less accurately reflect the nature of the world. Rather than to act as though you have no point of view, it is better to own up to your perspective and examine

your findings in this light (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

With this new understanding of subjectivity and researcher's place, many qualitative researchers raise completely different criteria regarding the rigor and quality of case studies and qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose dependability and transferability. Rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense—whether the results are consistent with the data. To achieve transferability, the researcher provides the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility.

These arguments provide helpful guidance to my qualitative case study on immigrant teachers' professional identity. I tried to avoid intentional bias, while at the same time my observations and interpretations were subject to my own cultural knowledge and perspectives, which is explained in the section "the researcher's role" and admitted in the whole process of the research. For example, the fact that I share similar cultural and educational background with the immigrant teachers may affect my observation and interpretation. I might understand their membership in the Chinese culture much better than in the US school settings. I may tend to observe some practices while ignore some others because of my own knowledge or lack of knowledge of the US schools. By specifying and acknowledging my own perspectives and researcher's role, I can help the reader better access my observation and analysis.

At the same time, I strived at dependability and transferability in my study. The methodology chapter helps the reader see the process by which my data were collected in

participant observations and interviews, and the process of data analysis. I provided thick descriptions that could help the reader judge whether the interpretations and results make sense. At many points I provided adequate raw data prior to interpretation so that the readers can consider their own alternative interpretations (Stake, 1995). I did not aim at an “objective” description and analysis in the positivistic sense. Rather, the aim is to help the reader understand the participant teachers in their school settings through my description and analysis and allow the reader to judge to what extent the case is comparable to other situations. I wish readers would concur that the results are consistent with the data, and they could reach a conclusion about whether transfer to the cases of other immigrant teachers is a possibility.

### **Researcher’s Role**

I have explained my relation with the two participant teachers and my role as a researcher/volunteer in the classrooms in the participant and research site sections. In this section I will further explain my own background and perspectives to help the readers access my observation and analysis.

As the researcher I am Chinese by ethnicity coming from the Chinese mainland educational system and had taught English as a foreign language, therefore I am familiar with the teaching beliefs and practices in the system. I am also familiar with the general Confucian culture in China and Southeast Asia that emphasizes literacy and hierarchical respect for elders and teachers. For the US public school system, because of previous research and teacher supervision work I have visited a good number of language classrooms of immigrant teachers, therefore I have some degree of familiarity with their professional experiences and development, although my perception of the US school

culture has more limitations.

The common ethnicity and membership in the Chinese culture between me and the two teachers facilitated my understanding of the practices and professional identities of the teachers. For example, I deeply related to Meiling when she discussed the Confucian values rooted in her childhood memories, such as respect to the elders, or to Amy when she talked about the school culture in Taiwan, which shared a lot in common with the culture in mainland China. At the same time, I kept realizing certain differences and fresh perspectives in the Taiwan culture compared with that of Chinese mainland, which reminded me of our differences in the sub-cultures and memberships and has been a process of learning for me.

However, the fact that I share similar cultural and educational background with the immigrant teachers may affect my observation and interpretation. I might understand their membership in the Chinese culture much better than in the US school settings. I may tend to observe some practices while ignore some others because of my own knowledge or lack of knowledge of the US schools. For example, when Meiling talked about some students touching her hair or requesting a hug, like Meiling herself, I was not sure to what extent the acts were personal or cultural in the US context. In the findings section I made this clear and admitted my own uncertainty when necessary, which helps the reader access my analysis. Because my research aims at dependability and transferability rather than “objective” truths, this approach has served my purpose and helped in the degree of dependability.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

Findings in both case studies are centered around the concept of “identity in practice,” that is, how people use objectifications of social identities, such as images, narratives, labels, or memories of past events, to manage their own feelings, thoughts, behavior and actions on a broad scale (Holland et al., 1998). In the figured worlds, the identity as practiced is “a process of personal formation that occurs via cultural resources enacted in a social context” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 282). One learns the identity of inscribed acts—the markers of culturally constructed identity, such as the display of particular skills and the use of certain expressions. They are parts of a behavioral routine and a means to affect others and to evoke one’s own sense of identity, thereby organizing one’s behavior. The ability to sense the figured world becomes embodied over time, through continual participation.

For both Amy and Meiling, the single case study will focus on their professional “identity in practice,” in which inscribed acts, in this case storylines of teaching in the school place, were negotiated and improvised through continual participation. On-going construction of the teacher identity and agency were shown throughout the process, in which multiple memberships in the Chinese and American cultures were negotiated.

#### **Amy**

##### **The class: A Profile**

Amy’s Chinese classroom was a spacious basement room with narrow windows and a lot of wall space. The room was shared with the Spanish classes, so Chinese and Spanish decorations, signs, and assignment displays mixed with each other and both

stood out when one walked into the room. The Chinese cultural artifacts included lanterns, paper dragons, a scroll painting, a red fish knot, and signs in ink calligraphy saying “Zhongwen (Chinese)” on the door and “Zaijian (Goodbye)” on the wall. There were also small posters of traditional Chinese arts. On the side wall there was a space for displaying students’ project assignments, which were changed several times over the three months. For quite a long time one of the posters said “Ci/Feizhou,” which was a wrong translation of “China/Africa,” but Amy told me it was Ok for the students to make mistakes. Around the time of the Chinese New Year in the spring semester more decorations were put up: the red “Fu (happiness)” characters with firecrackers hangings, and paper cut figures and Duilian (red couplets) on the classroom door, which brought some more festive look to the room.

The spatial layout of the classroom was part of the expressions of identity and relations in the classroom. The student desks in the room were divided by a “street” through the middle of the room, with three rows on each side facing each other. Amy said this way of seating with a walkway in the middle was convenient for her to move back and forth between the front and the back of the room. In one of the front corners there was a cabinet and a big desk with two chairs, which I sat at during observation. On the front wall and the white board, among the Chinese phonetic chart, an article “Why learn Chinese” and daily agenda, there was a document entitled “Classroom policy,” drafted by Amy herself for the Chinese class:

My job is: To share my love and knowledge of the Chinese language; to facilitate learning, give direction, and help set the class tone; to provide you with necessary guidance and feedback; to encourage and support your efforts and learning success; and to monitor, assess, evaluate and guide your performance. I’m here for you, so please ask if you need me to help in any way!  
In the classes the long-legged high school students sat at their desks most of the

times, while Amy herself frequently moved around the room, often busy giving stamps for answers and homework. She occasionally sat at the desk lamp projector and once also sat on a desk to read a little story book. Most often she walked back and forth along the figured “bridge” or “street” in the middle of the room. “We don’t talk across the bridge.” She often reminded the students, or “Don’t throw across the street.” The students on the two sides, though facing each other by seats, did pay good attention to Amy most of the time.

The materials used in the class were cultural resources to be enacted in the figured world of language learning. Amy used a textbook named Chinese Link published in Taiwan, which taught traditional characters used in Taiwan but also the Romanized pinyin script used in Chinese mainland. In addition to the book, she was adopting a mixture of materials: poems, songs, Taiwan children’s rhymes, even a poem written by an experienced Chinese teacher. Many of the materials were appropriated from her mentor teacher in practicum. She also purchased CDs, videos, and story books, which quickly used up her limited purchase grant. Once she showed the class a video recording of herself giving instructions on how to use chopsticks, because she couldn’t find good videos for beginners. “They should be exposed to different things,” She said of her learners.

Amy’s classroom had her own behavioral routines. The class began every day with Work Of the Day on the front screen, such as underlining tone marks, or translation of a couple of sentences, which Amy believed gave the students “a sense of stability when they come in.” When the work was done the class would do the traditional greeting ritual in Chinese classes, which was another important cultural artifact: The students

stood up to greet the teacher in choir: “Laoshi hao (Good morning teacher)” before sitting down and beginning the lesson. The class usually proceeded with some time on housekeeping, followed by exercises and activities listed in the agenda on the front board. Amy tried to use as much target language as possible in her class. She gave ample praises to the students for their answers and work done, and kept saying “Hen hao (Very good)” “Hen bang (Excellent)” in each lesson. Each day usually ended with students copying two Chinese characters on a character grid at the end of the class.

Assignments and grades were important inscribed acts in Amy’s class. The students had a calendar and a folder each month for assignments. Amy made meticulous assignment sheets with rubrics and kept detailed assessment records. She called it “home study” and spent a lot of time encouraging the students to do the work. “That’s your job everyday, you do that at home, that’s called home work, not class work, ok?” One day’s assignments due would look like: “lesson #3, 15-18; W. O. D., 11/15-11/20 + 11/30; (Assignment) Calendar,” which consisted of three small separate pieces of work to turn in. One morning even Amy herself was confused about which work to hand in that day. “We have too many assignments.” She said, and a few students responded “Dui (Yes).” Quizzes were given during and at the end of the semesters, as well as tests required by the school.

“This class is motivated.” She often said, comparing the students with a class in another school she taught, even though she was teaching exactly the same content. Amy usually stayed after school every day for office hours, when the students could come in for questions and make up tests. She also collected resources and worked on grants and scholarships for the students. As a first year teacher responsible for the curriculum of a

new Chinese program she was very busy and said she had too much to learn. She got up at 5:30 am every morning and worked on lesson plans nights and weekends too. “My husband asked me whether he could see me this weekend,” she once joked.

As a cultural event and resource, at the beginning of the spring semester Amy worked on a Chinese New Year party, in which she asked parents to join their son or daughter in the celebration. In the invitation letter, Amy asked whether the parents could provide some New Year holiday treats or any treats. “You and your son/daughter may be interested in visiting a local Chinese grocery store to experience this special festivity through grocery shopping.” She went on to give a list of local Asian grocery stores. The party did have New Year treats that some parents bought and Amy’s family sent from Taiwan, including Chinese melon seeds, and Amy said it was successful.

### **Activities and Drills: Instruction**

#### **Activities, the American Way**

The language class in the school world had its full range of inscribed acts in terms of instruction, to be navigated and negotiated by the teachers. For Amy, an immigrant teacher, the acts were often figured against the familiar Chinese school world. After starting teaching for one month, Amy adjusted some of her methods based on responses from a student survey. She found out, “In China it’s like you listen and take notes at school, and go home and write and practice, but here it’s the other way around (fan guolai)... They practice in class, and go home and review.” So Amy changed her strategy: “For things they can read and understand they’ll do it at home, they write the assignment. But reading, like pinyin, we’ll do it at school, writing characters, making sentence, etc... I feel it makes sense.” Amy’s characterization of “the other way around” seemed to be

referring to the fact that in China the teacher talks and students listen, while in the US the classes are more practice focused. The characterization showed her process of figuring the school world, which resulted in change of the practices, even though the practices might not be exactly “the other way around” and were subject to her own interpretations.

Amy was aware of the legitimacy of the different teaching storylines. “We have to be aware of who our students are. If you say because I’m Chinese, I’m teaching Chinese, therefore, here is how we do things, regardless of what, then I think we’d have a lot of work to do.” When asked about the American way of teaching, she explained, “Americans, they emphasize interactive practices, or a variety of practices. They emphasize not doing one activity for too long, to divide up the time, and you focus on one at a time.” In addition, in American classes, she said “It is student-centered. This is their culture—students learn with each other.”

Amy made attempts to enact the storyline of interactive activities in her class. She used interactive activities for classroom instruction, including pair work of interviewing, singing, chopstick battles, and some TPRS (Total Physical Response Story-telling) games. She used familiar tunes with Chinese lyrics for singing, such as the Chinese versions of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. One of the successful activities she used was pinyin or word writing activities on small writing boards. She purchased a big box of these writing boards for \$ 1 a piece and they lasted a couple of months. Sometimes she asked everybody to raise the boards when they finished writing a character and the eagerly raised white boards turned the dictation into a game. Amy also liked to give project assignments, including posters and booklets. She told the students that this was a good way to earn more credits. Appropriating some of the tasks from her former mentor

teacher, she was aware that doing projects was an “American” way of teaching not commonly used in Taiwan.

The storylines, however, did not necessarily become the “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin, 1981) that was the actor’s own voice. Once in the fall semester, Amy’s mentor teacher at the school suggested that she try using more practice and competitive games. Following the advice, Amy added a fly swatter game for new words the next day, which worked well with eager participation from the students. When I commented after class that the students enjoyed the game, Amy smiled and said: “They like competitive games...American kids are like this—I don’t know why (Meiguo haizi jiushi zheyang—bu zhidao zenme huishi).” Amy’s comments showed that she considered herself culturally informed, by knowing the “American kids,” while at the same time still saw herself an outsider who did not fully understand the culture, and probably the full impetus behind the use of the games and activities. The pair of red and orange fly swatters, which Amy bought with her own money, sat on the corner table most of the time during the two semesters and Amy once admitted she forgot to use them after some time, being too preoccupied with curriculum coverage and students’ assignments. She mentioned in the middle of the second semester that she still needed to learn to use more interactive activities.

### **The Mixed Storylines**

While Amy “didn’t know why” the students liked competitive games, she did not seem to wonder about the use of reciting and drilling, an important storyline in language and literacy learning in the Chinese context, which she systematically used in her class. The focus of schools in China is on developing literacy by memorizing thousands of

characters (Miller, 2001). In Amy's classes I did observe some seemingly Chinese literacy practices, such as chorus reading and copying the characters. Throughout the first semester Amy spent a lot of time on drilling tones, which she learned was "very important" from an experienced head teacher. The whole class often read tones and words in chorus, and sang the pinyin alphabetical song together. They reviewed numbers by reciting "Yi er san si, er er san si, san er san si (One two three four, two two three four, three two three four)..." whole class, which was in fact the lyrics for the collective morning exercise song in Chinese schools. Sometimes the class collectively recited a poem, typical of traditional Chinese literacy practice which often uses classical poems as primer. Amy also emphasized reciting and memorizing in her language tasks. Around the Chinese New Year when the students were learning the New Year Congratulations song, Amy gave credit to students who sang or read it out loud in class, and extra points for those who could memorize the lyrics. When once the class was doing a group speaking presentation, one line in the task requirement said: "Everything **MUST** be memorized." Amy's purpose was not to let the students read out of a script, although the capitalized "must" also showed the emphasis placed on memorization.

When we discussed the nature of these methods in an interview, Amy said "copying and reciting are the right method because you always need repetition to learn." She believed reciting the rhymes provided a context for the words and was also a good pronunciation practice, which did not clash with activities, depending on how you put the activities into the classes. Amy probably meant she could use both methods. Once I observed her calling on two students to compete who could recite some alphabetical rhyme faster, both timed by a stopwatch. I wondered whether it could be seen as Amy's

improvisation—a combination of the Chinese storyline of reciting rhymes and the American storyline of competitive games.

Amy herself, however, had her own interpretation of the storylines and acts in their relation to the cultural world. For her, the use of the chorus reading and drilling practices was mostly appropriated from practices of other teachers she observed, especially a few experienced Chinese teachers who she was modeling from. She did not seem to think of it as the “Chinese” method in the Taiwan schools she was familiar with. These experienced Chinese teachers, according to Amy, let their students memorize a lot of rhymes and tongue twisters and put emphasis on drilling. Her former mentor teacher, for example, would begin every day with a chorus reciting of poems or rhymes. Amy was aware that “American” teachers use recitation too: “With Spanish, maybe they don’t have the same rhymes, but they also sing songs and memorize the lyrics.” In addition, Amy believed that the method was well accepted by the students, who enjoyed getting credit for reciting.

### **Uncertainty and Dilemmas**

“Experienced Chinese teachers” formed an authoritative discourse in Amy’s teaching practices. She maintained a mentorship relation with her former mentor teacher in practicum and often consulted her on various teaching practices. She once half joked about wanting to go to another experienced head teacher to “baishi,” which is a Chinese narrative of apprenticeship under a master. The term itself is a storyline deeply rooted in the Confucian cultural world of teaching and evokes humble respect on the part of the pupil, who would need to go through solemn rituals to be accepted by the master and then receive the teaching of doctrines and knowledge. She seemed to believe that these

experienced teachers had taught in the US context for many years and their methods had gained legitimacy and authority in the new cultural world. If they were using the chorus recitation method, it was less a “Chinese” discourse than discourses that were time tested and legitimate in the American school context.

Amy had her uncertainty and dilemmas in the process of negotiating the teaching storylines. She repeatedly mentioned that the school district standards and tests, set up mostly for alphabetical languages, did not fit the grammatical system of Chinese. She was especially uncertain about teaching the characters, which is very time-consuming with slow rewards. While avoiding the Chinese discourse of heavy copying, even though it has proved an effective method for the language with deep orthography in the Chinese context, she tried to get the students to learn more characters by requiring a certain percentage of characters in written assignments and giving extra points for more characters. She tried to promote the right stroke order in writing, which is strictly required in the Chinese context, while worrying that it would overburden the students and contradict the inscribed act of activity-based learning.

On a larger scale of the inscribed acts, Amy was also not sure about how to measure progress across language programs and schools, and what the short term and long term focus should be, because “Chinese is much harder than other languages.” A couple months through the second semester she even speculated that the goal of the program might become culture first and language proficiency second: “The students love the culture, that’s enough.” The Chinese programs could use culture to “attract the students” and lower the proficiency requirement. While centralized tests rule in the Chinese contexts, for Amy an overarching purpose was not clear in the figured world of

Chinese language teaching in US schools, even less clear was specific instructional methods serving the purpose. Would the special features of the Chinese language legitimize instructional acts used in its native context, such as heavy copying in character grids? What made chorus recitation of classical poems more legitimate than character copying, which are both common literacy learning practices in the Chinese context? Amy needed to negotiate her way through these different teaching storylines and make her own interpretations and choices.

### **“Carrying the Chinese Culture”**

Amy stated in the classroom policy posted on the front board that one of her jobs was to “share my love and knowledge of the Chinese language.” When asked what being a Chinese teacher meant to her, Amy said it was important that “the teacher carries the Chinese culture...the students can feel the culture from you, they can model from you... they can understand and see there are differences, and they can live in their own culture and learn another culture.” Her teaching practices indeed helped the students see the cultural differences, although “carrying the Chinese culture” could be contextual and elusive in meaning, as shown in the following discussion.

### **Chinese Culture in Artifacts: Meanings They Carry**

For Amy, one of the ways to “carry the culture” seemed to be the use of Chinese cultural artifacts in the classroom, which always carry collective cultural meanings (Holland et al., 1998). In addition to the classroom decorations, she used various other artifacts, such as a red moon cake box made in Taiwan for holding socks used as whiteboard erasers, and stamps saying “(shangke renzhen (Concentrate))” and “Shangke zhuanxin (Paying attention)” that had both the traditional characters and the English

words on them. She translated the name of the high school into a poetic Chinese name and tried to make the students remember it. Another cultural artifact was the bowing ritual at the beginning of the class, which was a distinctive Chinese inscribed act in traditional schools. "I should let them learn some culture... in the class this is who we are." These artifacts indeed seemed to evoke the cultural world that they represented, although one could question the meanings they carry in the new context and the claim on an associated identity. The bowing ritual, for example, seemed a cultural practice without its underlying conceptions of hierarchical respect to teachers. "This is who we are," which assumed some kind of cultural membership and identity for the Chinese class, became uncertain in meaning. This uncertainty of meaning will be further discussed in Meiling's case, who had her process of negotiation for the same ritual.

The cultural artifacts are always open to new and improvised meanings in different contexts (Holland et al., 1998). One day it was a girl's birthday and the class sang the happy birthday song in Chinese. Amy took out a jar of fortune cookies from the corner cabinet and presented her a cookie. Another girl said she did not have one for her birthday and she got one too. A boy started murmuring he did not get any for HIS birthday either but checked himself because Amy already put back the jar and moved on. Nobody asked or explained why fortune cookies were given for birthdays in the Chinese class, even though they are certainly not used for birthday in the Chinese culture. In fact, they do not even exist in Taiwan or China. They are "Chinese" in the American conception accepted by both the Chinese teacher and the American students. The birthday was an occasion of improvisation for Amy who appropriated the cookies and gave them yet a new meaning.

Another important Chinese cultural artifact Amy used in class was the students' Chinese names. This practice was directly copied from her former mentor teacher, who used students' Chinese names all the time. Before the start of the fall semester, Amy spent a whole week looking through *Baijiaxing*, a traditional Chinese book for family names, and making "authentic" Chinese names for the students. The names all followed the Chinese name traditions, such as characters for beauty, nature and virtue for girls (Shumei, Jiaqi), and strength and power for boys (Tiegang). For a pair of twins in the class, their names had the same middle character as with Chinese names for siblings. However, the meanings of the names, together with the traditional values they carried, seemed to have escaped the students. Amy did not explain the meanings of the names to the students for lack of time in class. She only told them they all had authentic Chinese names and they could ask her individually if they wanted to know the meanings, and only a couple of students actually asked. Once again the artifact seemed to evoke the cultural world that they represented while carrying altered meanings.

Through a couple of months in the fall semester the Chinese names tags were hung on one of the walls. The students were encouraged to remember their own names, and got an extra point if they used their Chinese names in their assignments and quizzes. The names, however, seemed to have had difficulty merging with the named ones. During the two semesters Amy used both students' English and Chinese names, and both teacher and students confused names sometimes. Most often she used English names for the Caucasian students and Chinese for Asian kids, although she used the Chinese names too when aided by the name sticks and the roster. Amy admitted that Chinese names were harder for her to remember. However, there were several Chinese and Asian heritage kids,

“I don’t know why, but it was easy to remember their Chinese names.” It seemed the names were connected to culture and ethnicity in her consciousness. Perhaps an Asian face had more of a right to a Chinese name even though the student was American born, while a Caucasian one had a harder time being identified with it.

As a participant observer I became so used to an Asian student’s Chinese name that I wondered about the meaning of the names when hearing his English name for the first time after months. The names to some extent rendered the students characters in a figured world. Since ways of addressing is a discursive practice that constantly reconstitutes social relationship, “affording of a position” to other people (Holland et al., 1998, p. 134), the use of the students’ Chinese names in Amy’s class afforded the students a position in the figured world of language learning as well as a degree of ethnic identity. It was an artifact that helped the students enter the world of the Chinese class and take on a somewhat different identity, although one might argue that the entrance was only partially achieved. Like with some of the other cultural artifacts in the class, both the meanings of the traditional names and the identities associated with them were elusive or undisclosed to the students.

### **The Story of Nian**

The collective figuring of cultural meanings and its association with identity were most evidenced in a discussion around the Chinese New Year in the spring semester when Amy made plans to do a Spring Festival unit. One day she was telling a folk story about the New Year, a story of a Year monster named Nian. Amy tried to tell the story all in Chinese by walking around the class and acting some of the words, including “Nian (monster)” and “pa (afraid).” She also put in practices of words and sentence patterns in

the middle of telling the story, such as “Ni pa bu pa... (Are you afraid of ...)?” The students’ attention, however, was directed at the pictures on the PowerPoint screen and the story, which they found intriguing. “It looks like bacteria.” Some students commented on the picture of Nian on the screen, which did look like the bacteria in a hygiene poster. “So the Nian changed into a beggar person at night like Shrek?” One student misunderstood. “No...you have to listen to the story.” Amy answered. “Where did it come from? Where did it grow up?” A boy persisted about the origin of the Nian and some students laughed. “This is just a legend, don’t think too much, Zhijie.” Amy said in the noise and moved on with the story. Still Zhijie murmured one more question: “Where were his parents from?” For Zhijie, who Amy later told me was an American born Chinese student, the question of origin and root seemed important. Yet Amy did not have an answer, possibly because in the Chinese culture with a long pantheist tradition, plants and objects often come to life in folk stories, and the birth origin of a monster is not of importance. Zhijie’s question about origin might also have been related to Amy’s use of the word “legend,” which made it a historical story rather than a folk tale. In this case, language related misunderstanding added to the possible cultural misreading.

Amy was asked other questions that probably would not be asked in a Chinese context, such as “Is it connected to the fact that roof tops in China are curved?” “Why is it in the water?” “Is it afraid of the red color, or the characters on the paper?” “Why do you put characters on the paper?” When Tim asked, “Does the monster symbolize the Devil?” Amy could only tell him, “Nian is an evil animal.” This seemed another question outside the Chinese cultural framework, where there is not a Devil figure. It was also possible that Amy and the students were having different references regarding what Devil

meant, and what was evil. Besieged by questions Amy had to admit to the class, “I don’t know, the legend didn’t tell me if Nian could read, it didn’t tell me where the Nian came from, the legend didn’t tell me where Nian went to after he saw the banner...”

“Imagination!” A girl said. A few said “yeah!” Amy summarized with “Hao, hen hao (Very good)” and the class finally went on with practices of sentence patterns.

The story of Nian was one of the relatively few occasions observed when the class had an extended discussion on a story and culture. Amy was expected to know the answers to all questions about the story because she was from the culture, although she did not and frankly admitted it. In the mean time, she was challenged to new understanding and unexpected interpretations of her own culture when presenting what she had thought was a simple and taken-for-granted folk story. A gap of perspectives and understanding appeared in the class discussion, when Amy and the students both started from their own cultural frameworks and sometimes talked across each other. Given the absence of answers, a student proposed the solution of “imagination,” although in her hurry with the lesson Amy did not respond to the comment, leaving yet another gap in the joint effort of understanding. Confusion and unsatisfied curiosity remained around the Chinese folk tale, but the questions and answers might have left both teacher and students thinking about folk story characters, origin, and cultural practices and meanings. The experience with the folk tale supported Kramersch’s belief on the possibilities of cross-cultural understanding, even though the understanding might be imperfect and temporary in nature (Kramersch, 1993). The world of the Chinese culture was collectively figured in the process.

### **Being Chinese vs. Being American**

As part of her positional identity Amy sometimes claimed membership and authority in the Chinese language and culture as a native speaker. She gave occasional comments like “To sound like a native speaker you...” “The beauty of Chinese character is in proportion and balance,” or “This is the most proper way [of writing].” At the same time, however, she did not often lecture on Chinese practices or values. On the contrary, she sometimes showed a measure of distancing from her native culture. The process of positioning was clearly shown in a talk she gave on the schedules of the Taiwan students once when the class was learning days of the week. The PowerPoint she used, entitled “Taiwan gaozhongsheng de yitian (One day of a Taiwan high school student),” was made by a visiting Taiwanese student in her class at another school under her instruction. In her PowerPoint presentation, Amy started from the breakfast shops in Taiwan, and went through the daily schedules, lunches and dinners at school, and the flag raising ceremony and exercises. She talked about students taking a mid day nap at their seats, working till 9 or 10 o’clock at night, and about the *jiaoguan*, the military personnel in each school who was “like the dean here” and inspected things like hair style and “dating.”

Amy’s talk showed identities are constructed through differences (Hall, 1996). The practices in Taiwan schools that Amy discussed in the PowerPoint presentation were typically practices as compared to the American schools: The study hours are long as compared with the American students, “The hallway is narrow” as compared with hallways in American schools, and “there is no prom” as is done in American schools, and so on. The identities of both the teacher and the students took on new meaning by being seen through another figured world of school, as some students whistled about the length of a school day or shrugged about the *jiaoguan*. At the same time, Amy did not

seem to claim much cultural membership and authority in her talk. She distanced herself a little bit from the culture by saying “Now it’s time for you to throw out questions... hopefully I can answer some of your questions,” or “I don’t know now, but when I was in high school many years ago...” in which she sounded like a partial outsider to Taiwanese culture. In addition to the pronoun of “we,” she used a lot of “you” and “they,” as in “You don’t choose your classes,” “They study more than US students,” and a lot of “She said,” quoting her Taiwanese TA. The shift from “we” to the indefinite pronoun “you” and the pronoun “they” showed a degree of uncertainty and detachment, and reflected her distancing from the practices and the culture, which was an act of discursive building of significance and relation (Gee, 1999). These choices of stances positioned herself as somehow an objective presenter of facts, rather than an intimate member of the culture, and identity was constructed in the process.

Amy often displayed her membership in the American mainstream culture, such as using orange paper for the Thanksgiving assignment. She did not seem to think it important to emphasize a focus on a “pure” Chinese culture or perspective, and her language class as a cultural world incorporated other cultural discourses. When the students did the project on Chinese New year celebration, for example, she asked them to choose localized Chinese communities in different countries and regions to do the research, rather than limiting it to Taiwan or China. The cities picked by the students ranged from Paris, Tokyo, Thailand, the Philippines, to New York. In the sample Chinese New Year booklet Amy made herself, she did not emphasize Taiwan or even China. One of the pictures she put in was an American bread roll her family had for New Year in Iowa. When she was asking the students to bring treats to the Chinese New Year party,

she said in class, “Of course it doesn’t have to be Chinese food...If you just want to bring brownies, it’s up to you. It doesn’t matter.” The Chinese cultural practices were not presented as a doctrine for herself either. When introducing the twelve zodiac animals and the zodiac traits, she said, “That’s how the Chinese do it, you know, the culture...I don’t believe in that, but I do look.” She gave the example of once checking her own and her husband’s zodiac match when they first met. Amy was positioning herself an insider of the culture, possessing the knowledge and partially practicing it. At the same time she was again somewhat distanced from the culture, when she referred to the people as “the Chinese” and said she did not really believe in the zodiac traits.

In addition to the discursive positioning, the positional identity is also constructed through access to membership resources. Among other discourses, Amy’s intercultural background, especially the long time intercultural marriage, provided her with additional access to the mainstream culture, which was sometimes shown in her talk. When she handed out the New Year party parent invitation letter to the class, she smiled and said, “I think my grammar is all correct. I had my husband proofread.” She added, “I’m always learning. With language you never stop learning.” She was admitting her own insecurity in the English language, although the insecurity was ameliorated by the claim on learning, at the same time claiming membership and more legitimacy by referring to the support from her native speaking husband. Another time she talked about the graduation camping trip in Taiwan in which students learn how to live in the woods and cook without gas, “My husband was laughing at this. He said it seemed such a big deal.” Again she claimed more of a cultural insider perspective and more membership because of her husband’s insight. This access and membership became a feature of her positional identity.

There was a seeming contradiction in the ways Amy took pains to bring various cultural artifacts into the class on the one hand, while deemphasizing the focus on Chinese practices and perspectives on the other, hence the positional identity. If the cultural artifacts, including the students' Chinese names and the bowing ritual, served to evoke the Chinese cultural world, the partial self distancing from the culture might have helped her identify with the mainstream cultural world. The discourse of Chinese class is sometimes merged into the larger discourse of being American, and Amy's positioning was pushed by the different discourses of teaching authentic Chinese culture and conforming to mainstream culture. In addition to these discourses, numerous other discourses might have come into play in her decisions. The use of Chinese names, for example, came from established acts by other teachers. The research on localized Chinese communities and belief on zodiac traits might have come from personal interests and experiences. There could be practical considerations, as with the case of bringing Chinese treats. Interplay among these discourses resulted in many improvised decisions that sometimes could seem contradictory. "Carrying the Chinese culture" by the teacher, as she expressed in the interview, became uncertain in meaning, subject to moment to moment interpretations and decisions.

### **Negotiating Discipline**

Even though Amy described her students as motivated learners, discipline and management was still an important part of her classroom discourses, and involved major storylines in the world of both the US schools and Chinese schools. In the first interview, Amy said what she'd value most in the education system in Taiwan was "discipline," by which she meant the students unquestioningly follow what they are told to do by the

teachers. She considered it a positive factor that contributed to learning, although most of the disciplining practices were not applicable or legitimate in the US context: “In China, you do something wrong or you don’t behave you get a good spanking (aida), here if you spank the kids you’ll be sued. You can’t do it.” Negotiating the storylines and seeking the legitimate and effective practices became a long time effort for Amy.

### **The Rules –“Bu Shuohua (No Talking)”**

The inscribed acts of discipline were an important discourse in Amy’s class. She believed it was necessary to reiterate the discipline rules to the students, which from the perspective of the figured world was an activity of positioning and identity construction, much as scolding served to identify and entitle in the Hindu community (Holland et al., 1998). In the fall semester she sometimes reminded the students of the school rules on cell phones and headphones, and her own rules of no sunglasses and no gum. Talking was a big discipline concern in Amy’s opinion. She believed she had quite a few talkative kids, although the class was generally attentive and the talking was mostly learning related. She sometimes gave mild cautions like “Jianqiang, shuohua tai duo le (That was too much talking),” or “Katie if you talk more you need to move here.” Her coaxing tone made the cautions casual reminders, and when she said them the students usually stopped. Amy liked to say “No talking across the street,” and she explained to me in an interview, “They are looking into each other’s faces so they might talk. So I told them not to talk across the street. I just made that up on the spot.” The figured “street” in the middle of the classroom became an artifact that played into the discipline story.

The disciplining sometimes involved contradictory discourses that required situated positioning. Amy said a lot of “Bu shuohua (No talking)” in the classes. Zhishan,

one of the talkative students himself, even developed a habit of saying it for her when his classmates became noisy: “Bu shuohua!” One day in the fall semester Amy introduced a new discipline system: a month calendar on the front board. Amy told the class they’d get a new “super” stamp on the calendar if she said “bu shuohua” less than three times in one day, and they’d get special award when they got ten stamps. When the students started arguing whether it should be ten days in a row or any ten days, or five days, Amy said, “Ok, we’re civilized so I’m willing to negotiate. You can have five in a row, and you can have the award, hao buhao (all right)?” For Amy, room for negotiation indicated being “civilized.” It seemed that a teacher dictatorship would then be uncivilized. While she valued discipline in the Taiwan education system and believed that unconditional student obedience contributed to learning, she also held the belief in negotiation and democracy. Measured in two different cultural worlds, what was valuable in one could become uncivilized in another. Amy was contextually positioning herself in the contradictory discourses in her teaching practices and her beliefs.

Amy’s negotiation and positioning was further shown in her comments on the role of the teacher in disciplining in an interview. She pointed out that in the US schools, the teacher could do timeout or send the students to the principal’s office, rather than sending notes to parents or calling parents as commonly done in Taiwan.

The teacher doesn’t directly confront you, it’s left to the principal, it’s like one sings the white face and the other the black face (yige zuo bailian, yige zuo heilian). Because the principal has more authority than the teacher, it’s like using a bigger cap to cover you (yong da maozi lai ya ni), this is the American way.

Amy used a dramatic characterization in her talk: the teacher and the principal were compared to the characters in the Peking opera, where colors on the face indicate roles and personal traits. The school was figured as a stage with different characters, in

which the teacher and the principal played different roles in relation to the students. The principal became a more authoritative figure with a black face and a “bigger cap,” while the teacher was the nicer character who did not confront the students. During my observation across the two semesters Amy never sent any student to the principal’s office, or really had the need to confront the students. Nevertheless, the “inscribed acts” of disciplining remained an important discourse in her figuring of the world of the American schools.

### **Green Chair and Dunce’s Cap**

Two instances of cultural artifacts for classroom discipline came up in my classroom observations which seemed to exemplify the regulating function of cultural artifacts (Holland et al., 1998) and the figured nature of their meanings. One day in October, Amy put a chair at the back of the classroom and declared a discipline rule: Students would be invited to the green chair for a few minutes if they had behavior issues. When I asked later how she came to the new rule, Amy said she learned it at a teacher’s conference. “I felt I must get them under control, otherwise I’d lose them. The timing is very important; otherwise they’d ‘get an inch and want a foot.’ American kids could act like that (Fouze de hua tamen hui de cun jin chi, meiguo haizi hen hui zheyangzi de).”

When I asked what the students would react to being sent to the chair, Amy said,

Actually they know, they’re big kids, they know when they move to a chair and everybody is looking it’s not a honorable thing (guangrong de shi), for kids their age it’s not, and they know, so if you tell them to stop talking and they keep doing it, they know what the consequences are. ...It is like this in America, it’s different from the Chinese way.

The behavior regulating function of the chair was made very clear in Amy’s comments. Rules and consequences were reified in the artifact which would give the students pressure to behave. By characterizing “American kids” and the rule that was

different from the “Chinese way,” Amy was ascribing the practice to cultural differences, although her implication that Chinese students wouldn’t “get an inch and want a foot,” or they were not subject to awareness of consequences, could be questioned. The chair had a certain degree of figured meaning which carried Amy’s individual interpretations.

While the chair was conspicuously placed at the center the first time Amy set the rule, later it became a regular chair behind the front desk. I saw it used only once across the two semesters, and again, the coaxing manner in which it was used made it a rather casual seat change than a punishment or shame, and the student just shrugged and went on with the lesson in the new chair. It wasn’t obvious to me that the students really attached dishonor to the chair, as Amy explicated, which further showed the meaning of the artifact as individually interpreted and contextually constructed. However, the empty chair at the front corner remained a discipline artifact in the classroom and in Amy’s interpretation of the American school.

Another day in the fall semester I went in the classroom and saw a dunce’s cap on the front desk, made of paper and marked tonto/tonta, which was used by the Spanish teacher sharing the classroom. Amy told me the Spanish teacher asked her to write “dunce” in Chinese on the cap and suggested that she use it for the Chinese class. Amy said no because, she told me, it reminded her of the Cultural Revolution in China. In the subsequent interview we had some interesting talk concerning her understanding, when I asked again why she refused to use it.

Amy: Right it looks like the caps people wore in Cultural Revolution for parade, it’s not good.

Y: But is the cap a tradition in the school, as it is used in the Spanish class?

Amy: Actually it’s like to make the kids look bad, a big cap, etc., and it’s right, that’s the purpose, wearing a big cap to make you look bad (chu chou). And the other day I happened to have watched the film...Farewell to My Concubine

(Bawang bieji). It's about the Cultural Revolution and the Peking opera actors...and I thought no, it reminds me of Cultural Revolution, and they'd say we wear that cap in Chinese class, it's not right. This is a cultural thing...

Y: So was it an invention in the Chinese mainland?

Amy: No... in Germany they made the Israelis wear a pin, which said I'm a Jew, the purpose is to identify you and isolate you, that everybody sees you're a culprit. The big cap too, to parade the street and let everybody see that you're a culprit, to put shame on you.

Y: So is this used in other classes?

Amy: It seems to be used with little kids, in America maybe little kids use it, but usually it's a good thing, especially in elementary schools, they have the king and the queen, like wearing a crown, if it's your birthday you wear one. ...So if you want to make him look bad you write "dunce (sha gua)," because the [Spanish] teacher asked me to write "sha gua" on the cap, in Chinese, and I thought, this is not right, this is humiliation (xiu ru). So I thought you shouldn't do this, humiliation in public. You've already asked him to move seat, he already knows he is wrong, you shouldn't make him wear the cap. They are big kids. Their parents might even come in to sue you.

There was a lot of sense making and uncertainty of meanings in Amy's

interpretation of the cultural artifact. A relative lack of membership in the American schools was shown in her confusion as to the origin of the cap and its meaning. While an American teacher growing up in the education system might be better informed, Amy had no idea whether it was an acceptable practice, a near obsolete tradition, something related to the Spanish speaking culture, or a prop just invented by the individual teacher. However, a decision needed to be made regardless of her membership in the education system. She resorted to her own cultural background and experiences, including her cultural and political knowledge and a recently watched Chinese movie, in addition to what she did know about practices in American schools. The Jewish pin, birthday crowns and the Cultural Revolution cap were connected in figuring the meaning of the cap. She compared the cap to the birthday crown, which seemed a completely different artifact, although she was right that they both had the marking function. In fact, one could argue that their meanings were both inscribed through social history while the connection

between the meanings and the particular shapes could have an accidental nature, which is exactly the “figured” part of the cultural worlds. In any case, Amy placed the artifact in her own cultural framework and arrived at her own interpretation of its meanings.

Based on this interpretation, Amy made the choice to not follow the Spanish teacher’s suggestion for the practice. For her, the legitimacy of the artifact was questioned, even though it was used by the fellow teacher. In addition to being a humiliation, especially for the “big kids,” the image of the Chinese class would be connected with the practice. Amy had the awareness that if she used the cap, people would associate it with the Chinese culture, while the Spanish teacher, who was American, probably wouldn’t receive the same kind of judgment. The status of an ethnic minority and immigrant teacher came into play in her decision. Furthermore, the consequence of parents suing was also in her consciousness, as part the institutional discourses in the schools. Amy displayed her relatively full or partial memberships in both Chinese and American cultures in her negotiation of the layers of meanings of the artifact and the act, which in turn informed her own practices in the school.

### **Pulling the Nose: Schooling and Doing the Work**

#### **The Assignments and Choice**

If a figured world characterizes inscribed acts with certain goals, the teacher’s efforts to make the students do the school work were important inscribed acts in Amy’s class. Amy felt it was most important for the teacher to encourage students to learn. Doing school work and assignments was a big theme in her class, shown in her meticulous daily assignments, frequent quizzes, assessment records, and constant talks to students in and out of class on their work. Amy was aware of the different practice as

compared with Chinese schools. “The teacher gives a big pile of assignments, and the kids are tired,” she said, “That’s the Chinese way, I tell you one two three four five, you go home and practice, I give you a hundred exercises and you practice on your own, like that.” In the Chinese school world, the consequence of not doing the school work is also simple and straightforward, “If you don’t do it there’s immediately a note sent home and you get spanked.” Teachers, students and parents alike are subject to the pressure of high stakes tests and competition, and the inscribed act of heavy assignments is taken for granted rather than questioned. In the context of the American schools, however, assignments have different meanings, as Amy was taking time to figure out. “Chinese kids always finish whatever assignments you give them. American kids might tell you they couldn’t finish,” she discovered.

Amy certainly did not give “a hundred exercises”; however, she firmly believed that it was her duty to make the students do the work, which was “caring” on the part of the teacher, “It’s like, they know I care whether or not they do well.” A conversation that happened to fall on the recorder when Amy was talking to a student at the front desk was one of her many talks to the students on assignments. The boy was not catching up with the lessons and admitted he was not doing the exercises at home, and Amy persisted in seeing him spending more time on the work after class:

The pronunciation is really hard, but that’s ok, if you practice one month and that’s not enough, you practice ten months, ok, because right now I don’t hear you say it, ...I don’t pick up the cue, I can’t help you...you said you can’t come to the office hour because you have a class, so when is a good time you can come, you need to decide... if I can see you, we can go through things, and I can help you with the pronunciation, but when is that time? You have to tell me.

They settled on the boy coming to office hour the next day for a makeup test and additional help. In the talk Amy exerted pressure as a teacher but also emphasized her

role as a sympathetic listener and helper, just as she had stated in the “classroom policy.” The teacher was always ready to help, but the students needed to choose to come for the help. The conversation was a discursive positioning that served to identify roles and entitlement of both the teacher and the student in the school world.

“Choice” was a concept that repeatedly came up in Amy’s classroom talks and in the interviews. “I give you two choices,” Amy would tell a student when talking about how to better do his work: One was to come to her for help at a certain hour, another was pairing up with an advanced student, and “you can tell me which way you prefer.” She would also give “choices” to students on making up assignments. One day in late October, about two months after Amy started teaching, she gave a little speech in class on doing the school work, which exhibited the same identification and entitlement in the world of schooling:

However I have people say that I really don’t like it [Chinese], because, my parents make me study this... That’s parents we do that. But you have to decide. Nobody can take you further after that. I have people ask me, please tell me when I need to study for quiz or homework, and I, you know, I can’t help you with that either, I cannot tell you when to study, you have to decide... so I have a challenge for you tonight, when you go home, ask yourself, do I need to be forced to study, or do I study because I want to learn something. ... I’m here to help. Extra time, more worksheets, I can do that, I’m changing, I’m learning too. But I will not be the one to tell you you need to study so that you can learn the language. You have to make those decisions tonight. I’m here to help you to learn, I’m not here to pull your nose to make you do something.

In her talk Amy defined studying as a matter of choice, and students could choose active participation in learning, while the teacher had limited power and authority in making them do the work. She related to the students by identifying with their parents who wanted their kids to learn. She claimed to be “changing and learning,” which alleviated the authority as a teacher and further related herself to the students as learners. She also presented the request for making the decision for study as a “challenge,” which

pointed to the students' individual capability and resorted to the positive mainstream value placed on meeting challenges. By presenting herself as parent, helper, learner, and challenger, Amy avoided the authority stance as a teacher. However, the "choice" by the students seemed to boil down to choosing to be forced to work vs. choosing to be willing to work, and the right decision—to work—was already made for them.

In our interviews, Amy further explained the idea of choice and made a distinction between the "Chinese" and the "American" ways. "For Chinese, it's like I tell you to do one, you do one, I tell you not to move and you don't move," while "for Americans, it's like now I tell you you have two options (liangge xuanze), one is you choose to do it, the other is you choose not to do it. What you get depends on your own choices. These are different ways of thinking (zheshi butong de guannian)." Amy undoubtedly embraced the "American" way. She did not make clear, however, the essential difference between having one pre-given option and having two pre-given options, how acceptable the "bad" choices were, or the nature of the consequences when the students did make the "bad" choice.

In the case of doing school work, Amy's classroom practices did not seem to make "not studying" a valid choice. In spite of her claim that she was not to make the students do the work, very often Amy did need to. In addition to talking to individual students for making up assignments and quizzes when they did not complete them, everyday she would check students' homework and give them stamps. "You didn't do your work, honey." She would tell a student, "You need to work on it tonight right?" or "Do it tonight, hao bu hao (all right)?" "Ni hen hao (You are good)," "Ni buhao (You are no good)," she would say to the students who did/did not do the work, although she

always used a sweet coaxing tone. Occasionally Amy displayed students' grades on the wall or the front screen, with the students' IDs but not names, as she said it was not acceptable to display the names as would be done in Taiwan, because "it's privacy." Amy also asked parents to sign the assignment sheets or calendar. "If they need parent signature they'd know they need to do the work, 10 minutes everyday, to help them remember." Amy then added, "It's a way of encouragement (guli)." She probably saw all these practices as "encouragement," although they were at the same time commands that did not seem to be giving the students the choice they were ascribed by her belief to have. Her authority as teacher granted by the school as an institution contradicted the "choice" discourse in her belief, and she was positioning herself and improvising with the discourses in her daily teaching.

### **Working with the (In)dependent Students**

Related to the discourse of choice, certain contradictions appeared in her characterization of the students on doing the school work, which was a direct affording of positions in the figured school world (Holland et al., 1998). On one hand, Amy believed the students were like little kids that needed more coaxing to work.

This is American culture, it's different from Chinese culture. Chinese kids they know school means you work on your own, you sit there and work. Kids here, you're like coaxing little kids, you tell them "there, there, let's walk" they'd walk, you don't say it and they'd stop there.

Amy mentioned going to a teacher's conference and heard a teacher say her principal told her not to give the kids difficult assignments and let them play. "So by the time they're in high school they're used to playing. They don't know how to do it on their own." On the other hand, when talking about following instructions and rules, Amy said,

American kids are more mature than Chinese kids, they're quite independent by high school. I treat them as kids, but I also treat them as adults. You give them the

boundary and let them know, and you don't pull their nose (lazhe tade bizi)... I just point it out to you.

The independence, Amy further pointed out, was reflected in things like thinking more and asking more questions. Some students, for example, would ask for the rationale of an assignment, and Amy would gladly tell them. Nevertheless, she believed that the same students "didn't know how to do it on their own," in the school culture where they did not have the exclusive goal of centralized tests and were less motivated for working for grades compared with their Chinese counterparts. The independence in thinking and acting sometimes did not help when it came to opting for work more than play, and resulted in the dependence on more pushing and coaxing. The contradiction between independence and dependence paralleled the dilemma between the discourses of student choice and teacher authority, and presented a challenge to Amy the Chinese immigrant teacher.

Amy was optimistic but also expressed a sense of powerlessness regarding how much she could do. She mentioned waiting for some students to come to the makeup test after school and then did not show up. "American students you can't force them, you can't say, I'll punish you if you don't come. So you offer... You can say, you have to come, but if they don't, there is nothing you can do." Among the discourses of pushing, coaxing, negotiating, and sometimes letting go, Amy was constantly negotiating and positioning herself. In addition to how to make the students work, Amy was also in a constant process of figuring the right workload for the students. Even though she persisted in covering her curriculum and making the students learn, she also had doubts and uncertainty about the amount of work the students should do. Between the discourses of "a big pile" of assignments and "let them play," she was trying to negotiate a balance.

After the final test of the fall semester, in which students did not do as well as she expected in characters and sentence translation, she adjusted the workload. “Last semester I really pushed them. This semester I’ve slowed down a bit. I’m focusing on fewer sentence patterns each day now.” She was using one more week for each unit than in the fall semester. She also reduced the amount of assignments to some extent. Following her former mentor teacher’s advice, she was letting the students start the work in class and finish at home, which worked better than unstarted assignments. “They still say my quizzes are hard,” She said, but she did not give them up. It seemed Amy as the teacher was making more of the choices on the school work, although her choices might also have been pre-conceived options pushed by multiple authoritative and other discourses in the school world.

### **Figured Roles: Relation and Respect**

#### **Personal Relation and Boundary**

The teacher student relation might be the most important part of the positional identity in the figured world of schools. For Amy, as an immigrant teacher, construction of the identity involved relational discourses in both cultures. Amy believed personal relationships between teacher and students in the US schools were totally different from in Taiwan. “Chinese, traditionally, teacher and students don’t have personal relationship. Relationship is really hierarchy ... Here I think it’s different, because, the teacher has certain freedom, you can show your students that you care about them, that part is different.” Amy believed that teachers in the US schools are free to show the students their care, while in Taiwan, personal relationship and expression of care are prevented by hierarchy. She remembered in Taiwan, for example, she herself never talked to her

teachers about anything except school work.

Amy expressed that “the value here” made more sense to her than the traditional Chinese hierarchy value. She embraced the practice and enjoyed having more personal relationships and showing her care about the students. She often chatted with students before class, for example, “Zishan you wear glasses now,” or “Hanning, is your mother back from her trip?” She congratulated students who got travel opportunities or passed scholarship interviews. The class was sometimes updated in passing remarks about her own personal life, such as a car breakdown. More than casual personal relations, she also cherished a sense of bond in the students and classes she was teaching. “We’re one Chinese program, it doesn’t matter we’re two schools, because Chan laoshi is their teacher too.” She said to the class of the students she was teaching at another school several times during the two semesters, and was very happy that students from the two schools finally got together on a field trip in the Spring semester.

At the same time, Amy was also aware of the other side of personal relationship, and she talked about keeping the professional boundary in the interviews. “If you don’t, you’re not careful about your boundary, you can ask too many personal questions, or get too involved with personal issue, or share too much, or invite too many questions to yourself.” In the Chinese culture, according to Amy, the problem does not exist because the relation only operates on hierarchy. “I think because the hierarchy is there you would never go across the line ...but here in the US, I think you have to be very careful about where your line is.” For example, she said, she could help a student after class but not become his or her personal tutor. One might doubt the claim that there is no issue of professional boundary in the Chinese context, or no personal relationship for that matter,

but the comment reminded me of the general discourse of boundaries in US schools, and how professional access to children and schools is regulated by background check and guidelines of conduct, which is absent in the Chinese context. For Amy it seemed the caring of the teacher was limited to an institutional role, and the personal relationship ended at the school gate. The teacher's "freedom" was prevented by the discourse of boundary rather than by the one of hierarchy, even though the former made more sense to her. The inscribed acts of relations in the school were subject to her negotiation, figured against the Chinese school world.

### **A Bubble in Your Face: Respect and Authority**

Added to the discourses of personal relationship and boundary was the power status of the student-teacher relation, especially in regard to respect and authority. In Amy's class I observed students' challenges and sometimes jokes on her words, which Amy admitted herself would be pretty unthinkable in the Chinese context. Even though she was a very fluent speaker, occasionally her English accent would attract students' attention. "If I have any error [she said it like arrow] here let me know..." She once said and one student repeated, "Arrow?" and she smiled and corrected herself, "Error." When Zhishan once imitated her tone Amy said, "Zhishan, don't copy after me, honey." One day she made a mistake while teaching pinyin and a student challenged very bluntly, "How do you teach us?" Amy was not bothered—she just explained she was having a hard time with the computer this morning and she almost cried when it failed to work. She always frankly admitted and did not mind it when she did not know answers to the students' challenging questions.

In our talk on student respect, Amy noted the difference between Chinese and

American cultures: “In Chinese culture you never talk back to the teacher, it’s the hierarchy and status, you’d never do it, it’s the culture. In America it’s equality, we’re equal, they can ‘discuss’ with you.” She believed the questioning and challenging was part of equality and the freedom of expression and a perfectly legitimate discourse, and the teacher needed to acknowledge the students’ voices and needs. Amy gave the example of the special education students who did not have to do what the teacher told them to. The student could refuse to be grouped with a classmate and there was nothing the teacher could do. “If the teacher says no to him he’d say I’m feeling bad I need to go to the clinic. And if you don’t let him go, the parents would come and ask you.” In this case the teacher’s authority was weakened by the student’s claim on special rights and needs granted by the inscribed acts in the schools.

For Amy, however, the challenge and claim on equality did not necessarily conflict with respect. She believed “whether the students respect a teacher doesn’t depend on your authority (ta dui laoshi zunzhong bu zunzhong bushi kan quanwei),” and that students in her classes respected her, because “they show it right away if they don’t.”

For example, you know I have a few talkative kids. If they don’t respect you, if you say, stop talking, they’d completely ignore you. They hardly look at you and they just keep talking. American kids could act like that... Kids in my class, when you say, no talking, they’re like, Oh sorry, and they stop talking. ... Sometimes they joke but you can see that they listen to you. American kids, when they listen to you it means they respect you. ... They are individualists. Like I tell them no gum, sometimes when they are chewing and I give them some tissue they’d spit it up, but if it’s kids who don’t respect you, they’d look at you and blow another bubble right in your face.

In her negotiation of the school discourses, Amy assigned a different meaning to respect in the US context. Rather than silent obedience and “never talking back,” it was a degree of cooperation. Since the students as “individualists” had the right to free expression (“show it right away”) and open defiance (blowing a bubble in the teacher’s

face), listening to the teacher became a sign of adequate cooperation and respect. Amy here considered authority as the Confucian deference that a teacher commands in the Chinese context, tied to hierarchy and status, while respect was a more universal concept congruent with the equality discourse in the American context. As a Chinese teacher, she distanced herself from the authority storyline and was happy with the “respect” she had from her students, even though one might argue that the cooperation could also be an act of deferring to the teacher’s authority, just like silent obedience. At the same time, her conception of the meaning of authority could contextually change. There were a couple of times when she thought students used “hey” to address her, and Amy did not hesitate to demand, “Who is hey?” She explained when talking about this:

So you want to let them know. Even though they feel they’re equal to you... Even though we’re on good terms, you need to make sure you have the authority. I think I made the mistake before, I thought they were grown up...but you must remember that when you come in here you need to dominate the classroom, I’m the boss, even though I’m very nice and I respect you very much... You need to let them know, I’m the head, American kids you need to give them the notion otherwise they’ll climb onto your head. This is their culture.

In spite of the discourse of equality and personal relationship, the teacher was not a friend or peer that could be addressed as “hey.” More importantly, authority became a legitimate and imperative discourse to be embraced by the teacher, who was the “boss” to dominate the classroom. The image of the teacher as the boss and domination found resonance in the Chinese hierarchy discourse that Amy had found illegitimate, even though the “boss” in the US context and the high status teacher in Taiwan might be very different figures in Amy’s conception: the teacher as the “boss” was at the same time equal, nice, and respecting to the students, who allowed the freedom of expression and equality. It was not clear to Amy whether domination and equality could be contradictory discourses, as shown in the example of the special education student. In her own practices,

Amy certainly had ways to “let them know,” such as setting up the discipline chair or calendar for the class. However, she did not know whether these measures conveyed the message that she was “the boss” or established her authority. Neither was it clear to her whether the domination and authority, when achieved, was hierarchy after all. The different storylines and grand narratives across the school worlds exhibited much uncertainty in meaning and were subjected to constant interpretation and figuring by this immigrant teacher.

On top of all the discourses of personal relation, boundary and respect, yet another discourse came up in Amy’s talk, which, even though briefly touched on, seemed to carry much momentum. Two months into the spring semester Amy talked about next year’s enrollment, and like other high school world language teachers, she wasn’t sure of the enrollment number. She admitted that the students had the option of dropping out or switching to other language courses.

In China the teacher doesn’t need to smile, for what? I’m the authority. Here it’s different. Put in a plain way, they are your clients (yishi fumu), right, if they don’t come to the class you have no job. This is their way of seeing it. So you need to make them happy and not transfer schools. This is culture and their way of thinking.

The comment not only added to the interpretation of teacher-student relation, but also pointed back to the discourses of discipline, school work, and authority discussed in previous sections. The teacher needed to smile and make the students happy because they were at the end of the day the client. With all the discussion on making choices about their learning, it seemed a real choice for the students was the optional enrollment in the class, which gave them the power and a different form of voice and authority. The dimension of the teacher as a service provider anchored the discussion of professional identity in a new light and might serve to ultimately negate any Confucian respect and

authority based on hierarchy and traditional Chinese values, even though in Amy's case, she seemed to be already fully embracing the new values in the mainstream society.

## **Meiling**

### **The Class: a Profile**

Meiling had her own big Chinese classroom, which was on the second floor of the middle school building and marked by the word "Zhongwen (Chinese)" and some pictures and postcards on the door. Inside the classroom there were posters and signs of school rules, including a big poster of IB (International Baccalaureate) guidelines on the wall. There were two maps of China and Taiwan and a few pictures, but not many Chinese cultural artifacts. Meiling said she was still collecting decorations in the second year of teaching at that school. On the front wall of the room, a pocket chart held routine and daily phrases in Chinese characters. A row of picture and character cards lined the space above the white board, such as *nali* (where), *duoshao* (how many), *shui* (who), *ma* (question word), which Meiling told me were the key words for the TPRS (Total Physical Response Storytelling) teaching method that she sometimes used.

The spatial dimension was very different from Amy's classroom with a street in the middle: The student desks were arranged in three rows in the middle of the classroom and surrounded by a horseshoe shaped row of desks. Usually students sat in the middle and the two sides. Meiling learned this layout from another teacher and she liked it because she could walk a circle around the room and also "You can clearly see everyone." The layout allowed many of the students to face each other rather than the teacher. The seating toward different directions seemed to have diffused the flow of attention and at the same time created an atmosphere of casual communication and

exchange in this classroom world. Meiling usually stood at the front of the classroom, and she occasionally held a long ruler to point on the screen. This image somehow reminded me of my own teachers back in China. “I’m small.” Meiling said to me several times, adding when she was teaching in the high school last year many students were taller than she was. She sometimes stood at the corner table of the classroom to operate the computer for the PowerPoint. At that moment she did look rather small and unnoticeable in the room, especially with one row of students facing away from her. When the class did group activities Meiling would go around checking their work, although generally, the front or front corner was her station in the room, a physical positioning that was part of her positional identity as a teacher.

The behavioral routines and activities in Meiling’s class was a different world from Amy’s. When students came in everyday they were required to copy the agenda on the projector screen into their notebooks. Then the class began with the standing ritual when the students said “Liang laoshi hao (Good morning Ms Liang).” The students always addressed her as “Ms Liang,” while Meiling mostly called the students by their English names, occasionally using “guys” or “gentleman” for the boys and “ladies” for the girls. The ritual was often followed by a few minutes of translation practice of three sentences, although drills like this never took up much time in her class. When new words were introduced, she used PowerPoint with the words and web-found pictures. Students copied the words in their notebooks when Meiling explained. Each student had a big notebook systematically marked in sections with letters in which they put in notes on vocabulary, grammar, assignments, and so on. Once the introduction of new vocabulary or sentence patterns was cleared, the class was ready to practice and review them through

various interactive games and activities, including TPRS games, bingo, and other group or class activities, and individual or groups of students were often asked to present to the class. Throughout my observation across the two semesters, most of the class time was spent on these activities and games. At the end of the activities Meiling often gave a piece of red Chinese candy or some other treat to the winners of the games. Amid all the practices and activities, the eighth grade students struck me as especially energetic and expressive. It seemed her students would never let go of any chance of commenting and expressing of opinions. Any remark or question from Meiling could spark boiling class discussion and exchanges, and activities were often done with discussion and commenting along. Some rare days, when the class was actually quiet, one would feel something was amiss.

Doing projects was an important inscribed act in the class, as the students were sometimes turned loose to work on various projects. For example, the final project at the end of the fall semester for the architecture unit lasted over a week, during which time the students worked on a house design with Fengshui rules. During those sessions the class was a din of happy voices, conversations, exchange of ideas, and explanation of their own houses and drawings. Meiling did not try to hush the students, nor did she join their conversations and banter. She seemed to encourage their imagination and creativity, although she only gave measured praises and compliments as I observed. The house designs featured breeze ways, skate boarding ramp under the bedroom, go-cart track in the garden, or a McDonald sign in the kitchen saying “Two people served,” among many other amenities. The results of the project were impressive drawings with Chinese character labeling, and some ended up displayed on the hall way walls around the winter

break.

The Chinese literacy discourses did not make much presence in Meiling's class. She used a lot of pinyin in class, and students were not required to remember the characters. Sometimes the class copied a character while she demonstrated on the screen. For me the researcher, those brief moments were most resembling of a literacy class in China. Meiling wrote a character stroke by stroke, plus doing a row of small characters showing each step of the stroke order, which was quite time-consuming. Then she would ask students to write it twice or three times on their own.

At the end of the class, she gave students stamps for attendance. Most of the time, the last four or five minutes ended with the Taiwan teenager pop song *Today You Will Marry Me* (*jintian niyao jiageiwo*), which Meiling told was a big hit in Taiwan a couple of years ago. The song was one of the most important cultural artifacts in the class, played every day at the end of the class throughout the fall semester, till replaced by a new one. Meiling said it was for pronunciation practice, as the students were looking at the lyrics in pinyin while singing along. The first time I was in the class seeing the song played, I was impressed by how much the students enjoyed it. The whole class sang with the English lines in the song: "Jolin in the house," "DT in the house," and "Yes I do," and some waved their hands with the characters in the video. At the beginning of the spring semester there was a school-wide talent show and the class entered with this song, which created a lot of animated rehearsals in class. "I thought it didn't matter, we'd just try...I hope to let people see that the Chinese classes are going on Ok." Meiling said.

Every day when the bell rang the class would jump to their feet and swarm out in good haste, as it was the last class of the day. Meiling always stood outside the door

smiling, according to the school rule, to see the students off while the hall way was drowned in deafening noises. Even though in our interviews she talked at length about the initial shocks and tensions she experienced at the beginning, Meiling was very positive about her own teaching experience, and took pride in working in an urban middle school, which she was told was the toughest group to teach. “Teachers at the suburban schools, they cannot experience these wild situations (hen kuazhang de zhuangkuang), like students fighting and disrespect in the classroom. They can’t believe it when I tell them, but urban students are like this, and you keep learning. This is good for me, in the tough situations you learn more. I complain too but I do like it.” It seemed to me she really did.

### **IB, Games, and Activities**

#### **Creativity, Themes, and Variations**

The kaleidoscopic activities Meiling used in her classes was central in her teaching, ranging from TPRS story telling to class auction games, which was also a major part of her improvisation in the cultural world of the language class. Throughout the two semesters Meiling was always coming up with new activities and games. Like Amy, Meiling also believed using more interactions and more games was the “American” way of teaching, although the novelty and constant changes she brought to the activities showed an enthusiasm that seemed more than a mere storyline enacted.

Meiling spent a great deal of energy on turning regular language exercises into games. She adapted from books and also “made up (bian)” games herself, “You’d keep thinking of it everyday. Sometimes you have an idea and you hurry to write it down, otherwise you’d forget.” Most of the time the activities worked to engage her chatty

students in learning. When the class was learning prices, for example, a guessing game was used, in which Meiling asked the students to guess the price of a Chinese jelly candy, in the range between 5,000 to 30,000 Yuan, and each guess was written down on the whiteboard by a volunteer. In the end, the student who guessed the closest price got the candy. Hoping to be the lucky one to get an exotic candy in the built-up suspension until the moment the “real” price was disclosed by unfolding a small piece of paper created attention and excitement in the students, and turned a speaking and listening activity into a fun game.

Meiling also tried to make the improvised activities relate to the students’ lives and interests. “I try to use more daily life examples (shenghuo zhongde lizi),” she emphasized many times in our talks. When the class was learning clothing items and colors, for example, the students were asked one day to wear as many colors as possible to class. Meiling asked three students to stand at the front and told the class what they were wearing. Then the students divided into boy and girl groups and counted the colors they were wearing. The student who had the most colors won a treat (a Taiwanese puffed rice cake), and a girl got the prize for wearing 15 colors that day. It was an exciting day for the class. “When are we doing the color counting?” A boy asked at the beginning of the class, and his expectance was probably shared by his classmates. In the following lesson, the class guessed who it was when a student described the clothing and colors a classmate was wearing, which proved equally engaging.

Meiling encouraged the same creativity she exhibited herself in her language tasks for the students, which struck me as a less Chinese storyline than American, because of the emphasis often placed on conformity in the Chinese school world. For the

house designing project, she said in the task description, “Now you have a billion dollars. So money isn’t an issue. You’ve been dreaming of having your own house and wanting to design it.” For a “Mini Project” of outfit designing in the clothing unit, she said “You’ll be designing the latest, most fashionable outfit for top models to wear for the dress design competition in China. Use as many accessories, colors, pieces of clothes as you can.”

Meiling once had the students draw and color 14 clothing items based on what they found in some Taiwanese fashion magazines, rather than using ready made cuts or pictures. The drawing by the students turned out pretty and creative. Meiling told me then they would do activities with the drawn items, for example, practicing listening by picking the right items in right colors when she spoke the phrase. To me the freedom that the students had in creating their products made the class least resemble a Chinese school world, although Meiling seemed to be unconscious of it herself. When I asked her whether she thought the Chinese education did not encourage creativity, she apparently never thought of the question. It seemed she did not believe it was a cultural specific act or even something “marked.” For an immigrant teacher, this lack of awareness could be part of her figuring of the two school worlds, where she had different interpretations than held assumptions on creativity about Chinese school cultures (McGinnis, 1994). At a deeper level, it could also be part of the process of positioning, when she unconsciously avoided attributing negative features, such as the lack of emphasis on creativity, to her own culture, as part of her identity construction. This unconscious attribution might also apply to other incidences when she discussed the Chinese school culture in a positive light in later sections.

Improvisations in a cultural world could meet different responses and results

(Holland et al., 1998). Meiling said she was always trying out new games and activities on her students. I did see how some of these games ended up with rules which were not clear and needed to be clarified or changed on the spot. Sometimes quite complicated games were devised too. In another price exercise, Meiling asked students to sit in four groups, and write in Chinese characters an Arabic number she showed on the screen. The group that finished writing first had the chance to guess the price of one of the four animal puppets on the front table, including a fancy red dragon puppet. When the group shouted out a number in Chinese, Meiling would tell them “Duo (more)” or “Shao (less)” and they’d supply a new number. If the right price was guessed within the given chances, the group won the puppet as well as a pen for every group member. The four-group and two-staged game proved complicated and did not go smoothly, at least for the first day it was introduced, or maybe it was just a hyper or distracted day for the students. The activities did not always work magic. Nevertheless, they seemed to make a big difference in the class dynamics and reflected Meiling’s figuring of a US language classroom and her own improvisations on the teaching discourses.

### **The “American” Instructional Storylines**

The instructional storylines that Meiling negotiated in her school world appeared a lot different from Amy’s. Meiling’s classes were based on units of themes, such as architecture and clothing. Unlike Amy, she never used Chinese textbooks, which she said were not as well developed as textbooks in other world languages, such as Spanish, and did not have what she wanted to teach. Even though it was a lot of work to design her lessons from scratch, she said she’d been doing this since the beginning of her teaching and was very used to it now, “I’d think about what language they need for communicative

purposes, and I teach it (Wo hui da gai xiang ta men xu yao shenme yu yan lai jiaoliu, ran hou qu jiao).” The discourse of communicative goal of language teaching thus played a part in Meiling’s teaching, which she once mentioned was an influence from her TESL training.

Compared with Amy, Meiling did not seem to be concerned about a standard or uniform objective, or results comparable with other language classes. “I cover themes...I give quizzes, and they do projects.” Meiling outlined her own teaching. She expressed that she hoped to challenge the students but also not make it too difficult—to find the balance. When I asked what guided her course design, she said the school was an IB<sup>1</sup> school and “They have a guideline.” When I asked what IB was, she said,

International Baccalaureate... it’s like a program, it’s global, if you’re an IB school, if you go to another country you can continue what you were learning...[the guidelines] they tell you basically what you teach, like, environment, I haven’t taught about environment, community service, health and social education, and body parts. It doesn’t tell you what you should specifically teach (ta meiyou genni shuo yiding yao jiao shenme). You need to figure out (ni yao da gai xiang). Because you should follow the guideline, you need to squeeze the things you teach (ba ta sai dao) into one of the categories.

Meiling said the guidelines were not disciplinary, but she did not know how it would work in other classes, such as a math class, because she had not been to the IB training. The guidelines should be followed, even if it meant it sometimes could be a “squeeze.” The IB guidelines, posted on the wall in big letters, were one of the curriculum discourses and “inscribed acts” in the school context that regulated her teaching, with uncertainty in meaning. For Meiling it seemed mostly a topical guide, and room for interpretation existed when what was intended to teach could be “squeezed” into its categories.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the official IB website, “The International Baccalaureate® (IB) offers high quality programmes of international education” which “help develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world.”

In addition to the storyline of the IB guidelines, other instructional storylines also played into her classroom practices. These included teaching methods she learned in school district workshops, such as the TPRS method highly recommended by the district, materials adapted from other world language programs, and activities and games she learned from her Spanish mentor teacher in the school. She also read various books on teaching methods, including a book handed out by the school district named *One Hundred Games and Activities*.

As in all cultural worlds, negotiation and choices were involved in the process of figuring the storylines. Meiling learned the TPRS method and used it in her classes, although she said she could not use it for whole class periods; she found fifteen minutes was the longest possible. One day in a TPRS workshop in the spring semester, the audience was told that the TPRS method helped achieve real language proficiency while playing language games was not as effective. Meiling found she could not totally agree. “It makes some sense...but I thought, the games are what raise their interest for learning (wan zhexie huodong tamen juede hen you xingqu)...At least they won’t hate language learning (zhishao buhui taoyan xue yuyan), especially when Chinese is so hard.” Interestingly, the storyline of games in language learning was contested in the school district workshop, which was an example of the uncertainty of meaning in the “inscribed acts” and the “American way” of language teaching, where the very definitions of “games” and “real language proficiency” might vary in addition to the different conceptions or trends in “effective methods.” For Meiling who learned from her experience that student motivation was a top priority in her class, “effective methods” might also take on different meanings and adjustment and improvisations had to be made

to the methods.

### **“It Suddenly Occurred to Me”**

In spite of the uncertainties in the instructional storylines, such as the specific meaning of the IB guidelines and effectiveness of the TPRS method or the games in language learning, Meiling had developed her own approach of activity centered teaching, and I was curious how she came to the approach when her own educational background did not give her the experience. Meiling admitted that the use of interactive activities was influenced by her TESL education here in the US, although she did not see a necessary connection between how she taught and the school world in Taiwan where she came from. Meiling was not placing emphasis on writing the characters and believed “you can’t say copy the characters one hundred times, or you must remember these.” When I mentioned in an interview the “rote learning (beisong)” Chinese storyline and its absence in her teaching, she asked me, “Have you ever seen teachers doing it here?” For her the “Chinese” way was illegitimate and out of the question. If her own language class experiences in Taiwan had any influence, it was the experiences with the English classes and the decision to avoid similar ways of instruction. Meiling said her own English classes back in Taiwan were boring, when they just memorized, read the textbook, and had quizzes everyday. “Sometimes I’d think how I learned English before [in Taiwan]. If my teachers had used more interactive activities, maybe I wouldn’t have had such a hard time with it. I would have had some fun.” For Meiling, growing up in an education system that does not emphasize interactive activities was not a barrier to their use in her teaching. On the contrary, the experience led her to seek a different approach. This was one of the examples that reflected the complex connections between storylines and

narratives and the situated and improvised practices in and across the cultural worlds, in this case the worlds of the Chinese and American schools.

For Meiling what initially drove her focus on games and activities was the students' interest and motivation in learning. She repeatedly mentioned that students demanded games in class when she first started teaching. Meiling said, "If I don't use games they'd look bored and distracted (ta men hui hen wuliao, hen rongyi fenxin). If I do something fun they'd be interested and they'd participate and listen (ta jiu hui xiangyao wan, jiu hui ting)." The skills and competency as part of the culturally constructed identity in the figured world, however, took time to develop. Meiling constantly referred to her own teaching in terms of "the first year" and "now." She lectured more during the first year, and the classes did not have those activities. "Last year I couldn't think of any of the games," She admitted. Talking about the color counting game, she said, "Last year I just used cards. This year, I don't know how, it suddenly occurred to me (turan xiangdao shuo): let them talk about what they wear." "It suddenly occurred to me" almost sounded like her approach was a sudden revelation and inspiration. For me the expression was reminiscent of the Buddhist conception of sudden moments of understanding instead of gradual progress in learning, although I wasn't sure whether it possibly played a part in Meiling's cultural interpretation of sudden learning. These sudden moments, however, are always built upon long term practices of the doctrine. For Meiling too it was probably not really a sudden revelation, but a result of her many years of learning and experimenting. Nevertheless, her own characterization of the sudden realization captured some special moments in her improvisation and authorship in the space of the language class.

## **Fengshui & Youth Fashion: Teaching the Chinese Culture**

### **Cultural Presentation and Mixed Discourses**

Teaching of the Chinese culture found various ways into the construction and positioning of identities in the world of the language class. This was first reflected in the cultural talks and artifacts in the class, always with their culturally ascribed and figured meanings. Even though Chinese decorations were not a priority in the classroom, Meiling constantly talked about Chinese or Taiwanese cultural facts and practices in her language teaching. When she taught new words in housing, for example, she'd mention facts from prices of apartments to type of clothes washers in Taiwan. The talks showed her cultural membership and her positioning as an insider in the culture, although she thought of it as mostly serving the practical purpose of helping learning the words, "If you talk about these they might remember the words better."

In many of the language or cultural artifacts in the classroom a mixture of Chinese and American discourses was adopted. For example, in a TPRS story Meiling would tell of a person flying to China to drink Tsingdao beer in Starbucks, or the students would add English words and smileys onto their spring festival calligraphy pieces. The music video Meiling used for "Fa Yin Lian Xi (pronunciation practice)," *Today You Will Marry Me*, was another example. "Chun nuan de hua kai dai zou dongtian de qihan (The warm spring blossoms took away the winter chills)..." A recent hit in Taiwan, the song told of falling in love in the spring breezes and people deciding to marry today because yesterday was gone and tomorrow would be too late. The wedding pledge was inserted as a rap part when a traditional "Western" wedding in the church took place in the video. The singing was also interspersed with a few English lines, including the "Yes, I do,"

which turned out the students' most favorite part as they always sang along. The song had the Chinese characters and setting, and the characteristic sentiments brought about by nature in Chinese poems and songs, and at the same time English words, rap singing and traditional "Western" wedding.

After the Chinese New Year in February Meiling put in a new song for the pronunciation practice, which was another youth pop song and the latest hit, featuring sophisticated music video techniques, sepia images and some postmodern lyrics about winds and stars and "bites after bites I ate up the melancholy." Meiling did not teach the lyrics or talk about the music video. For her again it was only a more appealing pronunciation practice. Nevertheless, the videos showed her membership in the Taiwan youth culture and at the same time her presentation of the "Chinese" culture and her positioning. Instead of seeking distinct traditional Chinese culture (such as a wedding with red sedans) that set itself apart, and highlighted the "differences," Meiling chose a presentation that blurred the distinction. The choice might be unconscious since for Meiling, it was the Chinese culture as she experienced it in Taiwan, no matter how globalized it was. It was also possible that she was pushed by other discourses, such as the interest of the teenage students. A figured world of Chinese culture was objectified in the music videos as artifacts in which culture was a mixture of discourses.

Another example of cultural presentation was Fengshui, the Chinese knowledge on how to balance the energies of a given space, although in this case it was more intentional teaching of "culture." For the housing and architecture unit, Fengshui was added as cultural knowledge about housing in China. The class learned a certain rule in Fengshui each day. One day, for example, Meiling showed a rule on the screen: "There

should be no television sets in your bedrooms. If you cannot get rid of that habit then after watching the television cover it with a plastic table cloth. It has to be plastic and not simply cloth.” Meiling explained the rule and added that the scientific explanation for not having a TV in the bedroom was one should have complete rest in the room, instead of being disturbed by sounds and images. It seemed this cultural “belief” and practice did not justify itself and Meiling sought support from the more accepted science discourse for the rule by offering the “scientific” explanation.

I wondered about Meiling’s choice to bring Fengshui into her housing unit, especially when hers was a modern version with TV rules, rather than the ancient philosophy parallel with traditional medicine. In our interview discussion, Meiling thought it was “culture,” although she admitted that she did not really know very deep about it. “If you go any deeper, I wouldn’t be able to do it, and the students wouldn’t understand either (ruguo ni jiangzaishen, wo ye buhui jiang, xuesheng ye tingbudong).” “The deeper things, I haven’t learned about them either, I don’t know them...I just talk about what I know (wo zhineng jiang wo zhidaode).” Meiling was aware of the ancient philosophy as the “deeper things,” which was neither understood by herself nor necessary for the students. Her choice of the more popular modern version instead of the ancient theories again showed a stance in her presentation of the Chinese cultural world.

### **Teaching Culture: Goals and Meanings**

The choice and stances had their underlying interpretations to the participants in the cultural world, which guide their authoring of the cultural space. Meiling once talked about the reason for teaching Fengshui in terms of life-long influence.

Because even if they live in the US, I let them know these... You give them a goal, in 40 years, when your students think of the class what do they remember (ni gei

tamen yige mubiao, sishi nianhou, tamen xiangdao nideke shi hui xiangdao shenme), they might think, the Chinese do Fengshui with their furniture. They might forget the details, but they'd have the idea.

Meiling believed learning and understanding the cultural differences was important, even if the students lived outside the culture, and they should “have the idea” even after “40 years.” Rather than immediate goals or practical purposes, learning the culture should bring a permanent change of perspectives in the students' lives. Meiling seemed to believe she was teaching much more than a language. I wonder whether her students would indeed cover the bedroom TV with a plastic cloth, or believe that all “the Chinese people” do so. In the housing design project, in which Meiling required Fengshui principles, the young students were apparently much more preoccupied with skate boarding ramp or breezeways than about Fengshui. However, the “ideas” might indeed have made a difference, or will at some future point.

The greeting ritual at the beginning of the class was another example of negotiating goals and meanings in the world of language teaching. Meiling considered the standing ritual teaching of culture, although she felt a certain degree of uncertainty and lack of legitimacy with the practice. “In Taiwan we must bow, but I thought forget it, I'd be embarrassed if they bow to me (wo xiang suanle, rang ta zhanqilai gen wo jugong, wo dou jue de buhao yisi).” Meiling mentioned in Taiwan, students bow not only before class, but also after class and say “Thank you teacher” before then go. She thought she should teach this next year, “They don't need to salute but they'd say thanks.” When I asked whether they would salute if she asked them to, she said,

Some of them do, they think it's fun. There is a girl in the six-grade class, every time when she stands up she says “laoshi hao” [palms together and bowing], she learned it herself, I didn't teach that. Maybe she learned on TV. But things like culture, I think you should practice it yourself, and let them see how the Chinese do it (ni yinggai shentilixing, rang tamen kandao zhongguo ren zenyang zuo).

Meiling would be embarrassed if the students bowed to her, probably because she did not feel she had the authority and hierarchical status ascribed by the ritual. Even the standing itself was no longer a gesture of deference and respect as in the Chinese context. She believed some students would bow for “fun,” which they learned from the media or elsewhere as an exotic gesture to be mimicked, rather than a practice with ideological meaning. One interesting thing I noticed was that Meiling added a small thing to the ritual: She said “xiexie (thanks)” every time after the students said “Liang laoshi hao.” While in China the teacher would never thank the students in the greeting ritual, Meiling added the thanks to adapt it to the American classroom, probably pushed by the discourse of politeness or equality. By saying “thanks,” she partially relinquished the hierarchy and authority entailed by the ritual and reduced the degree of “embarrassment” she was feeling.

In spite of the uncertainty of meaning and the lack of legitimacy, however, Meiling insisted on the underlying idea of the ritual— thankfulness and respect. For her the idea that the students should be thankful to the teacher was not to be put in doubt by the dismissal of hierarchy or higher status. Her plan for the next year on an additional ritual after class, if carried out, might help drive this home. Rather than an exotic practice for display, Meiling seemed to consider it a ritual to be formally established for a class, which for her would really carry some of the weight of meaning in its original form, even though the same meaning most probably would not be assumed by her students, who would have their own figuring of the cultural artifacts. The standing ritual as an artifact thus evoked the Chinese cultural world and carried multiple layers of meanings which were pushed by various discourses and negotiated in the new context.

### **The Fashion Magazine: Self and Other**

Cultural discussion in the language class is always a construction of the positional identities, as “we place ourselves in the social fields, in degrees of relation to—affiliation with, opposition to, and distance from—identifiable others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 271). In Meiling’s class this process was most clearly shown with the example of a class discussion on culture and fashion. One day Meiling showed me some glossy Taiwan youth fashion magazines. She said the students, both girls and boys, liked the pictures in the magazine. One of the articles in the magazine consisted of pictures of body exercises, in which a girl moves some parts of her body in circles as a weight-losing tip. Meiling said the students laughed at the method and said they had never heard of this. Meiling in her turn had never thought it before as something new and laughable. Both Meiling and the students made discoveries about the culture.

The students’ response led her to plan a discussion on the topic: 1. How is the fashion the same or different than it is in America? 2. What did you find interesting or strange when you were looking at the magazine? One day the class had a heated conversation on their discoveries after studying the magazines in groups. The students pointed out similarities like “We both have weird bags.” “We both wear jackets, and we both wear boots,” although they noticed a lot more differences than similarities. Alicia said, “They have a lot of mismatched clothes,” (“It’s like you,” Joey said and Alicia rolled her eyes. ) and “They wear more layers, and there are a lot more hats and accessories in China.” Another group said in China people wore looser clothing, they did not wear skinny jeans, and they wore more tennis shoes. What they found strange was that “They wear a lot of furry things, like, they wear their sweaters this way.” Meiling

stepped in and commented, “Oh that’s the fashion that year.” A short excerpt of the discussion could show the kind of interaction and exchange in the discussion:

Luke: They have a lot of “Playboy” accessories and stuff, which have nothing to do with playboy.

Meiling: It’s just a brand.

Luke: They have a lot of Proactive, or sort of Proactive... They’re for acne... and these products...[showing a page in magazine.]

Meiling: Like I told you before...Asian people, Asian females, we are not used to tampons... We use...

Roy: Proactive. I don’t need to hear this. [class laughing]

Luke: And they have lots of English words... like this...

Gwen: That’s a BRAND.

Luke: Also, they have crazy haircuts.

Gwen: All over the world there are crazy haircuts.

The students were led in this task to identify themselves with a collective “we” in light of another cultural group. Two figured worlds were constructed in the discussion, both having an imaginative nature, and later Meiling further admitted to the students that those were the fashion magazines and people on the streets in Taiwan did not all dress like that. The students presented differences that distinguished the two cultures, although their own comments like “It’s like you” and “All over the world there are crazy haircuts” showed that they realized too it might not be really “cultural” differences.

Culture puts in question traditional boundaries of self and other (Kramsch, 1995). The comments by the class showed a good deal of Othering on the part of the students. Although Meiling showed some membership in the target culture by informing on some cultural practices, the relative authority was obscured by the students’ perspectives. Meiling had a rather ambiguous position in the discussion: She was Asian and Chinese, and a cultural insider of the magazine. At the same time she was also a resident in the US, and the teacher who initiated the discussion with an openness to possible different perspectives. Meiling herself seemed to acknowledge the distinction between Self and

Other, and readily accepted the comments of othering, such as people in the magazines being “weird.” It was worth noting, however, that the magazines were quality publications with professional photos, and the people were “weird” in rather artistic ways. This in a way seemed to have countered the Othering discourse, as the “Chinese” fashion discussed were modern fashion that really did not have clear boundary with “Western” fashion, and lots of the “differences” pointed more to trends than to culture. The Self and Other were blurred, as in the pop music videos. In fact, in spite of all the differences talked about, the recognizable youth culture in the magazines seemed to serve as a bond between the teacher and students with shared interests and insights. One more time, Meiling made her choice in the presentation of the Chinese cultural world and the teacher’s, as well as the students’ identities, were constructed in the process of self and mutual positioning.

### **Discipline & Control**

#### **The Kuazhang Students**

As with Amy, discipline was an important discourse in Meiling’s class, which likewise involved storylines in the worlds of both the US schools and Chinese schools and categorization of the students, although in very different ways. “They’re at a rebellious age (fanpan de nianji),” Meiling said of the students, who were often “noisy (chaonao),” “good at complaining (xihuan baoyuan),” and “always want to play (zongxiang yaowan).”

They just directly speak out, why do we do this, why can’t we play games, why can’t we watch movies, why not this and that. They’re not like kids in Taiwan. We’d only complain to ourselves at heart, otherwise we’d get spanked.

The “rebellious” students in her class formed a sharp contrast to the silent

students in Taiwan she was familiar with, and Meiling said she was nervous and shocked

when she first started teaching the year before.

The students here are wild (*kua zhang*), they often freely stand up and walk around, go to sharpen the pencil, or talk to others, you're here teaching and they just stand up and talk. In the beginning I felt like, this is too much... The other teachers here, maybe they're used to it, but in my culture, you're supposed to sit quiet, if you want to go somewhere you need to raise your hand and ask the teacher.

At the same time, Meiling also said some students who were motivated learners were “good, obedient (*guai*),” “mature (*dongshi*)” and “well behaved (*tinghua*).” In our talks Meiling often used these words to categorize her students, which were evaluative terms commonly used in the Chinese context to describe children and students and deep rooted in the Chinese cultural world of values and good behaviors. While “*kuazhang* (out of proportion/over the top/wild)” was a neutral word with a slight sense of humor, “*guai* (obedient, quiet, well behaving),” “*tinghua* (literally ‘listen to what is told’, obedient),” and “*dongshi* (literally ‘knowing the rules/proprieties’, mature)” were all positive evaluative terms carrying the Confucian values of obedience to the elders and people of higher status and knowing the proprieties. For a slightly negative side, Meiling once described her students as “*mei da mei xiao* (showing no respect to older people).” The term literally means “no distinction between elders and the young,” which is a traditional criticism for breaching the age hierarchy and not showing due respect to an older person. These words stood out in her talks as they evoked the school worlds in the Confucian culture and the Chinese storylines of being a student, since “The evaluative terms index a moral universe, a figured world, and serve as cultural resources in the process of identity formation” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 218). At the same time, the terms used in the new figured world may begin to carry different meanings. When Meiling said some of her students were “*tinghua* (obedient),” I wondered about the meaning of such terms, and what it meant to be an “obedient” American student. Meiling was indexing the Chinese

school world with the evaluative terms, which was in turn part of her process of figuring the American school world. The characters in the figured worlds seemed to merge in Meiling's positioning of both herself and the students through these terms.

I did not see “obedience” in the Chinese way in Meiling classes, even though I observed the most “guai (well-behaved)” class. What I saw most was students’ talking, as voices often flew from different directions across the classroom and accompanied the activities and tasks, almost in a race for who could give the quickest and coolest comments for all time and on anything. “How can you hear me when you talk?” Meiling once demanded of a few students who were talking. “We’re multi-tasking.” A boy said, and it sometimes seemed they did. When at the beginning of the spring semester the class was rehearsing the song for the talent show Meiling would say “Seriously, it’s going to be a good memory for you,” or “Seriously, I need your cooperation,” and tried to get the rehearsal going when the students talked, argued, and improvised moonwalks or waltzes. Occasionally she hushed: “Sh—” but not often. Only once across the two semesters did I see her asking two students to change seats.

Meiling seemed to be used to the students talking back too, even though it would be a least “tinghua” behavior in the Chinese context. “No gossip.” She once said. “NO Gossip??” A student repeated and comments regarding gossip rose from all corners of the classroom. “You might listen up.” Another time Meiling said to a group. “You Might?” A boy immediately said. “And might not?” Another followed. “Sometimes their talk is too much, and the best way is to ignore them (zuihao de banfa jiushi buli tamen),” Perhaps because it was already the second year, Meiling no longer had the initial shock and seemed to have more or less accepted her *kuazhang* students, a stance that contributed to

her positional identity among the evaluative discourses of Chinese and American students. She sometimes attributed a noisy day to an impending break or a “loose” week due to special events in the school. One day she said the students were hyper because it was full moon. She learned it in the school because the staff in the behavior room always circled the full moon days on the calendar and expected more behavior issues. This scientific explanation somehow also showed a sense of resigned acceptance, since nobody could stop a moon.

Full moon or not, one most common way Meiling used in bringing the class back to attention was asking “Haole ma (are you ready/are you good).” Noise would fill the room and banter thrown back and forth till Meiling’s voice rose above: “Haole ma?” “Haole (ready),” Most of the time the class would say out loud, and the class would calm down and the lesson moved on. Sometimes even students who were busy bickering would manage to stop and respond “Haole.” Occasionally some would shout: “Haimei! Haimei! (Not yet).” A couple of times two students started a local skirmish over “Haole (ready)” and “Haimei (not yet),” and the ability to bicker in Chinese was impressive. It seemed the students enjoyed the response, and I suspect the English phrase “are you ready” would not work as well. It almost seemed as if the phrase evoked the figured world of the Chinese language class and the students were showing a kind of membership through their responses. The Chinese phrase became a cultural artifact that carried the rules of the class and regulated behaviors, partly through this entitlement of cultural membership.

### **Behavior Room and Spanking: Legitimacy and Learning**

In our talks on classroom discipline Meiling again made a distinction between her

first year of teaching and “now,” which reflected her process of developing the cultural skills and competency in the school world. Meiling said in the beginning during each lesson she needed to say up to fifty times “sit down.”

I was strict with them (wo hui guan tamen)...I told them to sit down and stop talking, telling them they'd lose points or I'd call their parents, and they didn't like it...They'd say, what are you saying, we don't know what you are teaching. They'd say things like that on purpose to hurt you (tamen guyi shuo zhexie hua lai ciji ni).

While she seldom sent the students to the behavior room across the hallway the second year, during the first year the behavior room was her resort and rescue. She sent the students out right away when they were noisy. During the first year she wrote over 90 slips, “I think I was the top one or second top in the school.” Meiling remembered the efforts and frustration she felt in the beginning,

In the first couple of months every day I'd go home and think how to make them behave and learn (zenyang rang tamen guai yidian, rang tamen xuexi)... I was thinking even in the shower and at dinner. Then, I forgot from when, I stopped doing that, because it was like working 24 hours a day.

Meiling believed things turned a bit better with what she learned in the district classroom management training, and from her mentor teachers. In addition to designing more engaging lessons, she learned about storylines of disciplining, such as “Don't get mad and let the kids know they can piss you off,” and she often made contrast between the Chinese discourses and the American. Meiling found while in Taiwan, teachers and parents scolded a lot more than praised, teachers here gave much more positive comments. It was hard for her to tell the students “You're great,” and she tried to make herself do it instead of saying “You'll lose points.” She also found that unlike in Taiwan, where teachers directly correct the students or call out their names, here it is better not to call out their names, or scold in class, according to what she learned in the management training, because it would embarrass and demotivate the students. Meiling admitted that

“I’m still improving because I can’t follow that 100% right away, sometimes when it’s bad I’d call on their names without thinking (wo hui buzijue jiao tamen de mingzi).” I sometimes did see her calling on individual students’ names in class, although it was not apparent that her students were embarrassed. The storylines and inscribed acts in the schools were enacted to different extents in her practices.

The Chinese discourses of disciplining often came into the process of enactment too. Once Meiling mentioned, “When I first came teaching here my mom said, make sure you don’t spank the kids (qianwan bukeyi da xiaohai). I said I know. But scolding is necessary (danshi ma haishi yaoma).” When I asked how she scolded though, she only said calling out the students’ names. Scolding as an act carries its cultural implications and meanings, as Holland et al. (1998) observed in their study on the Hindu community. While it is a harsh activity in the Chinese context, “calling out the students’ names” might be a meaning Meiling ascribed to it in the new context. By sometimes seeing it necessary, it seemed she was still negotiating between the Chinese storyline of scolding and the American one of withholding it. It was interesting that Meiling’s mother reminded her not to spank the students. On one hand, the lack of legitimacy of the discourse was accessible to her mother in Taiwan; on the other hand, the accessibility was limited since the reminder seemed to assume that spanking was still an option that Meiling might be inclined to take, while in fact even calling out the students’ names in public was almost a breach to the inscribed act. The negotiation of the discourses and positioning were highlighted in the exchange between Meiling as an immigrant teacher and her mother who was a cultural outsider to the American schools.

Meiling summarized the “American” way and the “Chinese” way in simple terms

when talking about disciplining. The American way was “letting the students speak up, and express their opinions (rang tamen fayan, rang tamen fabiao yijian)...like letting them loose, not restricting too much (xiang fangshou, buyao xianzhi taiduo).” The Chinese way, by contrast, meant stricter rules and more scolding. Her practices, on the other hand, showed more complex processes of negotiation and positioning. Meiling believed that a successful teacher should attract the students to her class and make them like her class. At the same time, however, she quoted her mentor teacher that “teacher and students should maintain a good boundary, don’t let the students climb onto your head or cross the boundary... You don’t need to care whether you’re friend with these teenagers,” which she thought “made sense (youdaoli)” too. “Being likable,” “being friends” and “being in control” and “keep the boundary” worked together in the disciplining practices and required constant positioning on the part of the teacher. The discourses that “made sense” to Meiling may nevertheless be negotiated and contested in practice, which might be shown in a story of disciplining in her class. One day a student was embarrassed and refused to do the activities because Meiling told him to pull up his low pants in front of the class:

Then I started talking about Fengshui, and he was interested, so he picked up his notebook and started taking notes. He was angry but then he forgot, kids are like that. Sometimes you can’t just confront them, you need to coax, but then you can’t make them feel they’re childish either. This I still need to learn.

It seemed being likable and being in control mixed in a series of positioning in the classroom practice. For Meiling who was used to the respect and hierarchy in the Chinese school culture, the storylines of “climbing onto the teacher’s head,” “crossing the boundary,” or “being friends” probably also took on some additional layer of meaning. “In Taiwan, we don’t have the problem...The teacher is an authority figure (weiyuan de

daibiao)...They care about you too, but you know she is the teacher, you can't be impolite." The idea of the "caring" teacher who was at the same time entitled to physical punishment of the students pointed to different frames of reference to respect, caring, and relation that played a role in Meiling's figuring of the new school world.

### **Being Chinese: The Self-Consciousness**

#### **"Restrained": Negotiating the Distance**

Meiling's self positioning in the school world was reflected in a sense of distance from the students and their culture. Even though being a teacher of the Chinese language and culture gave Meiling the claim on membership and authority, there are times when she felt the lack of membership in the American culture and the school, which echoes the theme of marginalization in immigrant teachers (Remennick, 2002). Meiling was concerned about her own English language proficiency when she first began teaching. She was nervous because she had difficulty with some students' names, which were African Americans names that she couldn't read or pronounce right. In addition, she felt her English was inadequate, "I can't talk like native speakers no matter how hard I try.... So when they were having behavior problems, like talking out loud or being noisy, and I couldn't get them quiet down, I would be nervous." While she observed American colleagues talk to the class in elaborate and cushioned ways, she couldn't do it herself, "I can't talk like other teachers... I would skip all [elaborates] and directly say, no shouting, no talking, can you go back to your seat."

The students sometimes pointed it out in class when Meiling's pronunciation was not clear, especially when the class was noisy. "Did you say teacher or T-shirt?" They'd ask, or question when her "red" sounded a bit like "reid." Once a student asked, "How do you say the cat in the hat?" Seeing Meiling looking puzzled, a girl explained, "Where they have a

picture with a cat wearing a hat, they call it the cat in the hat. It looks like this...” She acted. “Ooh.” Meiling understood, “So you say mao dai maozi.” Another time a boy asked her how to spell jacuzzi and Meiling let him ask the class. Sometimes Meiling would ask what it was when the class laughed on some remark by a classmate. Once when the students talked about Big Bang, a singing group, Meiling did not know who that was. “They are terrorists,” Some joked and the class laughed. Meiling admitted that “sometimes they ask weird questions, I don’t know how to answer them, so I don’t.”

Meiling said she could not be real close and personal with the students. While the teacher next door stood every day in the hallway and chatted with the students when they came in, she felt “restrained (youjuxian)” and couldn’t do it because of the distance she felt she had from the students and their culture. “I still can’t feel with the students (sheshen chudi wei tamen xiang) why they have behavior problems etc., when they’re noisy or don’t want to learn or complain.” Every morning she stood in the hallway like other teachers, but instead of chatting with the students, she only said “good morning” to them.

The day after the Thanksgiving holiday Meiling shared her own holiday experience in class after some students shared theirs, including her potluck party and Taiwanese bubble tea. It seemed she was being personal with this sharing. When some students told of holiday experiences of eating up pounds of candies, or Thanksgiving turkey, or a whole family trip to a casino, she did not comment. She did ask questions to a Hmong student when she talked about their ethnic festival. I suspect the ethnic affinity or common minority status made it easier for her to relate to the Hmong students than to students of the majority ethnicities, although that was the only occasion I observed any

difference in her talking to the students.

Sometimes the different inscribed acts in terms of teacher student relations resulted in more dramatic encounters. Once in her first year of teaching a 6<sup>th</sup> grade student asked her for a hug, “I was like, uh? You know the 6<sup>th</sup> graders, they just came up from elementary, a little boy...but my culture limits my behaviors after all (wo de wenhua haishi hui juxian wode xingwei juzhi), I couldn’t do it.” Meiling emphasized that hugging was not the Chinese culture, “Even though you’re in a different culture, your native culture teaches you since a child that things should be like this, so I also adjust myself (ni congxiaode wenhua jiaoni shi zheyangzi), I’m actually open-minded, but there is a limit.” When I asked why the boy wanted a hug Meiling said she didn’t know. Meiling knew “it’s not my culture,” but she was not really clear whether it was “American culture,” and did not know why they would do it, whether it was common, or what was expected of the teacher, even though she was vaguely conscious of the age and gender factors in addition to “cultural difference.” The uncertainty of meaning accompanied her decision based on the cultural “limit.” The school world with its inscribed acts had a figured side with elusive meanings, and more so for an immigrant teacher with less cultural membership.

### **The Other Side: Changes and Efforts**

In spite of the distance and otherness she felt, I observed a degree of trust between Meiling and students, as constantly shown in the students’ engagement in learning, or the frank discussion on the language and culture. Once when Meiling made a mistake in a pinyin spelling a girl asked, “Is it y-a-n?” A boy commented, “Why are you correcting the Teacher?” and another girl explained to her neighbors, trying to defend her, “She is from

Taiwan. She grew up reading characters...” The students attributed some authority to Meiling the “Teacher,” and showed a degree of tolerance and acknowledgement in spite of her mistake.

A special occasion further showed possible spontaneous changes in the distance and relation amid the interplay of multiple memberships. When the class performed the music video song *Today You Will Marry Me* for the school talent show, Meiling joined the students and did the rap part of wedding pledge, and rehearsals were done in class prior to the show. I was a little surprised to see her become a performer and almost entertainer for a moment, given her usual demure manner. Once in the class rehearsal when she completed the rap and reached “Ni yuanyi zheyang zuo ma (Do you want to do it)?” The whole class shouted “Yes I do,” and cheered and applauded. “What are we clapping for?” A boy asked. “For Ms. Liang,” His neighbor answered. Meiling was standing at the corner front facing the other side of the classroom when she sang—partly to look at the lyrics on the screen. At that moment a different side of relation seemed to be enacted and improvised in the class and Meiling was less like a teacher with authority or a cultural outsider to the students. The distance was for a moment diminished in the lyrics of the song, and when the students said out loud “yes I do” following her part they seemed to have entered the imaginary world of the video.

In our interview talk Meiling said the decision to let the class perform in the school show was indeed a conscious effort to change her habitual self, although she did not comment on her own singing a part—she only self deprecated in a typical Chinese manner when I said she did well. She explained how she came to the decision for the school performance:

I hadn't planned to do the performance... I think it's a cultural difference, I found many teachers, or Americans, they know well how to show themselves (biaoxian ziji), I think it's a cultural difference, I don't know how to sell myself, like us Chinese, or Taiwanese, your parents and teachers all teach you to be humble (qianxu), not to be conceited (bu keyi jiaoao). I'm not conceited, I'm being humble, but I feel sometimes when you have something and you don't think it's that good, but others would say, this is not bad, you should show it. In this culture, you'd feel you need to change a little bit, still you shouldn't forget to be humble, but at least you can let other people know that you have the Chinese program in the school and students are learning Chinese, ... Sometimes I should take the opportunity. I don't mean we should promote ourselves (tuixiao ziji), but at least we'd tell others we have Chinese classes at the school.

For Meiling being Chinese is to be “humble,” reticent, and self effacing according to the traditional Confucian discourses, which ran contrast to the individualism and self promotion discourses she observed in the mainstream culture. Meiling said she believed “silence is gold” and as the only Asian teacher in the school she never talked much in the staff meetings, and she felt very different from other teachers. “I listen more and don't share as much... because they all talk fast, one after another... I guess they think I'm quiet and I don't talk much. I don't know.” Meiling said she couldn't use the American way to communicate with others, “I'm still of the Chinese and Taiwan culture, since I grew up there. I can't take out that culture (wo meiyou banfa ba zhege wenhua choudiao).” I wonder whether Meiling believed staff meetings in Taiwan or China would be quiet, or Chinese people never show themselves, but her attribution to culture was part of indexing a different cultural world in the process of figuring the new cultural world. Meiling positioned herself by claiming affiliation to and membership in her native cultural world. The performance of the song, however, was an improvisation on the discourses that, at least for a moment, changed the positioning. The discourse of “showing oneself” was making sense to Meiling and she decided to “take the opportunity,” conforming to a degree to the inscribed acts of the new cultural world, even though she tried to maintain

its distinction from “being conceited,” or self promotion. The Chinese discourse of being humble was not abandoned, and Meiling insisted on its practice (“I’m being humble”), but with the singing and performance on stage being humble no longer meant keeping silence and effacing oneself, therefore changed its meaning in the new context. Between “Silence is gold” and “I feel sometimes you should show it,” Meiling was positioning herself in the school world, and the performance of the pop song was one instance among the many possibilities of improvisations and changes.

### **The Moral Teacher**

#### **The Confucian Values**

The Confucian values were a big part of the discourse of “cultural differences” Meiling constantly referred to, including “being humble.” Coming from the Confucian culture, Meiling believed it was the teacher’s duty to teach these morals and values to the students, even though it was not a storyline in the new school world—a stance that characterized another side of her figurative and positional identity as an immigrant teacher . Her talks on teaching morals started from a snack story and lasted through all three interviews. When she first started teaching, she was shocked and took it hard when she once brought Taiwan snacks to class and some students actually complained that it did not taste good.

I’d bring awards and treats to them. In the beginning I found they took it for granted. Like the snacks from Taiwan that my mom sent me, I brought here to share, and they actually complained, this doesn’t taste good, can you bring something else next time? Really, you’d think, if it were in Taiwan, how happy we’d be, we’d thank the teacher, how could you tell the teacher to bring something else next time?...It was too much (kuazhang), at that time, my jaw fell on hearing it.

Meiling mentioned that her students were outspoken and “good at complaining,”

so the treats were probably just another target that came handy for the students. For

Meiling who was used to the Taiwan school context, however, where the students bow and thank the teacher everyday for teaching, thankfulness was expected when the teacher brought treats, especially treats that were precious to herself. While the young students said whatever they thought and did not see the need to please the teacher, Meiling interpreted it as something moral. It seemed the teacher and students were having different values that indexed different cultural worlds.

Meiling had a deep-rooted belief in thankfulness and respect, as already shown in her discussion on the standing ritual in previous sections, which was a value that Chinese children were taught by teachers and parents since childhood and she strongly affiliated herself with, “Like when we eat we’d say every grain of the food is somebody else’s hard work (shuizhi panzhong can, lili jie xinku). You hear that from teachers and parents all the time since a kid.” “Everything you’ve had since birth come from other people’s help and efforts, like you can go to school, you have things to eat and to wear.” Whereas in the US schools, the students take the teachers’ efforts, as well as education in general, for granted. “How happy is schooling, free lunch, you know, in our country, there are kids who don’t have lunch or don’t have school, but they don’t understand, they don’t know they have good opportunities.” For Meiling, one important duty of the teacher is to make the students understand and appreciate their chances of education.

Meiling identified herself with the Confucian values, which she at other times termed as “Asian” or “oriental,” of being polite and grateful, observing proprieties, having respect for elders and teachers, being unselfish and thinking of other people first, and sharing what one had with other people, and believed these values should be part of the teaching in the Chinese class, which was not merely cultural knowledge, but

something to be practiced and to bring changes to students' lives, as with the case of gratitude and appreciation of education. The teachers carried more responsibilities than what an institutional role entailed. "Perhaps their parents are too busy to teach them... If you don't teach them they'd never know." Meiling seemed to conform to the Asian conception that teachers should be moral guide to their students (Ha, 2006; 2007) and should "propel the doctrines"—the Confucian doctrines of morals and respect, before "imparting knowledge." Seen from the figured world perspective, her characterization of the "Confucian" values had a figurative nature with assigned meanings, as with the various storylines in the US culture and schools. For example, she defined gratitude as Confucian and Chinese while it might be a discourse common in many cultural worlds. Discourses like "being humble," as discussed in the previous section, are also subject to situated interpretations. It was her self positioning in the discourses and their orchestration into the new school world that contributed to her identity as a Chinese immigrant teacher.

### **Teaching "the Small Things"**

Meiling believed that the cultivation of respect and manners should start from "small things (xiaode xijie)," including sitting straight in class, putting feet under the desk, keeping things in order, and not chewing gum, which she believed was "a matter of attitude (taidu)," "It makes you look like you don't care... If you can't even sit straight, how can you learn well?" One day the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students made a mess of the classroom and Meiling told them off, and expressed her feelings in an interview:

I asked whether your parents taught you to put things back into place. I asked them and they didn't speak. I asked whether they know if they misplace things the custodian will have a hard time. I felt they weren't listening, but I just let all those out (wo juede tamen tingbu xiaqu, keshi wo jiu yigunao jiangchulai), I feel I

shouldn't have, but these basic things (jiben de dongxi), I think they should learn. If you didn't do your homework, forget it, or you didn't get good grades, but these small things (xiaode xijie), I feel my mindset is still very oriental (wode sixiang haishi hen dongfang). I can't be like the Americans, to be very free (hen suixing), to [allow] putting up the feet in class, or not sitting straight, they think it's ok, but I can't, I'd correct them, I have to.... I don't know, I can't help, it's part of my culture and it's deep rooted, what you do and how you sit in class.

In the class I observed, I never saw Meiling lecturing the students on their mistakes, perhaps because it was a second-year and "well-behaved" class. In any case, for Meiling, the "basic" or "small things" like putting things in order were even more important than homework and grades, which probably carried a sense of Confucian propriety and were related to morals. Meiling was aware that lecturing was not quite a legitimate discourse or effective approach, and the students "weren't listening," but she felt urged to do it. She asked the students to think of their parents' words, and to think for other people (the custodian). Because parents in the American culture might not be the authority discourse whose words are to be obeyed as in the Confucian culture, Meiling and her students might again have had different indexes in the dialogue. In this case, however, she did not see herself primarily a cultural outsider and learner; instead, she was a legitimate teacher supported by the strong discourse of Confucian culture, and believed in the relevance and legitimacy of the discourse even in a different cultural world.

At other times Meiling commented on the different purposes in Chinese and American education.

A successful teacher should make the kids learn how to be a man of virtues (zuoren chushi de daoli). But here they don't put emphasis on this, I don't know. It's different emphasis... American education, I feel they don't take care of a lot of details (tamen buzhuoyi xiaode xijie).

Again she was referring to the "small things" that carried a sense of propriety and were related to "virtues." Meiling was figuring the "American education" against the Chinese educational world where she came from, which in its turn was also a world

figured. In spite of her uncertainty about the inscribed acts in the cultural worlds, shown in the phrase “I don’t know,” she tried to orchestrate the discourse into the new school world, even though the “virtues” may imply stricter rules and less individual freedom than embraced by the new cultural world. In an interview talk Meiling further discussed teaching the Confucian tradition of teacher-student relation:

Meiling: Maybe they don’t understand now, but one day they’d know why we Chinese do all this. Why we respect teachers. I heard that here in the US people don’t want to be teachers, they don’t want to be a teacher if they have other choices, here they don’t have the kind of respect for teachers (meiyou dui laoshi nazhong zunjing). So I’d tell the students why we are doing this, and let them feel (rang tamen tiyan yixia), because this is the Chinese class, what Chinese culture or Taiwanese culture is like, about relation with the teacher, the teacher teaches us and we should be grateful to her, like that.

Y: Do you think the students can learn it?

Meiling: I think one day they will. At this age, some of them might feel it (youxieren ganjuedao), some not, it’s a rebellious age, I think one day ... You’d thank the teacher for not taking you as a bad kid and not teaching you. You’d feel grateful to the teacher, and you had learned from the teacher how to do things and be with other people (zuoren chushi).

There were two layers in the students’ acceptance of the values: understanding why the Chinese do it and having the same values themselves. The two were connected and understanding the practice might be the beginning of accepting the value for themselves. Meiling emphasized the future and long term influence of the teaching in the students’ lives and believed “one day” the students will understand. Her confidence might again come from the strong discourse of the Confucian culture, at least in her own conception. However, when she said “because this is a Chinese class,” Meiling was not very certain of the justification for the choice: Why should the American students accept the Chinese values in addition to learning about them, which might conflict with their own mainstream values? Could Meiling as a Chinese teacher change the “kind of

respect” for teachers, for example, through her teaching of Confucian teacher respect? If the values were indeed changed, to whatever extent, identities were indeed being constructed in the interplay of two cultural world.

Changes did take place, according to Meiling, although in small ways. Meiling tried to emphasize the idea of sharing to the students, starting from herself bringing treats to class. Once when I was in class and they were having treats, Meiling told the students to make sure to share with “the guest” too. Meiling said she was glad to find some changes in the students after two or three semesters. “You’d discover, even if it’s only a couple of students, they have changed a little (you yidian gaibian), they’d bring snacks to share. Even though it’s not any big change, there is a little, and it builds up. It happens gradually.” Meiling’s perception of the “change” and her delight once again showed her belief and positioning in the school world. It seemed the “small” Chinese teacher was having some real strength in her readiness to bring changes in her students.

### **Further discussion**

This section is further discussion of the case studies. The analysis attempts to complement the single case analysis through fleshing out the analytical framework and comparing across the cases, which is organized around what Holland et al. (1998) term the four contexts of identity: Figuring the American school, positioning, orchestration of discourses, and the making of the a Chinese language class. These four contexts represent different aspects of the teachers’ professional identity, although they are also interrelated in many ways, which will be shown in the discussion.

### **Figuring the American School**

Like all beginning teachers (McCormack et al., 2006), the two teachers in my

study grapple with the demands of teaching full time which include programming, catering to a range of student needs, assessment and reporting, and the overriding issues of classroom management. The immigrant teachers, however, displayed a heightened awareness of the school culture because of their immigrant background, as shown in many examples in the single case discussion. The teachers were exposed to numerous discourses in the schools, from grades on the wall, extra credits, assignment folders, to standing in the hallway and chatting with the students, or pedagogical practices used by other teachers and shared in teachers' conferences or workshops, many of which form a contrast to the practices in the Chinese schools with which they were familiar. There is a sense of the "standard plot" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53) in the form of accepted and common practices, which were appropriated to different degrees by the teachers in their classrooms, although both teachers were still in the process of exploring various instructional approaches and haven't settled on a systematic curriculum. Amy, for example, mixed content-based unit (for the Spring Festival) with proficiency-oriented teaching (for the school wide language proficiency test), while Meiling was still negotiating the practices advocated in training courses and workshops and had yet to attend the trainings for the IB curriculum.

For the Chinese teachers, the teaching practices were often figured against the other cultural world of the Chinese schools with its competing storylines, and a sense of legitimacy accompanied the interpretations. The teachers were well aware that some practices, such as physical punishment, were not legitimate. Many others, such as hierarchical teacher authority or heavy homework assignments, were questioned or avoided. The Chinese pedagogical storylines were often perceived as illegitimate in the

US context.

The process of figuring was also reflected in the labeling and categorization, which is a social action (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and rendered people characters in the school worlds. Categorization of the students formed an important part of the teachers' perceptions of the schools. While Amy defined "American kids" as equal, independent and individualistic, Meiling described her students as "kuangzhang (wild)" but sometimes "dongshi (mature)" and "tinghua (obedient)." It was interesting that Meiling tended to use the Chinese categorization rather than the American, which indexed the Chinese school world, as discussed in the single case section. If language is inevitably and inextricably ideological and reflects lived perspectives on the world (Holland et al., 1998), terms like "tinghua (obedient)" and "meida meixiao (no distinction between the older and younger)" reflected a figuring against the Chinese ideological perspective and is an example of resorting to the teacher's native culture in figuring the school world in the US. There seemed to be a degree of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) in the teachers' comments, both in the discourses of equality, independence, and boundary, which reflected the mainstream discourse in the US classrooms, and in the Chinese discourse of obedient and respectful students. The interplay of these discourses formed the "internally persuasive discourses" (Bakhtin, 1981) which characterized the immigrant teachers' conception of the schools.

In addition to the mixture of discourses, the uncertainty of meaning of the discourses was featured in the process of figuring. While Amy considered herself familiar with many of the inscribed acts, Meiling's narratives of her learning to teach contained some tension, perhaps due to her relatively shorter immigrant background. However,

there was considerable uncertainty in the figuring process by both teachers. In the figured worlds, “meaning depends upon a collectively remembered history of use and interpretation that is a common part of the social commentary that accompanies most interaction” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 36). This was evidenced in many of the acts or cultural artifacts in the schools, such as practices like telling the students to switch chairs, or sending them to the behavior room, which all carry their own history of use and social interpretations. The immigrant teachers were trying to participate in this collective interpretation, although the history and meanings of the practices are often less clear and more uncertain because their lack of the collective memory. Amy’s interpretation of the dunce’s cap was a dramatic example of this process of figuring and uncertainty, when she was not clear about the nature of the practice, connected it to various other practices, and made her own decision based on her own cultural background and experiences.

In the figured world, “multiplicity and partiality” exist in the interpretation of actions; It is often unclear “which (or how many) figurations are instanced by interaction” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 56). Greater uncertainty and different interpretation are often characteristic of the immigrant teachers’ professional practices and identity. This is more obvious when the two teachers made different interpretations of the same acts. Both teachers, for example, called on individual student names in class for disciplining. Meiling learned from a management workshop that it was not a best practice because it would embarrass and demotivate the students, although she could not help it and still did it at times. Amy, however, believed it was acceptable and helpful. She even pointed out that students knew it was shameful so it helped them behave, although from my observation in class, the students were not really shamed by it. At the same time both

teachers were aware it would be an acceptable practice in the Chinese context whereas it was different for the “American students.” Whether the act put the students in a bad light or helped disciplining and learning were subject to different interpretations, and the meaning of the practice and its effectiveness remained unclear and contextual to the teachers, in spite of the storylines circulated in teacher talks or workshops.

The multiple interpretations were also reflected in the conception of various other discourses, for which a shared meaning is often lacking and interpretations were further complicated by competing discourses from a different cultural world. Discussions on teacher’s authority and respect were a good example. While Amy believed her students showed respect by listening, Meiling thought the students did not have much respect, although they both commanded attention and learning from the students. Their different definitions of respect probably arose from the different degrees they resorted to the discourses of respect as equality and respect as hierarchical deference in the two different cultures. Even in each teacher’s conception, there was evidence of contradictions, as with Amy’s understanding of the “American kids” discussed in the single case section, who were both more independent and needed more coaxing for work compared with students in China.

At the same time, certain Chinese practices when carried over to the US context also changed their meanings due to the multiple and partial interpretations. The standing ritual at the beginning of the classes used by both teachers, for example, obviously lost its meaning as a sign of deference and Confucian respect to the teachers. Various other cultural artifacts and practices, such as the traditional Chinese names or chorus recitation of poems used in Amy’s class, or the fashion magazines and music videos used by

Meiling, also took on different meanings and significance, as discussed in the previous sections. The “Chinese” teacher, likewise, was also a figured concept. Amy attributed “caring” to American teachers while Meiling attributed “moral” to Chinese teachers. Amy said in Taiwan teachers and students don’t have personal relationships, while Meiling believed it was here in the US that a teacher doesn’t have close relation with students. One found distance in the traditional hierarchy, the other saw it in the institutional roles and perhaps the different cultural memberships. The contradictions again showed the uncertainty of meanings of the cultural practices.

The “capability to figure social practice...is at the same time a capability to figure it otherwise than it is” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 143). While this was true for all teachers, the multiple and often competing storylines available to the Chinese immigrant teachers made the figuring process more complex.

### **Positioning: Who is the Chinese Teacher?**

The positional aspect of identity was clearly demonstrated in both teachers’ classroom practices, in the form of moment-to-moment interaction and the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The teachers’ positioning in relation to the students was already discussed in detail in the single case sections, both in their classroom interactions with the students and in their own interpretations. Rather than a decided, finite role, the positioning was reflected in constant changes, such as Meiling’s singing the song with the students, or Amy’s calling the students by their Chinese or English names or sometimes “honey,” or Amy’s classroom policy on the wall and after class talk to a student, or Meiling’s saying “thanks” after the standing ritual. Each moment in the classroom seemed to reflect

different aspect of the positional identity in the school world, and the teachers' stated beliefs on the relation only formed a small although revealing part of the identity.

Self positioning among memberships also formed an important part of the teachers' positional identity. For both teachers, the disadvantage of immigrant status and lack of membership in the mainstream language and culture was offset to some degree by the authority in the target language and culture in the classrooms. At the same time, Meiling often said she felt different from other teachers in the school while Amy said everybody was different, and they had different ways of self positioning among the multiple memberships. Meiling displayed a considerable degree of "arrests," which is "representations of self at a particular time that people try to reassert, even under new conditions" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 55). She often expressed that her Chinese culture was deep rooted and she could not change it, and constantly identified with the Confucian culture and values. Amy, by contrast, never chose to highlight her cultural roots. Rather, she embraced the mainstream cultural as well as a multicultural perspective.

On the other hand, the ways they represented and interpreted their own culture sometimes belied their stances too. While Amy was keen on Chinese cultural artifacts and traditional festivals, Meiling did not conform to the stereotypical Chinese culture, such as traditional costumes and rituals, in her selection of the teaching materials. She opted for a popular youth culture that was more globalized and less traditional Chinese. By affiliating herself with the popular youth culture, she identified with a youth sub cultural membership while distanced herself from stereotypical traditional culture. Amy's enthusiasm on cultural artifacts on one hand and multicultural perspective ("doesn't have to be Chinese") on the other formed a contrast to Meiling, who did not seek to be

traditionally “Chinese” but at the same time claimed Chinese cultural roots all the time. In a way, I believe Amy was conforming to the American perspective on Chinese culture. The emphasis on cultural artifacts and traditions paradoxically showed her membership in the American culture, as they are the most recognizable and accepted parts of the culture from the perspective of the outsiders, in the same way that a tourist is often more aware and interested in the cultural products and practices than the local people. Meiling on the other hand was more focused on the more invisible cultural perspectives and values, such as the Confucian doctrines on virtues and conducts. The differences reflected the complexity of multiple memberships and positioning in the cultural worlds.

### **Orchestration of Discourses: Chinese, American, and Beyond**

Given the multiple storylines in both educational cultures, the Chinese language classes became the “space of authoring” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 63) in which the teachers exercised choice and agency in the form of improvisations on the various classroom discourses. The improvisations, like self positioning, were reflected in numerous daily pedagogical or instructional practices, such as the way Amy told the students what to do in different occasions, her use of fortune cookies for birthdays in the class, or Meiling’s adding Fengshui to the house project or choice of videos, her occasional discussion on her own personal life, or her speech on keeping the classroom clean to the students. Among other things, Meiling’s language games and activities in class might be a major effort in improvisation in her teaching. The self positioning discussed in the previous section was also part of the improvisations that contributed to the moment-to-moment construction of identity.

At the same time, the improvisations are also restricted as they are still products

of social history. “Although individuals constantly construct and reconstruct their own mediating devices, most of the constructions are not original...Even productions we might call innovative have developed in the flow of social interaction and depend intimately upon it for their significance” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 36). Meiling’s choices of music videos and youth fashion magazines, for example, may actually be rooted in the demand of the mainstream culture and the teenager students.

In the figured worlds, authorship is a matter of orchestration, of “arranging the identifiable social discourses/practices that are one’s resources in order to craft a response” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 272). For the immigrant Chinese teachers the orchestration was reflected not only in conforming to the mainstream teaching discourses and improvisations, but also in the mixture of Chinese and American conceptions and practices, and achieved in different ways for different teachers.

Both teachers took great pains to make the students learn, although in very different ways. Amy struggled to balance between students’ own choice and teacher’s push, while Meiling tried her best to engage the students with new activities and games in class. Both teachers muster whatever resources available in an effort to craft their own response to a good Chinese language class. For Amy the response meant a classroom full of cultural artifacts and students who work hard on homework assignments and did well in quizzes and tests. For Meiling it meant fun and engaging lessons where the students were mature and respectful in the Chinese ways. While pronunciation practice meant drills for Amy, it was pop songs for Meiling. Amy embraces the mainstream values of equality and freedom while Meiling emphasized the traditional Chinese values. Even though they were both from Taiwan, the “Chinese culture” they presented were very

different, from the hardworking Taiwan students in uniforms to the youth magazine with “weird” fashion figures, from the traditional Chinese new year videos with people in red ethnic costumes to the music video of Western church wedding. For Meiling, long term goals of schooling seemed important, both for moral teaching and for teaching culture. For Amy, an institutional role that featured both caring and boundary was the goal. There is a myriad ways in which the teachers engaged in their orchestration of the discourses and authorship of their classroom space.

In the process of orchestration, the Chinese discourses had a special dimension in their detachment from the new context. “Cultural resources take form from elements that may have been generated in other contexts and brought together in the mix of struggles that may lack any logical connection to the world being improvised in social play” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 285). The greeting ritual, as discussed earlier, was an example of transfer from another context and lacking a logical connection to the new school world, although negotiation was made and new meanings were quickly assigned to the act. Many other “cultural” practices, such as Fengshui, similarly lacked a logical connection and needed support by way of reinterpretation from the mainstream perspective. When Amy used the method of poem recitation, she tried to make the logical connection by pointing out that recitation was also used in the Spanish classroom, or by other experienced Chinese teachers in the public schools, rather than that it was a traditional literacy practice in the Chinese context, although the latter may well be the real underlying reason and her own choice of the practice out of many other possibilities was crucial in her authorship of the Chinese class.

At times, the space of authoring became a contested space when the competing

storylines could not be incorporated into the practice by quick logical connections. For example, Meiling was shocked at the students' free movement and rebellious manner and retained her deep conviction about the Confucian values on education and the teacher as moral guide. She believed being a Chinese teacher meant being strict with the students on small things. At the same time, she was deeply aware of the different American school culture of "freedom." She sometimes lectured the students on their manner but then had the consciousness that she should not have done it. Amy's efforts in getting the students do more work sometimes also contradicted with her discourse of "choice," as discussed in the earlier section. The competing discourses forged a space of struggle where the teacher made constant decisions and choices.

### **The Making of a Chinese Language Class**

Through the processes of figuring, positioning, and orchestration of the discourses, the teachers were involved in the making of the cultural world of the Chinese language class. The language classes, including its teaching strategies, instructional patterns and interactions, form a figured world in which standard plots and competing storylines are orchestrated in moment-to-moment figuring and positioning. Numerous cultural artifacts and practices, such as the Chinese decorations and names, the bowing ritual, and other materials, are used to "concretize" the Chinese cultural world, juxtaposed with the cultural artifacts and practices in the American schools. Worlds are being enacted and identities formed. In the figured world theory, Holland et al. believe that "the interchange or convertibility of the two contexts of identity provides opportunities to reform either by recourse to the other" (1998, p. 143). The immigrant language teachers both conformed to the mainstream culture and resorted to their own culture, changing some of the rituals

and key events. For language teachers this is further complicated by the task of teaching culture, which is one of the goals of the language classes. The teachers could be caught between teaching the culture as knowledge and teaching it as a practice with the underlying values, when the values are both marginalized outside the mainstream culture and the target of learning in the class. Both teachers, for example, had doubts about the standing ritual at the beginning of the classes, and Meiling especially attached much thinking and efforts to the teaching of the traditional Chinese values. Some scholars point out that in the US schools, the learning of ‘authentic’ national culture means educating students about Eurocentric curriculum knowledge, race-neutral philosophy, mainstream Christian traditions, and meritocracy values (Subedi, 2008). The different experiences and choices by the two immigrant teachers in my study showed that the Chinese language teachers have the option of bringing in different discourses of culture and values in their teaching, and agency is achieved in the process, although the degree of their choice and control might remain highly contextual. These improvisations and changes are always “being appropriated by people as heuristic means to guide, authorize, legitimate and encourage their own and others’ behavior” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 18). The teachers were constructing a world of Chinese language class which might become legitimate practices that in turn encourage both themselves and other teachers. “Human life is inexplicable without our abilities to figure worlds, play at them, act them out, and then make them socially, culturally, and thus materially consequential” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 280). In the stories of the two Chinese immigrant teachers I see this process of making consequential the figured world of the school. Looking back at the classrooms of Amy and Meiling, I feel I indeed entered two small figured worlds of Chinese as foreign

language class and participated in the explication of their lives in those worlds.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion**

My study has tried to answer the research questions of how the Chinese immigrant teachers navigate the cultural and educational practices in the figured world of foreign language classes in the US public schools, and how the two competing storylines of “Chinese” and “American” teachers interplay in their professional identity. The findings of this study showed that the processes are complex and highly contextualized, reflecting positioning in multiple memberships and orchestration of various discourses, as discussed in the cross case analysis. In the following section I will further summarize three areas of major findings in the study that both answered the research questions and contributed to existing literature on teacher identity.

Many parts of the findings confirm theories put forth in previous research on language and immigrant teachers. For example, the teachers displayed an awareness of teaching and schooling in the new culture that the native teachers may not have (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). Consciousness of the mainstream American and the Chinese cultures and the constant identification and positioning showed that the teacher’s whole identity is at play in the classroom (Varghese et al., 2005), and that their professional identities are especially connected to their personal identities (Galindo, 1996). The process of negotiation of the classroom practices was fully reflected in the finding, and the same struggle in legitimacy (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Grossman et al., 1999) was observed. In providing thick descriptions based on participant observations and interviews, my study made several major contributions to the professional identity of Chinese immigrant teachers in the foreign language classrooms in the US public schools.

## **Contributions of the Study**

### **Chinese and American Ways: the Storylines**

A central question in the study was the interplay between the “American” and “Chinese” storylines of teaching. Previous research has not provided clear accounts on the nature of the pedagogical storylines, such as the “American way of teaching,” and the distinction between the grand narratives and the situated teaching practices (For example, Feuerverger, 1997; Myles et al., 2006; Remennick, 2002). My study has shown that while certain cultural realities exist, there is a great deal of uncertainty and figuring involved in the inscribed acts and meaning. Simple attribution of practices and identity to cultures as was done in many research studies (Curdt-Christiansen, 2006; De Courcy, 1997; Monzo & Rueda, 2003) does not capture the complexity of the acts and meanings. As far as the “American way of teaching” was concerned, for example, the language classes by the two immigrant teachers, under the respective influences of IB guidelines, school district requirements, language teaching training and workshops, and advice from mentor teachers and experienced teachers, exhibited remarkable differences not only in the practices, but also in the idealized goals that the teachers were striving for. The relational aspect of the storylines showed the same uncertainty and multiple interpretations, such as the understanding of equality and respect, and the “American students” in general.

The Chinese storylines, at the same time, were subject to similar processes of figuring and uncertainty. My study revealed a range of conceptions and interpretations of the storylines by the Chinese teachers, such as the Chinese literacy practices, and the conceptions of hierarchy and authority. Complexity, individualized interpretations, and even contradictions were evidenced in the practices and conceptions of the two teachers.

As proposed in the theory of the figured world, room for individual interpretation of the storylines plays an important part in the figuring process. The teachers' own categorization of the practices became a most important part of their professional identity.

In fact, when examined contextually in relatively long term it has proved difficult to make broad generalizations about the teaching cultures and the teachers' professional identities associated with the culture as done in some previous research studies. The study by Pratt et al. (1999) on Hong Kong and Western expatriate teachers, for example, believed that the Hong Kong teachers characterized effective teachers as having a close, protective relationship with students, while the Western teachers framed the relationship in terms of institutional roles and responsibilities. For the Chinese teachers the primary responsibility was to take students systematically through a clear set of tasks, while Western teachers by contrast perceived teachers as "facilitators" of student learning and emphasized classroom activity. Comparing this study with my research findings, we can see that neither teacher fit the characterizations made in the study. Rather, they displayed a complex mixture of these and other discourses. While both Chinese teachers, Amy was more like the teacher who took the students through sets of tasks with assessment as the goal, while Meiling put much more emphasis on classroom activity. In terms of roles, Amy saw her own institutional role in her conception of boundary and the students as "clients," while at the same time she believed in being a caring teacher and cultivated personal relationships with the students. By contrast, Meiling neither practiced personal relationship nor saw "clients" in the students. Instead, she cherished the Chinese ideal of long term moral education of the students. The practices by both teachers and the contrast between them showed the situated nature of their professional identity and their own

positioning in the teaching practices.

### **Immigrant and Language Teacher: the Interplay**

Findings in my study added to the research on the social identity and its negotiation of language teachers (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Kumagai, 2007), the inseparability of language teachers' identity from the cultures they teach and their personal identities (Armour, 2004; Morgan, 2004), and how the way in which minority teachers interpret their cultural identity plays a critical role in their professional identity (Galindo & Olgún, 1996). Understanding of these processes was deepened by the lens of figured world, where constant positioning among memberships was observed, as discussed in detail in the previous sections. The immigrant language teachers appeared to have a layered identity (Pennington, 2002) that involved multiple discourses.

The marginalization theme common in the studies on immigrant teachers and the tensions caused by their immigrant status (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004; Remennick, 2002) was not apparent in my study. Although language proficiency and cultural membership played a part in the practices and identities of both teachers, and conflicts resulting from the different Chinese educational background and beliefs existed, the "struggle for voice" and marginalization mostly gave way to the positive learning experiences as discussed in Elbaz-Luwisch's study on immigrant teachers (2004). The result could be related to many factors, including immigrant status, additional cultural membership in Amy's case, or particular school context and personal traits of the individual teachers. One of the major factors, however, was the subject they taught—the teachers' own native language and culture, in which they had unquestioned authority. The lack of membership in the mainstream culture was compensated by membership in the target language and culture

they were teaching. At the same time, the dilemma between teaching the culture as knowledge and as practiced beliefs created more dynamics and complexities in the immigrant teachers' language classrooms, as in the example of the standing ritual with or without the underlying traditional belief in respect and gratitude, which became an important dimension in the teachers' professional identity. The lack of evidence for marginalization could also be due to the limitation of my observations only in the classrooms, where school-wide power relations were not evident.

The specific image of the passive, quiet Chinese teachers in a few existing studies (Pailliotet, 1997; Sheets & Chew, 2002) was not strongly evidenced in the study. Even though Meiling claimed that she didn't talk much in the school meetings, her active search for better practices, participation in the school event, and her strong beliefs in the role of education in the students' lives and future set her apart from the image of a silent and passive teacher.

My findings also contributed to the discussion on the ethnicity factor of minority and immigrant teachers. While being important in the teachers' authenticity, legitimacy, and visibility in the schools, the heterogeneity and contested nature of the identity were evidenced by the two participant teachers' different conceptions of various discourses and the meaning of being Chinese in general, which accords with McCarthy's argument (1998) that people from a particular racial or ethnic community do not necessarily share similar consciousness or interests. Meiling's belief in the Chinese practice of teaching the Confucian virtues, for example, was not shared by Amy, whereas Amy's belief in traditional Chinese literacy practices was not embraced by Meiling. The heterogeneity within an ethnic culture further speaks against the simple cultural attribution of practices.

The findings didn't serve to support Pennington's claim (2002) that shared ethnicity between the teacher and the students creates psychological bonds, while differences are basis for displaying differentiation. In the language classrooms of the two Chinese teachers, bonds seemed to exist when the students warmly responded to the teaching, and showed curiosity and respect to the teacher and the culture. Even though there were Chinese ethnic students in both classes, there was no evidence of additional bonds between these students and the teachers. The ethnic bonds seem to be subject to contextual and multiple factors just like other aspects of the relational identity. This question awaits further exploration in research studies.

### **Improvisation and Agency**

Through the combined interviews and long term observation, my study explored the dynamics operating in the teacher's classes, which was largely left out in studies on Chinese immigrant teachers (For example, De Courcy, 1997; Santoro, 1997), and answered the research question on teacher choice and agency. A most important aspect of my finding lies in the situated processes of the figuring, positioning, and choices made by the immigrant teachers, as discussed in detail in the previous section. Agency was enacted with curricular choices, many instant decisions (Coldron & Smith, 1999) made in the classroom, or choice over making visible the ethnic identities (Subedi, 2008) or personal identities (Duff & Uchida, 1997), and other forms of positioning. The concepts of improvisation and orchestration, hence the "space of authoring," further helped the understanding of these rich processes as contextualized choices and variations, rather than as joint and shared enterprises. The findings illustrated Bourdieu's thesis on agency and improvisation (1977), as discussed in chapter two. For the two participant Chinese

teachers in the study, the competing Chinese discourses of teaching and relation were often involved in the decisions and choices. The experiences and choices by the two immigrant teachers showed that they might have the option of orchestrating different discourses of culture and values in their teaching, and agency is achieved in the process. This process and the possible changes it could bring to the schools in the age of global migration are rarely documented in immigrant teacher research, and my study served as a small step in the effort.

### **Implications**

The present study has implications on the practices and learning of the immigrant teachers in several respects, especially in terms of teacher education and support.

#### **Immigrant Teacher Oriented Training**

The study has shown that immigrant teachers, especially teachers from a distinct educational culture, have their own gaps and needs in learning to teach in the US public schools. For example, while classroom management is a universal subject of learning for all new teachers, immigrant teachers from the Chinese background have their own distinct conceptions on the purposes, practices, and the relationships involved in the process. Some of the beliefs may be deep-rooted, and as ideologies do not match with the mainstream cultural values or concerns. The concept of boundary which is widely applied in the US school context, for example, is harder to conceive for an immigrant teacher from the Chinese context, where the relative hierarchy between the teacher and the students on one hand and the less distance in a more collective culture on the other create a very different dynamics in the classroom that is not usually characterized with the concept of boundary.

Some researchers believe the aim of teacher education is to help teachers synthesize and consolidate personal and shared knowledge (Pennington, 2002). Research has shown Asian immigrant teachers' negative reactions to the ethnocentric discussions in teacher education courses (Sheets & Chew, 2002), when their different perspectives were not valued or acknowledged. Even when the teachers actively adapt to the mainstream educational practices, there are many chances of confusion and misunderstanding, as partly evidenced in my research finding.

Universities and school districts can provide courses and training that meet the needs of immigrant teachers, which not only inform about the mainstream culture and practices of schooling in the US, but also discuss them with a comparative lens as related to other cultures of teaching. The different practices and assumptions can be made explicit in the process, and alternative perspectives acknowledged and articulated, which will greatly help the teachers in their understanding and process of adaptation.

### **Encouragement of Reflection on Teaching and Self-knowledge**

A sociocultural perspective on teacher-learning posits a central aspect of this process as the reshaping of identity and identities within the social interaction of the classroom (Richards, 2008). Research points out, however, that the issue of identity is mostly positioned outside the core of teacher education (Morgan, 2004). The theory of figured worlds might be used in the process of explicit reflection on identity. Immigrant teachers might understand that their cultural memberships are part of their professional identities and valuable resources to tap into, and identities are constantly explored and reshaped in the classrooms.

As teachers' professional identity is a matter of situated learning and constant

positioning which are not completed through one time training, reflection and self-knowledge are important in their learning and the identity construction. Teacher learning is not viewed as translating knowledge and theories into practice but as constructing new knowledge and theory through participating in specific social contexts and engaging in particular types of activities and processes. This latter type of knowledge, sometimes called “practitioner knowledge,” is the source of teachers’ practices and understandings (Richards, 2008). Researchers have suggested greater attention to personal and professional experiences and perceptions, which are critical to the development of meaningful teaching practices (Proweller & Mitchener, 2004). Others believe that the discourse opportunities are important for teachers, as chances to talk about the issues gives deeper understanding of the practices (Quirocho & Rios, 2000). Wallace (1991) identifies three models of teacher education that have characterized both general teacher education and also teacher education for language teachers, which he calls the craft model (emphasizing imitation), the applied science model (emphasizing expert problem solving), and the reflective model (emphasizing reflective practicing). A teacher’s professional growth implies making implicit things explicit, and reflection is a key in the process, including reflection on identity and related issues, individuals in specific contexts, and the role of discourse in shaping experience (Byram, 1997; Miller, 2009). In the case of the immigrant teachers, the personal and professional perceptions are especially important because they might carry unique understandings and meanings which might not be otherwise recognized, even by the teachers themselves. During the course of my interviews and talks with the participant teachers in the study, for example, many experiences and conceptions were brought up and discussed, which revealed

perceptions and meanings which might have been buried and unreflected in the busy daily classroom teachings. Reflection on these experiences and perceptions by the teachers could potentially bring deeper understanding of their own practices and improved teaching.

Researchers found that teachers' own ways of theorizing about their practice tend to be narrative in form and feature specific, concrete experiences (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). Identity and how it shapes teacher-learning can be explored through case studies, through the review of lesson protocols, through narratives in which teachers describe the emergence of their professional identities and the struggles and issues that are involved (Miller, 2004). These stories and reflections might explore various issues related to their teacher identity and understanding of educational beliefs, and eventually contribute to both general understanding of the immigrant teachers and their better teaching practices.

### **Celebrating the Cultural Differences and Constructive Adaptation**

Findings in the present study suggested that immigrant teachers possess rich knowledge and membership in other educational cultures, which may or may not apply to the local school contexts. In the process of adapting to the mainstream culture of teaching, their knowledge in the other cultures of education may nevertheless be a resource to tap into in the teaching practices, under the condition of cultural continuity and respect for contexts (Brown, 2000). In my study of the Chinese language teachers, the exploration on using traditional Chinese literacy practices such as heavy recitation, or using certain traditional rituals and practices with their underlying values might be some examples in point. While it is ungrounded to argue, for example, that the Chinese literacy practices should necessarily have a place in Chinese language teaching in the US context, or that

immigrant teachers should maintain certain educational values across contexts, exploration of the practices and their constructive adaptation could potentially contribute to better teaching practices.

Some researchers argue for building a global teacherhood, which encourage intercultural dialogues and understanding of the complexity of cultural values (Kubota & Austin, 2007), and the immigrant teachers' orchestration of alternative teaching practices and teacher positioning might be one of the steps toward this global teacherhood.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The present study had several limitations which future research can address. The first limitation was one of the scope of observation. Because I considered the teachers in the classrooms as the bounded units of my case studies, my study was confined to classroom participant observations and interviews, which only involved part of the teachers' professional lives and left some other aspects unexplored. While student teacher relation is a major part of the relational identity of the teachers, relations and positioning to colleagues, parents and other parties, as well as the teaching community and profession in general, are also crucial for this aspect of teacher identity. In my interviews with the teachers, experiences outside the classrooms were sometimes brought up and discussed, such as an experience of being called into the principal's office. Such narratives were not incorporated in the findings because they went beyond the classrooms, although they were equally important in the teachers' professional identities. Future studies that extend observations and interviews to the larger context may gain valuable insights into the identities. Some researchers argue that teachers' lives and careers must be studied in the context of their whole lives (Ball & Goodson, 1985), and causes and interpretations could

lie in structural forces outside the classroom or even the school, rather than practices observed within classrooms (Pratt et al., 1999). In my own study, for example, both Amy and Meiling entered the teaching profession in the boom of Chinese language learning, and might have gained a power from the new popularity of the language which could in turn affect the figurative and relational aspects of their professional identities, a point which might be illustrated with teachers in different contexts or across time. Future studies can make observations across contexts and take the larger contextual factors into consideration when interpreting the data.

Another limitation was that the study was focused exclusively on the perspectives of the teachers. Other parties in the classrooms and the school settings, including the students, colleagues and the principle, and the parents were not involved in the study. Future studies may include these parties into the data collection, which could shed more lights onto the teachers' practices and identity. It would be valuable to understand, for example, the students' observations and perspectives on the various Chinese cultural artifacts and practices introduced in the language classrooms, which could further highlight the immigrant teachers' cultural membership, different perceptions, and the process of mutual positioning in the figured worlds.

One more limitation of the study is the perspective of the researcher. As a Chinese immigrant researcher, my observation and interpretations were subject to the limit of my own perspectives on the Chinese and American educational systems and the cross cultural encounters. A researcher from the US culture might make different observations and interpretations on the same teachers. For example, the teachers' perception on the mainstream values, such as equality and independence, might be taken granted rather

than as marked for a teacher coming from a traditional Confucian culture, or there may be more layers of understanding on their conceptions of teacher authority and respect from the American perspective rather than from the Chinese culture. While this is inevitable in qualitative research, it is possible to make use of collaboration between researchers from both cultures, and integrate different perspectives in a global and comparative way.

Another way that future research could expand is to conduct comparative studies on the professional identities of immigrant teachers from various countries or cultures. For example, a comparative study on a immigrant teacher of Chinese and a Latina immigrant teacher of Spanish might reveal both culture-specific experiences and what the teachers have in common in terms of their immigrant professional identities. The comparison and contrast could serve to highlight the most important aspects of immigrant teacher identities.

In addition, due to restriction of the timeline my observations didn't start from the beginning of the participants' teaching career. Future studies might observe teachers in their first encounters in the classrooms, which may reveal more cross cultural interactions at the initial stage. Studies may also look into the pre-service conceptions of teacher identity before the encounters in the school world, which would further explore and highlight the "figured" aspects of immigrant teachers' identity and shed lights on the differences in the educational cultures. Longitudinal studies documenting the changes of conceptions taking place from pre-service into beginning teaching are also valuable in helping us further understand the cultural encounters and interactions.

From the socio-cultural and figured world perspective, teaching is an ongoing process of orchestration of discourses and the teacher's identity constantly form and

reform in the process. Further research is needed to explore the complex process of construction of the immigrant teachers in the age of global and multicultural education.

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**Appendix I Initial interview protocol**

- How did you first decide to teach here in the US?
- What were your first impressions of the American classroom?
- What were some of your memorable experiences in the classroom?
- What does "being Chinese" mean to you as a teacher?
- How do you understand authority and respect in the classrooms?
- How did schooling experiences in China help you become a teacher here?