Narrative Inquiry of the Parenting Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Parents in the U.S.

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NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE PARENTING EXPERIENCES OF
CHINESE IMMIGRANT PARENTS IN THE U.S.

Dissertation
by
XIAOXIA CHEN

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Narrative Inquiry of the Parenting Experiences of Chinese Immigrant Parents in the U.S.

By Xiaoxia Chen

Dissertation Director: Dr. María Estela Brisk

Abstract

While traditional multicultural education has advanced school personnel’s cultural awareness and the implementation of multicultural curricula, it can also perpetuate stereotypes of certain cultural groups by overstating the role of culture. The widely held stereotypes of Chinese immigrants as super-achievers and a “model minority” may dangerously hide the problems that many Chinese immigrant families face upon immigrating.

In this dissertation, I share findings generated from the narrative inquiry of sixteen Chinese immigrant parents. The study was to uncover multiple realities related to the parenting experiences constructed by Chinese immigrant parents in their given social, cultural, and personal circumstances. Guiding this inquiry is the bioecological model, which provides an overarching framework to address all the factors that possibly influence immigrants’ parenting.

With a focus on critical events, data collected from multiple open-ended interviews and documents were presented in two ways: case-focused narrative analysis and cross-case thematic analysis. The findings show that Chinese immigrants are a diverse group, with each individual’s parental beliefs and practices influenced by multiple personal and contextual factors. All the factors interacted through complex processes occurring at various levels within the parents’ ecological environments
between the two cultures. In addition, several issues related to Chinese immigrant families were exposed from the parents’ narratives that have not been well researched so far, including: subgroup differences, the influence of marital discord as a result of immigration on child development, the role of religion change on parenting, and grandparents as major childcare giver. At a theoretical level, notions of the continuum of common cultural values, and the continuum of enculturation and acculturation provide a fluid and dynamic theoretical lens to better understanding immigrants’ in-between cultural values.

I suggest that school personnel and social workers work towards eliminating pre-assumptions about any cultural group, attending to each child’s unique identity without over- emphasiz ing the role of culture. Furthermore, schools need to take efforts to build effective and reciprocal relationships with immigrant families to better address the immigrant students’ individual needs.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The United States (the U.S.) is becoming increasingly diverse with growing numbers of immigrants from different countries around the world. As a result, schools in the U.S. have enrolled an increasing number of children from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In order to provide what is best for all children, multicultural education, designed to address the educational inequalities in gender, disability, race, ethnicity, language and culture (Banks & Banks, 2010), has been advocated for several decades. With immigrant children, teachers have been urged to develop cultural awareness of the students’ cultural background, design instructional activities to understand and appreciate each immigrant student’s background, and integrate multicultural curriculum (e.g., literature about the particular culture) into their teaching. These have greatly helped educators and other children to “understand and embrace the realities of a culturally and linguistically diverse world” (Bredekamp, 2011, p.166); however, negatively, when the role of culture is overstated as the only predictor of the characteristics of an immigrant child, stereotypes may form, creating an obstacle for the educators to understand the real child. Consequently, the varied and rich experiences that learners of diverse backgrounds bring to the classroom will be unrecognized or devalued (Valdés, 1996; Nieto, 2002). Citing Bredekamp’s words, “culture and its influences [on children] are subtle” (p.166). While it is important for educators to be sensitive to issues of race and ethnicity, Wardle (2011) argues that the best approaches to multicultural education involve starting with the individual child and his family, viewing cultural
background as one of the child’s many contexts. This dissertation is an endeavor that embraces such approaches.

According to the survey results by Pew Research Center (2012), the Asian population has recently passed Hispanics as the largest group of new immigrants to the U.S., with Chinese as the largest Asian immigrant group. However, Chinese immigrants have received relatively less research attention in the field of education, compared to other minority groups such as Hispanics and African Americans, because Chinese immigrants have long been stereotyped as “super-achievers” (see Siu, 1992; Guo, 2006) and the “model minority” that is characterized as “hardworking, disciplined and academic inclined” (Mckay & Wong, 1996, p.586). Such a stereotype dangerously hides important problems that some Chinese immigrant children and families may face, and also leads to the decreased attention to this group of children from school personnel and social workers. In addition, many existing studies have relegated Chinese immigrants as a homogeneous cultural group without any awareness of the diversity of their home origins. To better understand the individual Chinese immigrant child, it is important to learn about the diversity of parental beliefs and practices among Chinese immigrant parents and how each parent raises his/her child(ren) differently within his or her specific personal, historical, and sociocultural context. Through the qualitative approach of narrative inquiry, the current study tries to fill the research gap by providing opportunities for sixteen Chinese immigrant parents to tell their parenting stories in a cross-cultural context.
In this chapter, I first provide justification and motivation for the study and address why, within the current context of educational research on multicultural education, and in particular, on immigrant children and families, it is important to study Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting experiences at the individual level. Following the explanation of the significance, I present the purpose of the study and research questions, and then I define relevant terms. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the entire dissertation.

Rationale of the Study

In this section, I present the rationale for the current research study by addressing the questions of why it is important to examine the following three aspects in an educational research: parents, immigrant parents, and Chinese immigrant parents.

Importance of Studying Parents

Responding to the question of what children need more than anything else to develop optimally, the famous American psychologist, Bronfenbrenner said it should be “someone who is crazy about the child” (Hamilton & Luster, 2003, cited in Luster & Okagaki, 2005). This person is typically the parent (Luster & Okagaki). The important role of parenting in child growth has been widely acknowledged. The reason that parents first caught educational researchers’ attention was their essential role in children’s development. As Connolly and Brunner (1974) put it, “The general skills, cognitive and emotional, appear to depend on what has properly been called a ‘hidden curriculum in the home’” (p.5). Not only is parenthood central to child development, it is also central to “society’s long-term investment in children” (Bornstein, 2001, p.8).
Parenthood is also a growing journey for adult. Although becoming a parent is seen as one of the major milestones in most people’s own lives (Demick, 1999), not all parents are equally prepared, skilled, and/or interested in being involved in their children’s education (e.g., Barnett & Marshall, 1993; Shum, 1997). Shek (1997) argued that “the experience of being a parent may be beneficial or detrimental to one’s well-being” (p.459), and conversely, the well-being of a parent directly affects his/her children’s growth.

Within our contemporary society overwhelmed “with dramatic and rapid changes” (Westman, 2001, xiii), parenting is complicated by the diversity of individuals who take on the role of parent such as immigrants, adolescents, singles, and so forth. “Compounding all of this,” Westman critically pointed out, “is the tendency of the generous side of our society to turn to child-caring institutions, schools, professionals, and volunteers to fill in when parents fail” (xiii). Westman further urged that we should hold parents accountable for their children. Given the intimate relationship between a child and his or her parent, the role of a parent in a child’s life is irreplaceable. While the focus of most educational research has been on how schools and teachers influence a child’s development, parents demand more attention as “parenthood is the fundamental institution in our society” (Westman, xiii).

**Importance of Studying Immigrant Parents**

Undoubtedly, immigration complicates the process of parenting in profound ways. Upon immigrating, many immigrant parents experience enormous challenges related to the changes in their social, emotional, cultural and economic resources (Deepak, 2005).
With the families where both parents need to work, it is found that decreased time as a family is associated with immigrant adolescents’ loneliness, isolation, and risk-taking behavior (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007). Previous comparative studies of different immigrant groups indicate that the parental beliefs and practices of immigrant parents are rooted in their original culture and many of the immigrants tend to maintain the traditional parental ideologies even after they move to a new country (e.g., Siu, 1992; Guo, 2006). However, notions about “good parenting” in western immigrant-receiving countries have been largely defined by the dominant population of white and European origin (Ali, 2008). Consequently, conflicts occur when there is a gap between the immigrants’ cultural beliefs and the dominant perspectives (Ali). Such conflicts may, oftentimes, lead to “hierarchical relationships of power” between immigrants and the host culture, which “often results in assimilation [of the immigrants] at the cultural level and in loss of self at the level of personal identity” (Conle, 1993, iv). Conle’s argument that hierarchical relationships during the immigration process engender personal and cultural assimilation is manifested in Ali’s study with a focus on immigrant parents. Through interviewing recent immigrant parents in Canada from several ethno-linguistic groups (Amharic, Arabic, Dari, Mandarin, Somali, Twi and Urdu), Ali found that

[T]hese parents experience a significant loss in their self-referent assessment of their effectiveness as parents as a result of systemic constraints on their ability to mediate the effects of their new environment on their children and on influencing the environment on behalf of their children. (p.148)

---

1 I have made a conscious choice to leave “w” in “white” and “western” uncapitalized as a way to de-center western/white privilege.
Ali (2008) further argued that the immigrant parents’ loss of parental self-efficacy is a consequence of the “inequitable and unjust power relations among the dominant white population and the racialized newcomers [the recent immigrants] and their children” (p.148). Immigration, which significantly impacts the parents, casts a strong influence on the parents’ parenting beliefs and practices.

As one of the major school reforms in the U.S., multicultural education was introduced in the late 1960s and entailed “a wide variety of programs and practices related to educational equality, women, ethnic groups, language minorities, low-income groups, and people with disabilities” (Banks and Banks, 2010, p.7). Although multiculturalism and multicultural education developed in North America as a logical result of the civil rights movement in late 1960s, Ali, citing Razack (1999), criticized traditional “multiculturalism,” arguing that the practice actually worked to “maintain ‘the fiction of equality’ by allowing immigrants to keep their culture but denying them access to power and privilege” (p.149). Similarly, Bredekamp (2011) also questioned the meaning of the word diverse (i.e., different) because the term implicates that people whose cultural identity is not white or whose native language is not English are different from “the norm” (p.166).

Wardle (1996) criticized the traditional model of multicultural education for two major shortcomings. First, it perpetuates stereotypes by overemphasizing the exclusive role of cultural tradition and homogenizes each cultural group. Stereotyping minority cultural groups is a form of oppression that can dangerously mask important problems within the stereotyped group (Conle, 1993). Second, the traditional model of
multicultural education does not allow for exploration of differences within a cultural group. When a cultural group is stereotyped, their particular cultural characteristics are easily exaggerated and the group tends to be marginalized from the dominant cultural group (Conle). At the same time, the individual differences within the cultural group will often be overlooked (Conle). Therefore, to advance multicultural education needs a step beyond the understanding of the homogeneity of each cultural group, and demands an understanding of the subtle, yet significant differences within each cultural group.

In conclusion, the challenge of the immigration process that complicates parenting experiences warrants more research efforts on immigrant parents. The traditional model of multicultural education that causes stereotype and homogeneity of different cultural groups demands more studies examining immigrants’ cross-cultural experiences at an individual level. This current study is exactly a response to such a demand in research.

Importance of Studying Chinese Immigrant Parents

As one of the largest immigrant groups in the U.S., Chinese immigrants have long been stereotyped as the “model minority” and have frequently been portrayed or sampled as one homogeneous group. Stereotyping Chinese immigrants as a “model minority” masks the individual differences within the culture (Conle, 1993). Therefore, the diversity of the Chinese immigrant community demands understanding their parenting experiences at an individual level that considers each immigrant’s various personal, historical, social, and cultural milieus.
Gym (2011) provides a critical comment on the implications of the “model minority” stereotype of Asian American children:

The model minority stereotype implies that Asian Americans are a docile group with a pull yourself up by the bootstraps culture – a group that doesn’t need services or much political or cultural attention and resources. This stereotype is often at the heart of the denial of a host of educational services from language services to lack of testing for special education, counseling services, and multiracial ethnic studies in schools. (p.34)

A result of the stereotype of “super-achievers” that many North Americans hold towards Asian immigrants is that challenges confronting Asian immigrant students in American schools and their families in the U.S. are often overlooked. Many Asian immigrant students are regarded as high achievers by default. In schools, teachers, social workers, and other professionals, despite the trainings they receive to be as culturally responsive as possible, often judge minority students and families based on their own beliefs and stereotypes (Bredekamp, 2011). When teachers focus their attention on under-achieving groups, Asian Americans are taken for granted as being able to do well without much attention or help. Hence, educational inequality has occurred with this group of students. It is not the ambition of the current study to eradicate the inequality; however, by focusing on the less powerful group and exposing the true life experiences of Chinese immigrant parents and families in the hierarchical power system, this study intends to raise the awareness of the unique identity of each immigrant child and the educational inequality.

Bredekamp (2011) points out that although there are a very limited number of racial categories designated, such as Asian or Hispanic, “hundreds of cultural/ethnic
groups exist” (p.171). For example, Asian group include Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Hmong, and many others. Even Chinese immigrants have diverse home origins such as Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan where people have different historical, economic and political backgrounds. In order to appreciate the diversity each child brings to school, individual differences must be taken into serious consideration. The current narrative inquiry tries to capture the individual parenting trajectories of Chinese parents, and explore the individual differences of the parenting beliefs and practices of a widely assumed homogenous cultural group.

**Purpose of the Study**

The aims of the current study are threefold: (1) to examine individual Chinese immigrant parents’ parental beliefs and practices considering their given personal, historical, social, and cultural contexts; (2) to identify multiple factors that have shaped and possibly changed their parenting beliefs and practices; (3) to explicate the dynamics of the changing home and host cultures that influence immigrant parents’ beliefs and practices. A reasonable framework that allows for multiple levels of analysis of the interactions between individual and environment is the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Taking into consideration proximal processes, individual characteristics, contextual factors and the changes across time in a person’s development, the bioecological theoretical model is used as a guiding framework to help examine the interactions between an individual immigrant parent and her/his environment at multiple levels and the changes in his/her parental ideologies. Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework claims that the process of
acculturation is highly variable, influenced by contextual factors in both countries and numerous individual-level factors. This study focuses on parents and thus explores developmental outcomes for children only indirectly through the perspective of parents. It is not the intention of the study to investigate the impact of different parenting beliefs or styles on child development.

Statement of Research Questions

The main research questions guiding the current study are:

- What stories do Chinese immigrant parents tell regarding their parenting experiences in the U.S. context?
- What do these stories tell us about the factors that influence Chinese immigrant parents’ parental beliefs and practices?
- How do the cross-cultural parenting experiences of Chinese immigrants help us understand the role of first culture and second culture in shaping immigrants’ parenting?

Significance of the Study

Research on Chinese immigrants’ parenting experiences is important for at least five reasons. First, knowledge about Chinese immigrant parents’ parental beliefs and practices, as well as the factors that influence the way they raise their children, will potentially provide school personnel with important information about immigrant family dynamics and the immigrant children’s growing environment. Such information helps integrate school and home activities to improve the learning of children (see, for example, Brisk & Harrington, 2000; Bredekamp, 2011) and also helps inform educational policies
and programs. Such an understanding is also needed to challenge the invisibility, stereotypes and misunderstandings of Chinese immigrants.

Second, Chinese immigrants’ parenting ideology and strategies may become valuable resources to share with both mainstream parents and the parents from other minority groups.

Third, by giving a marginalized cultural group a voice, the study will contribute to disrupting the inequitable and unjust power relations among the dominant white population and the racialized immigrants and their children (Ali, 2008).

Fourth, by exploring Chinese immigrant parents and families at the individual level, it helps readers form a more accurate picture of Chinese immigrants’ parenting and family relationships considering all the contextual factors. As a result, stereotypes will be challenged and individual diversity will be made visible.

Fifth, the current study may add theoretical perspectives in research on immigrants considering multiple factors and roles of cultures.

Overall, the study will be beneficial to educators, social service providers, and all family-related professionals, and will help these individuals to be more knowledgeable and sensitive to immigrant families. It will also make theoretical contributions to, and implications for, teacher education, immigrant education and policy making.

Definition of Terms

Chinese immigrants, Chinese Americans, and Asian Americans: The concept “Chinese” is more complicated than it looks for immigrants in the United States. In 2009 census of foreign-born population by country of birth, China includes respondents who reported
their country of birth as China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Paracel Islands, or Taiwan (U.S. Census Bureau). However, as China has been and continues to be one of the great sources of international migration, Chinese immigrants also come from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, and other countries. These immigrants speak Chinese, identify with Chinese culture and customs, and connect with China emotionally and ethnically. However, they can legally say they are not Chinese, because they are citizens of the above mentioned countries before they move to the United States. For the current study, “Chinese immigrants” refer to the people who were born in China and immigrated to the United States as adults, regardless of which citizenship they are holding upon immigration.

“Chinese Americans” refers to the immigrants from China who have gained the status of permanent residency or the U.S. citizenship, and the descendants of the Chinese immigrants in the U.S.

“Asian Americans” is the broadest term, including the immigrants from all Asian countries and the descendants of the Asian immigrants.

Parenting: “the practices and strategies that parents engage in as they raise their children” (Russell, Crockett, & Chao, 2010a, preface, v). Childrearing and “raising a child” are sometimes used throughout the dissertation being synonyms for parenting.

Parenting practice: refers to “the specific strategies associated with a parenting style” (Chen, Chen, & Zheng, 2012, p.3).

Parenting style: refers to “a particular set of strategies that parents apply in rearing their child” (Chen, Chen, & Zheng, 2012, p.3).
Visible minority: The term “visible minority” was first used in Canada’s Employment Equity Act, and is defined as: “persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (The Government of Canada’s Justice Laws Website).

Overview of the Dissertation

In this chapter, I set out to introduce the interest and scope of the current study, and then establish a rationale for this dissertation inquiry. The research questions stem from current discussions in research on the achievements of Asian immigrant children and stereotype of Asian immigrants, but lack of discussions on immigrant parents’ childrearing experiences. By narrating individual Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting experiences, the current study intends to critically challenge the invisibility, stereotypes, and common misunderstandings of Chinese immigrants by making their voices heard and their idiosyncratic trails of parenting known.

In Chapter Two, I first present two theoretical models that guide the current study. First, Bronfenbrenner’s biocological model is introduced, which provides a structural analysis of the multiple determinants of parenting identified in the current literature. Second, the concepts of culture, enculturation and acculturation help to better understand Chinese immigrants’ parenting dynamics in a cross-cultural context. Then a critical view of acculturation is introduced to help better understand how Chinese immigrants play an active role in the process of acculturation.

Following a review of theoretical models, existing literature related to Chinese immigrant parents is reviewed. The section starts with a review of Chinese traditional
cultural value – Confucianism, which is widely regarded as the one major factor that influences Chinese parents’ childrearing ideology (e.g., Li, 2001). The following sections are contributed to the review of literature on Chinese immigrant parents’ acculturative dynamics and immigration-related parental styles and practices. The section ends with a brief summary to demonstrate how the current study fills the research gap.

In Chapter Three, I discuss methodological decisions made to address the research questions. I then detail the research design, including participant selection, role of the researcher, interview development, protection of human subjects, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter four and five presents the findings of the study, with chapter four showcasing the idiosyncratic experiences and perspectives of four cases of Chinese immigrant parents, and Chapter five devoting to the cross-case thematic reporting of all sixteen cases included in this study. Chapter five presents the major themes generated in the study about Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting experiences.

The final Chapter discusses the findings of the analysis of the data, followed by conclusion, implications, recommendations for future research and limitations.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

This chapter consists of two sections. In the first section I present theoretical approaches that guide the current study. In particular, Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979, 2005) bioecological model on human development is firstly introduced, which provides an overall structure for the multiple determinants of parenting. Then the concepts of culture and acculturation, and Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework are discussed to help better explain the dynamics in Chinese immigrants’ parenting experiences in a cross-cultural context.

In the second section, existing research on Chinese immigrant parents is reviewed to provide background knowledge for the current study and illuminate the modes of theoretical inquiry that shape our current understandings of Chinese immigrant parents’ parental beliefs and practices in the U.S.

Theoretical Framework

*The Bioecological Model*

The earliest version of the bioecological model is the ecological model, developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1977, which emphasizes the environmental influences on child development at multiple levels, from the individual’s immediate setting to the broad sociocultural context. The model structures the environment into a set of four nested systems, including micro-, meso-, exo- and macro- systems, “each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.3). The *microsystem* involves the interactions between the individual and his or her immediate environment which he or she has direct contact with. Then the *mesosystem* comes next and is comprised of the
interrelations between two or more microsystems of the developing individual such as family members and friends. This is followed by the *exosystem*, which involves the social structures in which the developing person is not actively engaged with, but that influence and shape the individual’s immediate setting. Finally, the *macrosystem* refers to the larger institutional structures affecting one’s culture, such as: “economic, social, educational, legal and political systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.515). The macrosystem influences the nature of interactions within all other levels of the ecology of human development (Lerner, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) ecological model had a broad impact on the field of human development, promoting considerable scholarly interest in the effects of the environmental factors on the life course of individuals. By the end of 1980s and into the 1990s, Bronfenbrenner recognized the deficit in the role of individual with the ecological model he previously described (Lerner, 2005). Accordingly, Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) worked to integrate the features of the developing person (biology, psychology, and behavior) into the former ecological system, and the label *bioecological* started to be used instead of *ecological* (Lerner), with bio-referring to the person. One other property that was added to the original model is the dimension of time, which is called chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The chronosystem provides ways to comprehend differences in time experienced by individuals and families.

Overall, there are four interrelated components of Bronfenbrenner’s formulation of the bioecological model. First, the development *process* involves complex reciprocal
interaction between the individual and “the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment,” which is referred as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). Second, the personal level demonstrates the role that one’s “individual repertoire,” or “biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural characteristics” play in social situations (Lerner, xv). Third, the context of human development involves the four abovementioned systems that encapsulate the ecology of human development. Finally, time constitutes “the chronosystem that moderates change across the life course” (Lerner, xv). Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) believe that in order to adequately conceptualize the dynamic and complicated human development system, all four components must be included.

The bioecological model has great significance for the current study in that it not only provides an overarching structure organizing all the personal and contextual factors that possibly influence individual Chinese immigrant parent’s parental beliefs and practices, but also helps to depict the changes as a result of immigration “in interaction with ecological components at the four levels suggested by the ecological [model]” (Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001, p.218).

Culture and Acculturation

In recent years, a growing body of research has indicated that parents’ child-rearing ideologies and practices vary across different cultural groups and are greatly affected by culture (e.g., Bornstein, 1991; Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Holden, 2010). This section examines the conceptions of culture and acculturation and acculturation
framework because they are of central importance in our understanding of immigrants’ cross-cultural experiences.

*Conception of Culture*

There is a great deal of “order” in the natural world, although we may not be aware of it (Quinn & Holland, 1987). For example, bees divide their tasks among the colony in an amazingly orderly way; swallows make long flights to the tropics when the weather gets cold. Similarly, this order exists in the social world of humans; however, as opposed to the natural world, this type of order in the social world is frequently imposed by humans (Quinn & Holland). For example, over two thousand years ago, the ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius, emphasized the value “filial piety,” which means to respect the elders. Such a value, considered the first virtue in Chinese culture, was created by “the social agreement that something counts as that condition” (D’Andrade, 1984, p.91). That is to say, before Confucius coined the term, “filial piety” was a significant priority of many people in ancient Chinese society and it existed “only by virtue of adherence to the rules that constitute it” (Quinn & Holland, p.3). China has always had a large diversity of religious beliefs, but filial piety has been common to almost all of them. These culturally constructed understandings have also been called “cultural models” (Goodnow & Collins, 1990).

Bruner (1993) defines culture as “a way of knowing, of construing the world and others” (p. 516). Instead of viewing culture as static “customs and artifacts and oral traditions,” Bruner’s understanding of culture asserts that culture is socially constructed and shared by the joint participants in the cultural group. This joint social construction of
culture “shapes people’s views of the world and also establishes behavioral goals for the individual” (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p.4). Through the members’ “[interactions] and communication,” original\(^2\) cultural models are transformed into “intersubjectivity” or “shared meaning” (Greenfield, 2000, p.224), which “must be adapted to the contingencies and complexities of everyday life” (Quinn & Holland, p.4). Such a view illustrates that each individual’s cultural beliefs are developed through the process of socialization together with his/her own active construction of the culture, and each individual’s reconstructed knowledge and beliefs redefine culture also.

Conception of Acculturation and Acculturation Framework

“Shared” and “socially constructed” view of culture implies that culture traits are changeable within the same cultural community and movable across cultural groups (Quinn & Holland, 1987). The acquisition of the first culture is called enculturation (Schumann, 1978). “One’s original cultural identity is directed, shaped, and conditioned by the process of enculturation” (Li, 2002, p.30). When relocating in a new country, people have to adjust themselves to the new culture, and the process of learning of second or additional culture is called acculturation (Schumann).

The classical definition of acculturation was offered by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936): “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p.149).

\(^2\) “Original” here refers to the “taken-for-granted” cultural models at the moment, but it is not an accurate term in that cultural model is not static but a dynamic changing concept.
Based on this definition, acculturation is “neutral” in that it involves changes in either or both cultural groups; however, in reality, with immigrants, acculturation mostly refers to the changes with the immigrant groups as a result of getting into contact with mainstream culture (Barry, 1997, p.7). According to the immigrants’ preference either to their traditional cultural values and identity or to the values of new society, traditional acculturation research presumes that immigrants may adopt different coping strategies in the ongoing acculturative process, favoring either the dominant culture (assimilation), the heritage culture (separation), both (integration), or neither (marginalization) (Berry).

Which acculturation trajectory an individual immigrant chooses depends on multiple factors, as is discussed as follows in Berry’s acculturation framework.

Building upon “the concepts and findings from numerous smaller-scale studies,” Berry (1997) presented a “composite framework” trying to depict the key variables that possibly influence the process of acculturation. In Berry’s framework, a person’s acculturation process is influenced by various situational and personal factors. Berry argued that to reach a complete understanding of acculturation, the broad structure, that is, two societal contexts – that of origin and that of settlement – must firstly be examined. Then the individual variables prior to and during acculturation need to be taken into consideration as moderating or mediating factors. This information of societal contexts of the country of origin and the host country is important in three main aspects: (1) it helps us to be aware of the “cultural differences” between cultures, (2) the political, economic and demographic conditions in the two different countries shed light to the reasons why they decide to immigrate, and (3) the national policy and attitudes of the society of
settlement can encourage or constrain immigrants’ choices of acculturation strategy. To expand on the third aspect, it will be easy for the immigrants to establish “mutual accommodation” with the mainstream culture if the dominant society is “open” and “inclusive,” with “orientation towards cultural diversity” and “the presence of a positive multicultural ideology” (Berry, p.11). In contrast, when serious conflicts exist between the immigrants and receiving country, “acculturative stress” will occur (Berry, p.13).

Among the individual characteristics existing prior to acculturation, Berry (1997) listed the factors such as age, gender, education, migration motivation, cultural distance (language, religion, etc.) and personality. Based on Berry’s summary, there are some general, but not conclusive findings regarding the relationship between some personal factors and the acculturation process. For example, research has shown that children and adolescents are more motivated to acculturate toward the dominant host culture than adults, who tend to maintain the traditional values of their origin (e.g., Nguyen & Williams, 1988); higher education level appears mostly associated with positive adaptations, which is also correlated to other protective factors such as financial status, job status and social networks. Great cultural differences (in language, religion etc.) always make adaptation process hard. Different physical features may separate the immigrants from the mainstream culture and even experience prejudice and discrimination, which might be one of the reasons why Asian parents appear inactive with school involvement. Chinese immigrants’ acculturation attitude of “accommodation without assimilation” (Ogbu, 1990) may also because of their physical difference, which makes them have to stay minority. About personal factors like personality, although some
research has studied the role of locus of control and introversion/extraversion (Ward & Kennedy, 1992), and self-efficacy (Schwarzer, Hahn, & Schroder, 1994), Berry argued that a particular personality does not necessarily lead to a certain acculturation outcome, which more depends on the interaction between the person and the new culture.

The understanding of the concepts of culture and acculturation and Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework has significant implications for thinking about the experiences of immigrant parents. It is important to understand culture as multi-layered and ever-changing. Linking cultural models to individual parent’s parental beliefs, McGillicuddy-De Lisi and Subramanian (1996) see the formation of parental beliefs as a result of multiple processes while also acknowledging the effects of one’s personal and cultural histories. According to Berry’s acculturation framework, the process of acculturation is highly variable, influenced by contextual factors in both countries and numerous individual-level factors. Berry’s framework was also used as a direction to develop the interview guide on immigration section.

Research on Chinese Immigrant Parents

The purpose of this section is to provide background knowledge on Chinese immigrants related to the current study, and detect gaps in the existing literature on Chinese parenting. Since late 1960s, the academic success of many Asian immigrant children in North America has created an image of Asian children, especially Chinese children, as super-achievers (Siu, 1992). This phenomenon has triggered increasing research interest in Chinese immigrant community examining the possible reasons behind the children’s academic achievements. It has been well established that two major
reasons contribute to the Chinese immigrant families’ emphasis on academic achievements: Chinese cultural values and the demands of acculturation (Siu, 1992; Guo, 2006). The following review of literature is organized according to the themes emanating from the research literature focusing on Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting, including Chinese cultural values, a historical perspective on Chinese immigration in the U.S., and Chinese immigrants’ parental beliefs and practices. The theoretical constructs that guide the studies as well as methods of inquiry will also be considered.

**Chinese Cultural Values**

Literally almost every article discussing Chinese immigrant children’s academic achievements and parent-child relationship includes some reference to Chinese cultural values. Confucianism has long been regarded as playing a profound influence on the orientation, approach and aim of Chinese parents’ child rearing ideologies (Guo, 2006). Confucian traditions have been passed from one generation to the next in Chinese, as well as Asian, communities (Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003). In particular, the Confucian values that emphasize education, hard work, strict discipline, filial piety, human malleability, conformity to community norms and “closely-knit family structure” (Siu, 1992, p.8) are evident in Chinese families residing in societies with very different political structures and socioeconomic context, such as mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and also manifest in overseas Chinese families (e.g., Lin & Fu, 1990; Lee, 1996). Three main cultural values emphasized by Confucius that have enormous influence on Chinese parents’ parenting will be briefly introduced as follows, including: importance of education, human malleability, and family structure and filial piety. Socio-historical
context that has shaped the Chinese mainstream educational ideology will also be addressed.

Importance of Education

Almost all the Chinese people value education very much, which is greatly influenced by the Confucian philosophy as well as the socio-historical context in China. Chinese people have long been influenced by Confucius’ emphasis on “individual intellectual development, skill acquisition and love for learning” (Li & Wang, 2004). For about two thousand years in Chinese history, examinations were used as the only criterion for selection of officials in the Chinese civil service (Chen & Uttal, 1988). Contemporary educational environment in China still puts special emphasis on formal education, given that examinations remain as a primary path for individual advancement and career opportunity. The most important one is the annual National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). Since very young, the Chinese children are urged to study and get good grades, with the only goal of passing the NCEE and going to college. Consequently, Chinese parents tend to hold high standards for their children’s school performance (Li, 2001), and Chinese children are taught that high educational achievement is an important form of self-improvement (Chen & Uttal) and an effective way to “raise one’s social and economic status” (Gao, 1998).

Human Malleability

Confucian philosophy also emphasizes human malleability and the importance of the environment in shaping the human potential, which has led to a strong emphasis on efforts in education (Chen & Uttal, 1988). In the Chinese culture, it is widely believed
that all children, regardless of innate ability, can do well through the exertion of efforts. As Chen and Uttal stated, “innate ability may determine the rate at which one acquires new knowledge, but the ultimate level of achievement is attained through effort. Furthermore, there is always the possibility of improvement at any level of ability” (p.354). The very emphasis on academic achievements and the belief in human malleability motivate Chinese parents set higher standards and work more often with their children (Chen & Uttal). Chinese children are also socialized to function in their particular environments and to the belief that change is possible and is within an individual’s own control (Lin & Fu, 1990).

*Family Roles and Filial Piety*

In addition to the values placed on education and efforts, researchers contended that family is a concept that can never be overlooked when talking about human development in Chinese culture (Lin & Fu, 1990; Shek & Chan, 1999). In China, a closely-knit and hierarchical family structure has been highly supported (Lin & Liu, 1999). The word “family” in Confucian thought generally connotes two meanings: the collectivist tradition and the ethic of filial piety (Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003). The former stresses the need of being interdependent in groups; the latter highlights the importance of obeying and honoring parents (Ho, 1994).

Based on Confucian ethics, different family members were delineated different obligations and responsibilities (Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003). The father had the most authority, and also “assumed maximum responsibility for the family’s social status and economic well-being,” and the mother was responsible for “the emotional nurturance and
well-being of the family” (Huang, Ying & Arganza, p.193). Regarding parent-child relationship, the parents must “responsibly teach, discipline, or ‘govern’ their children” (Chao, 1994, p. 1117). The husband-wife relationship is regarded as secondary to the parent-child relationship (Lin & Liu, 1999). Teachers are authority figures second only to parents. There is a famous saying in ancient China about the roles of parent and teacher from *Three character classic* or San Zi Jing (one of the Chinese classic texts that embody Confucianism), “yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo; jiao bu yan, shi zhi duo,” which literally means that it is the father's/parent’s fault if he rears his child without educating him, and it is the teacher’s fault if he or she teaches a student but is not strict with him/her.

Filial piety carries the meaning that children must obey parents and show loyalty and respect for elders (Chao, 1994). Interpersonal harmony is valued in the family (Siu, 1992). When the value of filial piety is transferred to the children’s value system, Chinese parental expectations are likely to be valued and shared by their children, and the children tend to behave in the ways that are consistent with the desires of their parents (Chao, 1994).

While the cultural view provided a reasonable explanation for the academic achievements among the Chinese immigrant children, Siu (1992) pointed out that for these cultural values to influence children’s achievements in schools in the U.S., “one must look at larger structural factors which may constrain or expand the range of options for individual families” (p.3). Therefore, the process of acculturation must be considered, which is influenced by the societal contexts of the origin and that of the settlement, as
well as the interactions between the immigrants and the mainstream culture (Berry, 1997). Next section will review literature on the process of acculturation of Chinese immigrants.

**Historical Context of Chinese Immigrants in the U.S.**

Siu (1992) claimed that Chinese immigrants’ educational achievement could be understood only within a historical perspective. As detailed by Huang, Ying, and Arganza (2003):

…to understand the experience of Chinese American youth in this country, it is necessary not only to understand childrearing strategies of Chinese and Chinese American parents but to comprehend the impact of restrictive immigration laws in the 1900s, of miscegenation and exclusion laws, which were only repealed in the 1960s, and of racism and discrimination. These larger societal issues have an impact on Chinese American families, the composition of these families, their descendants, and the community as a whole. (p.189)

Siu (1992) argued that the phenomenon of Chinese immigrants as super-achievers is relatively recent due to the larger structural factors in both China and the U.S. Early Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. with lower socioeconomic status and poor education. Although there were always students and scholars too, only very small numbers of them constituted the Chinese immigrant population. Over 150 years, Chinese immigrants experienced enormous negative experiences in the U.S. such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (firstly issued in 1882), public hostility, racial discrimination, separation from family members, legalized house and school segregation, citizenship banning by naturalization, and even physical violence. According to Siu’s review, during the Exclusion Era between 1882 and 1943, Chinese immigration decreased sharply and the American public held an extremely negative view of Chinese. Later World War II
became one of the most historic events for the Chinese immigrants. Cited in Takaki (1989):

In the 1940’s for the first time Chinese were accepted by Americans as being friends because at that time, Chinese and Americans were fighting against the Japanese and the Germans and the Nazis. Therefore, all of a sudden, we became part of an American dream…we began to feel very good about ourselves... (p.373)

Siu (1992) concluded that “a series of events in the homeland as well as in the United States has led to a less hostile attitude toward Chinese-Americans and to a wider opening in the American opportunity structure” (Siu, p.13). It was not until the 1940s when Chinese in the U.S. had full access to American public education (Siu, 1992). The 1965 Immigration Law facilitated family reunification and an increased labor supply for immigrants. There was a 240% increase in Chinese population in the U.S. between 1960 and 1980 (Kwong, 1996). With the change of U.S. immigrant policy and advocates for social justice, Chinese immigrants have more study and work opportunities. At the same time, China initiated the largest Chinese study-abroad movement in Chinese history (Li, 2005), so more and more scholars have come to the U.S. to pursue advanced study. This new flow of immigrants has greatly changed the educational profile of Chinese immigrants.

It was during the mid-1960s when the term “model minority” for Asian immigrants was coined and caught public’s attention (Li, 2006). Based on Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework, the social and political contexts in both countries have presented great advantages for Chinese immigrants’ adaptation in the new land. It is worth to mention, one individual factor prior to immigration, educational level, has
played a very important role in Chinese immigrant children’s academic achievement. Berry pointed out that higher educational level was a high indicator of good cultural adaptation because it is directly related to job, income, and social networks. Instead of living in the U.S. temporarily for economic or educational advancement, recent Chinese immigrants view the U.S. as “a new home where they hope to find greater economic opportunities for themselves and educational advantages for their children” (Takaki, 1989, p.423).

Besides the Chinese cultural values and sociocultural contexts in both China and the U.S. that value education, some researchers claimed that Chinese immigrants strive for educational achievements for pragmatic reasons (e.g., Suzuki, 1977; Ogbu, 1990). Despite the improved immigrant status, most Chinese immigrants in the U.S. still feel insecure about their social status; therefore, education becomes a strategy to overcome job discrimination (Schneider & Lee, 1990). For example, Li’s (2001) study of Canadian-Chinese immigrants revealed that the expectations of Chinese new immigrants were contingent on the Canadian sociocultural context. Being aware of the demands of the Canadian labor market and their own visible minority status, all the participating families encouraged their children to pursue science and math, while it seemed that the careers in arts, politics or law is much more competitive for them in the western culture. It has been argued that Chinese children’s exceptional school performances, especially in the realm of science and technology, is not a reflection of their preferences and interests, but an adaptive response to external constraints of societal reality (Chun, 1995).
As a result of immigration, many immigrants experience a significant decline in their occupational and socioeconomic status, social networks and familial supports (Ali, 2008). When the role of parent is added, things become even more complicated.

**Intergenerational Gap**

One widely addressed problem with immigrant families is the intergenerational differences in acculturation level. Rick and Forward (1992) points out because the first generation immigrant parents have had well-established identity of home culture, they tend to maintain traditions after immigration. However, young children have wide exposure and interaction with host culture daily, so they are easy to be assimilated to the new culture. Therefore, “being Chinese” thus has different meanings for immigrant Chinese parents and their children (Mckay & Wong, 1996) and a wide intergenerational gap will be shaped. As a result of such a gap, problems such as intergenerational conflicts, parents’ depression and loss of self-efficacy in their parenting role are typical in immigrant families (Ali, 2008; Benner & Kim, 2010; Hwang, Wood, & Fujimoto, 2010; Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003).

**Resilience Types**

In her study exploring the resiliency within 20 Chinese immigrant families, Chang (2000) found three major coping types among the Chinese immigrants: “encountering changes within immigration,” “commitment to children” and “commitment to the marriage” (p.100-101). Within the three types, Chang claimed that “commitment to children” is fundamental. The marriages and families of the Chinese parents were preserved and empowered by their commitment to their children. Most of the participants
in Chang’s study attributed their decision on immigration to the desires for their children to have better education and career opportunities in the U.S. For the future of their children, these parents were willing to sacrifice better living conditions and career opportunities in their country of origin. Furthermore, the commitment to their children motivated the Chinese parents stay married for the welfare of the children (Chang). Therefore, the Chinese parents’ commitment to their children is essential to keep them resilient in face of immigration challenges and to preserve their marriage even when marital conflicts occur.

*Parental Beliefs and Practices*

Strongly influenced by Chinese cultural values and the demands of living in the U.S. society, almost all Chinese immigrants hold high educational expectations for their children and are actively engaged in their children’s life (Li, 2001; Li, 2006). In Siu’s (1992) review on Chinese-American educational achievement, she found consistency on Chinese parents’ parental practices from studies conducted in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and in the U.S.:

Chinese parents, whether here or abroad, tend to exercise more control over family members, be more protective of children, emphasize more obedience to the parents, provide a higher proportion of enthusiastic positive feedback when teaching young children, value grades more than general cognitive achievement in children, evaluate more realistically a child’s academic and personality characteristics, be less satisfied with a child’s accomplishment, hold children to higher standards, and believe more in effort and less in innate ability than their American counterparts. (p.11)
This summary depicted a group picture of Chinese parent’s parenting practices greatly shaped by Confucian values. In reality, Chinese immigrants’ parenting carries the influences of both Chinese and American cultures, contingent upon contextual factors.

Previous comparative work on eastern and western parenting has consistently reported that Chinese parents generally emphasize more the value of academic achievements than American parents (e.g., Chao, 1994; Lin & Fu, 1990; Wong, 1995). With an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of Chinese and western culture, the immigrant parents hold varying acculturative attitudes (Li, 2001). In her study with a group of Chinese immigrant parents in Canada, Li (2001) found that the majority of the parents maintained Chinese standards in terms of education and parenting. They believed that the demanding nature of Chinese parenting could ultimately produce positive outcomes. As one parent participant asserted, “Accomplishment is a result of tough discipline and hard work” (Li, p. 484). She was sure that the parents’ demands, including extra homework, are crucial for the child’s school success. At the same time, some Chinese parents criticized Canadian parents’ way of letting the kids grow naturally instead of providing enough guidance for children. They also expressed disappointment with weaker intellectual challenges in Canadian schools. In contrast, other parents expressed concerns about the Chinese academic inclination because it failed to nurture children’s multiple intelligences and mental health (Li, 2001). For example, the Qin family in Li’s study pointed out that while the strict academic training in China did help children develop good study habits, it directed the children only towards an academic journey, regardless of their own interests, talents, and abilities.
Research also indicates a mixture of Chinese tradition and American way in Chinese immigrants’ parenting practices. For example, in comparing the child-rearing beliefs and practices among Chinese, immigrant Chinese and the Caucasian-American mothers, Lin and Fu (1990) observed that the ratings on parental control were highest among the Chinese mothers and lowest among the Caucasian-American mothers, with the ratings of the immigrant Chinese mothers in the middle. This finding suggested a gradual change among immigrant parents due to acculturation to the western culture (Lin & Fu). Similarly, in Gorman’s (1998) study, who interviewed eight Chinese immigrant mothers (four from Mainland China, three from Taiwan, and one from Hongkong) of adolescents to gain information on their parenting attitudes and practices, she found that although all these mothers had strong concerns and beliefs about their children’s outcomes, most of their parenting approaches departed from traditional Chinese way of controlling, but in a more subtle way. The mothers were also found more flexible about what and how the children should learn, which is more of a western oriented parenting approach (Gorman).

Theoretical Framework for Research on Chinese Parents

Baumrind’s (1968) typologies of authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles have been a leading framework in research on immigrant parenting. Some researchers found that Asian American parents presented characteristics of authoritarian parenting: high levels of parental demands, low levels of parental responsiveness, and high levels of parental control (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts & Fraleigh, 1987). Other researchers found Chinese immigrants with authoritative parenting style, combining high levels of both parental warmth and parental
control (e.g., Chen, Chen, & Zheng, 2012). Paradoxical findings raised questions about the appropriateness of applying Baumrind’s typology to Asian American parents. In Chao’s (1994) influential work, she presented a Chinese conceptualization of parenting. In Chao’s study, immigrant Chinese mothers (mostly from Taiwan) and European-American mothers of preschool-aged children were administered standard measures of parental control and authoritative-authoritarian parenting style. In addition, Chao purposefully added a questionnaire related to an indigenous Chinese child-rearing concept, “chiao shun,” which contains “the idea of training (i.e., teaching or educating) children in the appropriate or expected behaviors” (p.1112). Chao discovered that while Chinese parents were significantly higher than European-Americans on the standard measures for parental control and authoritarian parenting style, the ways in which they interacted with their children were qualitatively different from how European American authoritarian mothers interacted with their children. Such finding cannot be well addressed by the authoritarian-authoritative typology. Instead, they should be understood through the indigenous concepts, such as chiao shun and guan, originated from Chinese sociocultural context.

The Chinese concepts of chiao shun (training) and guan (Chao, 1994, p.1111, emphasis added in original), are rooted in Confucian ideology. In contrast to the characteristics of “authoritarian” parents that is “associated with hostile, rejecting, and somewhat uninvolved parental behaviors toward child” (Chao, p.1113), the concept of chiao shun or “training” connotes the role of responsibility, that is, parents have to be “highly involved, caring, and concerned” with their children’s lives (Chao, p.1117). In
the English language the word *guan* simply means “to govern,” but in Chinese it implies to govern with care and love. In Chao’s (1994) words, “parental care, concern and involvement are synonymous with firm control and governance of the child” (p.1112).

Based on the findings, Chao (1994) argued that different concepts for parenting styles “have their own sociocultural traditions that have shaped how these concepts are defined. When these concepts are taken out of their sociocultural context and applied to individuals of differing traditions, they can be quite misleading” (p.1118). She questioned the ethnocentricity of Baumrind’s framework, which was based on the research with European American parents. Chao’s (1994) work on Chinese immigrants’ parenting from the indigenous Chinese concept provided a great example of understanding parenting within the psychological context of the target culture, rather than using western psychological theories as the framework. More research along this line has increased during the past two decades.

**Conclusion**

The review above first provides a historical and cultural background for Chinese immigrant parents’ emphasis on educational achievement. It was partially influenced by Confucian philosophy, partially by the challenge living in the U.S. From a historical view, as a visible minority group for over 150 years, “[t]he fear of subtle discrimination is ever-present” among Chinese immigrants (Siu, 1992, p.22). Unstable feelings trigger Chinese parents’ high educational expectations for their children for pragmatic reason (Li, 2001). Contemporarily, the recent sociocultural and political contexts in both China and the U.S. have brought increasing new immigrants with high educational level into the U.S. with a
more friendly environment in the U.S. society, which helped sustain the image of “model minority” and super-achievers among Chinese immigrants.

Regarding Chinese immigrants’ parenting, it has been widely found that Chinese parents retain many traditional aspects of parenting values and practices, and also experience changes as a result of acculturation (Guo, 2006). Challenging the ethnocentricity of western based authoritarian-authoritative typology on parenting styles, Chao (1994) argued that Chinese immigrants’ parenting must be understood within their own sociocultural traditions. As a result, the indigenous concepts of parenting, such as “chiao shun,” “guan,” have been used in recent studies on Chinese immigrant parents.

As the review of the literature illustrates, Chinese immigrants, even Asian immigrants, have always been pooled as a homogeneous group in research. Gibbs and Huang (2003) pointed out that

The overarching, shared cultural characteristics tend to mask the enormous heterogeneity of the Asian American population, with its range of languages, ethnic subcultures, religious preferences, economic systems, immigration patterns, family structures, socioeconomic issues, and cultural worldviews. (p.185)

Chinese immigrants are in fact an extremely heterogeneous group – “socially, politically, and culturally” (Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003, p.187). The homogeneity of a group is always accompanied with stereotyping. The problems with the stereotypes of Chinese immigrants as “model minority” and super-achievers was highlighted in the section of Importance of Studying Chinese Immigrant Parents in Chapter one, including hostility from mainstream population, less availability of social and educational services and resources, educational inequality, and racial discrimination. In fact, there are also
many underachieved Chinese children in the U.S. “The educational and developmental needs of these children are unique and are characterized by the stress of acculturation and intergenerational conflict” (Huang, Ying, & Arganza, 2003, p.187).

Given the fact that there are few studies in research on Chinese immigrant parents that focus intently on the diversities in their parenting at individual level, the current study tries to explore the individual differences of Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting beliefs and practices. In addition, while most existing research has studied Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting approaches in order to inform parent-child relationship, few studies have examined how and why these immigrant parents think, act and feel the way they parent throughout the process of parenting in a cross-cultural context. About the method of inquiry, many of previous studies on Chinese immigrant parent-child relationship and parenting styles were based on survey data, such as self-reported questionnaires or child-reported scales (e.g., Chao & Kaeochinda, 2010). These quantitative studies have been criticized for not being able to examine complex and subjective family values and cultural norms (Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992). Other research adopted the method of semi-structured interviewing to examine parental beliefs and strategies. Compared to survey method, qualitative research can gain rich data; however, preset questions limit the scope of data we can get.

With an interest in individual differences among Chinese immigrant parents, the current study used narrative inquiry approach. With open-ended interview prompts, the participants were facilitated to tell their parenting stories. Such an approach also shed
light to the various factors that shape the different ways Chinese immigrants raise their children.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

The current study explores the individual differences in the way Chinese immigrant parents raise their children in the U.S. and the factors that shape and influence their parental beliefs and practices. In particular, I am interested in the following research questions:

- What stories do Chinese immigrant parents tell regarding their parental beliefs and practices in the U.S. context?
- What do these stories tell us about the factors that influence Chinese immigrant parents’ parental beliefs and practices?
- How do the cross-cultural parenting experiences of Chinese immigrants help us understand the role of first culture and second culture in shaping immigrants’ parenting?

The Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting stories can not be revealed through traditional research methodologies that seek to “ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible” (de Vaus, 2006, p. 9). Instead, holding an epistemological stance of poststructuralism, I am more interested in the individual and “partial, local, historical knowledge” (Richardson, 2004, p.476) than the universal truth. Therefore, a qualitative narrative inquiry approach is used for the proposed study.

Since the late 1980s, researchers on parenting have started to wonder “whether respondents, given the opportunity to give free-floating and far-reaching narratives, might
conceivably structure the topic quite differently and add dimensions not anticipated by
the researcher” (Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992, xix-xx). Over the past
two decades, research interest in narrative emerged from several contemporary
movements including transnational movements – emancipation efforts of people of color,
women and other marginalized groups (Riessman, 2003). As argued by Langellier (2001):

Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted, personal
narrative responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense
of experience, claim identities, and ‘get a life’ by telling and writing their stories.
(p.700)

In order to challenge the widely accepted stereotypes about Chinese immigrants,
it is important to hear their stories within the concrete context. The main claim for the use
of narrative inquiry in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms,
who, individually and socially, lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The
value of narrative lies in the truth of experience – of “letting people speak for themselves
about their daily lives and communities, their thoughts, and feelings” (Sugiman, 1992,
p.12). To be a participant in culture, Kuhns (1974) asserts, is to have experience of the
community, the experience of which is expressed through the individual’s narrative.
Therefore, narrative inquiry is the best epistemological match for the current study.

Practically, the narrative inquiry method involves presenting the narrative
sketches or critical events with the elements of scene, plot, character and events
(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Data-gathering techniques may include “surveys,
observations, interviews, documentation and conversations that can enhance the time,
scene, and plot structures of the critical events” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.23).
Research Design

Participants

The participants for the current study are first generation Chinese immigrants who were born and grew up in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Malaysia, speak Mandarin or Cantonese as their native languages, and immigrated to the United States as adults. Also, all of the participants were parents of children who have attended or were attending U.S. schools, either private or public. The children of the participants were either born in the U.S. or immigrated to the U.S. before college, ensuring that all the participants have a certain amount of knowledge about the K-12 educational system in the U.S.

While the abovementioned parameters illustrate the characteristics shared by all the participants, “maximum variation” (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) is one of the main participant selection criteria for this study. The participants were recruited through the social connections of the researcher. With the goal of maximizing the range of participants and, to obtain insights into Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting experiences rather than to generalize, the technique of purposive sampling was adopted (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). In purposive sampling, participants were purposively selected to encourage maximum diversity within the participants (Onwuegbuzie and Collins). The participants were from three northeastern cities in the U.S., and represented as much variation as possible, including diversity in: gender, home of origin, years of residence in the U.S., socioeconomic status, educational level, English fluency, and
number of children. This sampling method allowed the complexities and subtleties of the human experience in individual parenting to be revealed.

Considering the length of time required for a narrative study, six families and up to twelve participants had been initially planned in the original proposal. However, once the data collection began, it was found that in most families, solely mothers were willing to participate in the study, and some of them did not want to share much about their life stories except for brief answers to the researcher’s questions. As a result, the number of the participants was increased to up to twenty parents and fifteen families three months after the first round of data collection. The individual families decided whether the mother or the father, or both, participated in the study. Eventually, sixteen parents from fifteen families were recruited, including thirteen mothers and three fathers. All of the participants were heterosexual, married couples. Data collection lasted eight months from August 2011 to March 2012.

As Table A1 (Appendix D) shows, the ages of the participants range from 31 through 60 years old. The participating families have one to four children in their household. Two participants are from Hong Kong, two from Taiwan, one from Malaysia, and eleven from Mainland China. The length of time the participants have lived in the U.S. ranges from 9 to 32 years. Most of the participants’ highest educational levels obtained are college or above, except for one mother who only completed middle school and one father who completed high school. Table A2 (Appendix E) provides information about the reasons the participants immigrated to the U.S. and their current family situation.
Role of the Researcher

As a Chinese immigrant parent myself, my interest in the current inquiry was piqued by my own parenting experiences away from my homeland, full of challenges, struggles, confusions as well as excitement and happiness. I had assumed the role of “insider” for the proposed study. By sharing a similar cultural background and immigration experience with the participants, I had thought it would be easier for me to establish a close rapport with each participant and provide an atmosphere that would enable the participants to openly share their life stories. I had also assumed that it would be easy for me to understand their stories as an “insider.” However, as questioned by my committee, the insider/outsider dichotomy in immigrant research has been seriously questioned during the past several years (Kusow, 2003). The major argument that Kusow presents is that the role of insider and outsider is “situational, depending on the prevailing social, political, and cultural values of a given social context” (p.592).

While the participants and I can all be categorized as Chinese immigrant parents, great diversities exist among us including our: genders, home of origin, years of residence in the U.S., socioeconomic status, educational levels, English fluency, and so on. Therefore, although I share the same cultural background and speak the same language as most participants (except for Ms. Kwan), my relationship with the research participants was not determined a “priori” and therefore I was not able to fully achieve status as an insider (Narayan, 1993). Furthermore, being a researcher can immediately distance me from the participants. As Kusow (2003) pointed out through his own
experience at a coffee shop in Canada, his disclosure of his researcher’s identity changed the way the participant commented on the Somali community in Canada right away.

During my casual encounters with some Chinese immigrant parents, we talked freely about our thoughts and feelings about our parenting experiences. Once I started to recruit participants for my study and changed my identity from a peer parent to a researcher, some parents’ reactions changed. For example, Ms. Zheng used to enjoy talking about how to raise children when I met her a couple of times at our kids’ swimming lessons. She liked to share her child rearing experiences and give me suggestions. During those casual meeting, she often led the conversations and talked about 90 percent of the time. Later after I determined my research topic and contacted her for possible participation, she cried on the other end of the phone line. She said, “I am not living a happy life as you imagined. I have had a really tough time with my husband.” Then she implicitly expressed her unwillingness to participate in the study. When I tried to emphasize that the focus of the research was on parenting experiences only, she still did not feel like participating at that moment. Even later when she agreed to participate, her worries of her story being told still present an obstacle for her to tell her story freely.

As is shown, the researcher’s identity inevitably influences the way the participant responds compared to the way s/he might talk in a more casual conversation.

The hesitation of sharing personal stories can also be attributed to cultural and historical factors. There is a famous saying in China, which has been held as a golden rule for generations: “always keep the shame within home” (jia chou bu ke wai yang). Overt expression of feelings is encouraged in western culture but not in Chinese culture.
(Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003). On the contrary, suppression of emotion, particularly in public situations, is highly valued in China. Expression of emotions, especially negative emotions, is thought to reflect poor upbringing. Therefore, Chinese immigrants tend to keep all the problems within their families or on the individual’s own mind.

As argued by Kusow (2003), “[insider/outsider] status emerges from the interaction between the researcher and the participants as well as the social and the political situation within which the interaction occurs” (p.597). My choice to disclose my shared cultural background with the participants served to facilitate and/or hinder the participants’ openness. Recognizing the situationality of the role of “insider” or “outsider” enabled me to better tell and retell the participants’ stories in a way that is true to their own voices.

Overall, my intimate cultural knowledge and personal experiences as a Chinese immigrant parent facilitated the participants’ narratives and also inevitably influenced data interpretation. At the same time, I tried to “put the objects of study at a distance” (Kessen, 1991, p.189, emphasis added in original) for the purpose of trustworthiness, “removing myself from my past experience and trying to transform those stories brought me to a higher level of awakening” (Connelly, 1996, Thesis talk, cited in He, 1998, p.23).

Interview Development

The early version of the interview protocol included the procedures for conducting the interview and a list of open-ended questions organized in the order of priority. I first piloted the questions with a Chinese mother who was not a participant in this study. Based on the research experience with her and her feedback, I revised my
questions to make them more concrete and easy to understand. The interview guide was developed based on three broad categories: immigration, parenting, and schooling. (See Appendix A for sample interview prompts.) With immigration, guided by Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework, I was interested in the participant’s characteristics prior to immigration, reasons for immigration (which may touch upon sociocultural contexts in both countries), and events or challenges after immigration. About parenting, I was interested in the participant’s childhood growth environment, overall parental beliefs, and any special events they could recall in their parenting experiences. Schooling is mainly about the parent’s attitude for American schools and their actual school involvement. The initial guide was further revised according to the feedback from my dissertation committee, and then modified several more times after interviews were conducted to enhance the cultural appropriateness and clarity.

Protection of Human Subjects

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the author’s university. After potential participants were identified, the researcher called the participants to request their participation in the study. Upon their agreement, a first interview was conducted at the time and place designated by the participant. Prior to the initial interview, all of the participants were well informed orally and in writing about the purpose of the research, procedures, the participant’s involvement and rights, and the potential risks of participation. The steps of the interview and the maintenance of confidentiality were explained. For example, as to the use and storage of the audio-recorded files, all electronic information was coded and secured using a password
protected file. The participants were informed that only the researcher had access to the recorded files, and the recordings were erased from the digital recording device after each interview and will be deleted from the researcher’s personal computer after the dissertation is defended. The interviewees were particularly informed of their right to end the interview at any point. A signed consent was obtained from each participant.

The selected parents were interviewed without anyone else present except for two interviews. In two cases, the researcher’s child and the participant’s child were present, but they did not make any threat to the participants’ privacy or negatively influenced the participants’ comfort level. The interviewees chose the interviewing time and the specific locations, such as their home, their work, their friend’s home, my home, church, and public library, which helped to provide a comfortable environment for them to participate in the interviewing process. Mr. and Ms. Zhou are from the same family, but they were interviewed separately so that privacy could be protected. At the end of the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or make comments on the interview process. After each of the interviews had been conducted, a follow-up phone call and an interview summary were sent or emailed to the participants for the purpose of soliciting feedback. After the final interview, a write-up of the complete transcript of the participants’ narrative was sent to each participant for final comments. I deleted the content the participants requested not to be included from my data repertoire. All the participants were given pseudonyms for privacy concern. Two participants requested faking partial of their demographic information. Respecting their request, the information about Ms. Wang’s husband’s job and her children’s gender is fictionalized and the
Information about Mr. Feng’s job and his number of children is fictionalized (see Appendix D). All other information is true.

Data Collection

Qualitative interviews. Upon IRB approval, data collection for this study started in the summer of 2011. In this study, I sought to uncover multiple realities related to Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting experiences constructed by Chinese immigrant parents in their given social, cultural, and personal circumstances. Hence, the open-ended, in-depth qualitative interview was chosen as the primary method of data collection, which allows the natural flow of “the richness of human diversity” (Kessen, 1991, p.192). In the beginning, the initial invitation email or phone call was sent or made to the potential participants, in which I briefly introduced the project and asked each person if s/he would be willing to participate. Although all the participants are bilingual with different levels in English, they were encouraged to talk freely either in English or Chinese. People who are bilingual usually express different sentiments in different languages, so allowing the participants to freely use both languages enabled me to obtain a more complete picture of each participant’s thinking process. Fifteen participants chose to speak Mandarin Chinese, and code-switching (the concurrent use of the two languages) appeared in some conversations for certain words. During our conversations, I tried to respond in the language of the participant’s preference, with the goal of making sure that each participant talked in the language s/he felt most comfortable with. One participant (Ms. Kwan) used English. Ms. Kwan is from Hong Kong, and her native language is Cantonese Chinese.
In the first interview, the main purpose was to establish rapport and mutual disclosure between the researcher and the participant and to initiate the story-telling process. The first interview lasted approximately one to two hours. During this interview stage, I introduced myself, shared my personal background as an immigrant and a mother, and introduced the proposed project and narrative method. Through this initial conversation, the participants’ demographic information was collected, which mainly includes: gender, age, birthplace, years living in the United States, educational attainment, employment status and income.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher initiates and facilitates the participant’s storytelling through the use of open-ended questions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that people experience life events across three dimensions: the temporal, the spatial, and the personal-social. As time and experience are critical in narrative, stories are told by allowing time and experience to work their way into the inquiry (Webster and Mertova, 2007). I generally initiated each conversation by asking the participants about the time they had their first child, and let their narrative flow if there was no ending point. If their narrative went too far from my research focus, I tried to lead the participant back to the topic by polite prompts. Along with the participants’ narratives, I added questions related to interview guide, including their immigration experience, attitudes for schools and their parenting beliefs, etc. Sometimes I also shared my own story. In case my own story distracted the participants’ narration, I tended to only add my own experience and feelings with the purpose of showing sympathy for their story, as a way to encourage them to tell more. Some participants were very good story
tellers. Without much probing, they could talk freely. Some participants were holding back, which, I believe, was due to the cultural preference for privacy or the difference of personality. The preference of the more reserved participants was: “you ask, and I answer” (interview transcript, 03/02/2012). Most participants “expanded on the stories as the research relationship developed” (Riessman, 2008, p.55).

The participants were interviewed as many times as needed if the participant had more stories to tell. The interviewing time lasted from one to three hours. The duration of the interview as a whole and the sequencing of particular topics were influenced more by “contingent features of the interview process” than by any well-considered plans of my own (Williams, 1984, p.177). Sometimes we had to stop in the middle of our conversation, if the time was strictly limited based upon the participant’s schedule.

At the end of the first interview, a second interview was scheduled about a week later so that sufficient time would be provided for the researcher to transcribe the first interview, write the narrative and summary, and send to the participant for review. At the second interview, the researcher first talked about the narratives from first interview, and asked for feedback and clarifications on certain points. Then the participants were encouraged to tell more stories or continue with former stories. Depending on each participant’s contextual situation, more interviews were conducted with certain participants. Each interview session was audio-taped and transcribed in Chinese, and then translated into English for data analysis. The interviews with Ms. Kwan were transcribed in their original form, English. Basic grammar errors were corrected, without affecting the participant’s intent.
The researcher's journal. During the research process, I made regular entries in a journal. The journal mainly recorded the field notes from interviewing, including: extra information from informal contacts with the participant such as phone conversations, email communications and casual chats. The journal also helped record my personal reflections and those “fragments of storied moments of time and space” during the research journey (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.17).

Document review. Some participants were willing to share their family albums, their children’s school work and competition certificates, and their correspondence with school teachers, or their friends or extended family members. These documents constitute an important part of the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred during the process of data collection. During the first interview, the researcher started to make initial data processing by recording reflection notes, improvising new interview prompts or revising the improper questions. More reflection notes were taken immediately after each interview. I listened to the recordings of interviews again and again, and jotted down the thoughts on the moment. Extensive notes and comments were written too when reading the transcripts again and again, sometimes influenced by the literature, theories and the researcher’s own personal experiences. After all the interviews were completed with the participant, I developed a narrative sketch of the participant detailing “event, characters and structure” (Webster & Nertova, 2007, p.73).
**Critical events approach.** Webster and Mertova (2007) propose that narrative can be analyzed through the highlighting and capturing of critical events contained in stories of experience. When people tell stories, “people distil those events that are most important” (Webster & Mertova, p.72). These critical events are essential for the research because when the participant remembers a critical event vividly, because they must have had a profound impact on the narrator (Webster & Mertova). Critical events may be a particular characteristics of narrative inquiry, because “[i]t is impossible to construct a list of critical events before they occur” and “[i]t is only in retrospect that an event can be seen to have been critical for the storyteller” (Webster & Mertova, p.74). In each participant’s narrative sketch, I located critical events, if any, adding comments and interpretations. The critical events that share similar themes were taken out of personal narrative sketches and grouped together for analysis.

Two types of data analyses are used to present findings: case-focused narrative analysis and cross-case thematic analysis. In case-focused narrative analysis, the narrative stories of four parents out of sixteen participants are presented. The stories are retold in the form of autobiography in the narrators’ own voices. In cross-case thematic analysis, themed findings collected from the narratives across all the sixteen participants are presented.

**Case-focused narrative analysis.** Although each parent of the sixteen participants told a unique story, several critical events from four participants’ narratives were selected to be retold as four narrative stories in the section of case-focused narrative analysis. On one hand, these four cases are not “representative” in any statistical sense, but rather
“symbolize, portray, and represent” something important about individual immigrant
parent’s paths of educating their children (Williams, 1984, p.176). On the other hand,
however, the cases do portray vibrantly the different styles of parenting among Chinese
immigrant parents, thus may contribute to our understanding of the whole Chinese
immigrant community.

The stories are presented in the form of autobiography in the narrators’ own
voices. In an earlier version of case analysis, I presented each case study in my voice,
together with extensive quotations of transcripts. Later, influenced by Weiss’s (1994) and
Lewis’s (1961) suggestions, I switched the presentation of each story in the participants’
voices, with my comments in the end. According to Weiss (1994), presenting case story
in the participant’s and the researcher’s voices alternatively might become tiring and
confusing for the readers to read voices from the researcher and the narrator back and
forth. A coherent story is easy for the readers to follow, to be taken into the participants’
lives and to possibly “identify with actual people” (Weiss, p.168). Commenting on the
objectivity, Lewis (1961) claims that the method of autobiography in the participants’
own voices “tends to reduce the element of investigator bias because the accounts are not
put through the sieve of [the investigator’s cultural mind] but are given in the words of
the subjects themselves” (xi). With an interest in providing readers an opportunity to hear
from the participants rather than listening from the mediated voices, I tried to let the
stories unfold instead of imposing theories and assumptions on the stories (Connelly,
1998, conversation with He, cited in He, 1998). The stories were constructed and

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reconstructed with the focus of transmitting the contents smoothly only, without consideration of other factors such as the narrators’ tones and gestures (Riessman, 2008).

It is hoped that the case stories promote a holistic view of the individual parents’ experiences, whereas the thematic analysis later on may present a cross-sectional view of their experiences together with the other twelve participants’ stories.

Cross-case thematic analysis. This section presents the themes findings emerged from the critical events within the narratives across all the sixteen participants. Taking critical events in each participant’s narrative sketch as analysis unit, the broad four categories are parental beliefs and practices, acculturation dynamics and family system, interactions with home and host cultures, and school involvement. Then under parental beliefs and practices, subcategories include traditional parenting with a focus on academic achievements, democratic parenting with a focus on whole child, and Christian parenting with the goal as serving God. Under the category of acculturation dynamics, subcategories include immigration challenges, intergenerational acculturation gap, and marital discord. Under the category of interactions with home and host cultures, the role of grandparents and fathers’ heading back to China are two sub-themes. Finally under the category of school involvement, related critical events are divided into frustrating involvement and active involvement.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Rigor

Although it is widely mentioned that “narrative research should not be judged by the same criteria as those that are applied to more traditional and broadly accepted qualitative and quantitative research methods” (e.g., Polkinghorne (1988), Riessman
(1993), Huberman (1995), Amsterdam & Bruner (2000), and Geelan (2003), cited in Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.89), trustworthiness and rigor are still the most fundamental qualities for a good qualitative research.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) note several criteria regarding the issues of trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative research. First and foremost, the authors emphasize that the research must be ethically conducted. In the current study, the ethical standards are detailed in the section “protection of human subjects.” Then, both the theoretical and methodological frameworks are explicated, which makes the research whole and coherent. Rossman and Rallis further detail the standards for research practice, focusing on the accuracy of what is reported (its true value), the methodology used to generate the findings (its rigor), and the usefulness of the study (its generalizability and significance) (p.65). The strategies suggested by Rossman and Rallis helped to ensure the credibility and rigor for the current study, including triangulation, “being there,” participant validation, peer debriefer, and using the community of practice, which will be detailed as follows.

**Triangulation.** Multiple sources of data and multiple points in time can help to maintain the factual accuracy of the researchers’ account, primarily being authentic and being true to the original narratives (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The main data collection method of the current study is open-ended interview. Multiple interviews were conducted at different times with each participant. Multiple sources of data such as interview transcripts, documents, photos and emails were collected.
“Being there.” This strategy is also called “prolonged engagement,” meaning that spending a substantial amount of time with participants can help get more complete idea of what the participants experienced in the context, instead of a “snapshot” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.69). In conducting the current research, by developing good rapport with each participant and encouraging their narratives with attentive listening and timely prompts, I was able to maintain the authenticity of the narratives. I stayed in the interview as long as the participant’s narrative went, rather than setting a fixed time for question and answers. With three participants, each single interview lasted more than two hours.

Participant validation. This strategy is also called “member checks,” referring to the way to provide the participant an opportunity to “elaborate, correct, extend, or argue about” the researcher’s findings. To accomplish this, I had constant connection with the participants, discussing their feelings, and providing them with a write-up of their narratives to make sure the information I collected accurately reflect their real experiences and feelings. I provided the transcripts of the interviews in Chinese and the write-ups in English. One participant argued about the translation at one point, which she did not feel accurate to the meaning she intended to transfer. I made the change based on her suggestion. However, this became a bit hard to realize with the participants whose English is poor. Therefore, I asked another Ph.D. student, who is also bilingual in Mandarin Chinese and English, to go through all my translations. When she had questions at certain points, I contacted the participants for further clarification.

Peer debriefer. This strategy refers to have a person who serves as an “intellectual watchdog” when major decision is made regarding research design, data analysis strategy,
etc. (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.69). My dissertation chair and committee members played such a role in my current research.

Using the community of practice. Rossman & Rallis (2003) point out that “engaging in critical and sustained discussion with valued colleagues” will increase the research rigor. I had a support group that was made up of three doctoral students in the program of education. We exchanged our progress, questions, and ideas on a weekly basis.

In interpreting and presenting data, to retell the participants’ stories without the trace of my voices was challenging because of my intimate cultural knowledge and personal experiences as a Chinese immigrant parent. To reduce this bias, I tried to consciously distance myself from the participants when interpreting the data, subsequently eliminating the possibility of biased data. In order to ensure a factual representation of the lived stories without adding my personal biases, I utilized two analysis methods: case-focused narrative analysis and cross-case themed analysis. In case-focused narrative analysis, I presented the participants’ narratives either in a chronological order or were made up of selected critical events (with time, place, character and setting). The stories were told in the form of autobiography, with the researcher’s commentary in the end, which is another way to reduce the researcher’s bias in the presentation of data. In cross-case themed analysis, thick description from the participants’ narratives and critical events were used.

Regarding generalizability, according to Maxwell (1992), “there are two aspects of generalizability in qualitative research: generalizing within the community group or
institution studied to persons, events, and settings that were not directly observed or interviewed; and generalizing to other communities, groups, or institutions” (p.293). The findings of the current study suggest that Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting is multiply determined and the view of acculturation process as a continuum of enculturation and acculturation can be extended to the larger Chinese immigrant community as well as other immigrant communities, thus achieving generalizability.
Chapter Four: Case-Focused Narrative Analysis

This chapter presents the case-focused narrative stories of four individual parents out of sixteen participants. Ms. Chiu’s and Ms. Kwan’s stories were chosen because their parenting experiences may seem common among American families, but are in fact atypical among traditional Chinese immigrant families. Ms. Chiu became Christian after immigration and ended up homeschooling her children, which is very rare in the Chinese immigrant community. Ms. Kwan is an educator from Hong Kong, which provided her advantages in language, culture and familiarity with the education system to bring her child’s potential into full play. Ms. Wang’s story was told in detail because she shared several critical events that vividly depicted typical but rarely told stories among traditional Chinese families. In the fourth case, Ms. Wei presented a strong case of an immigrant parent who took a hybrid parenting approach, where she maintained traditional Chinese educational values of being strict with kids and also adopted western concepts with emphasis on independence and open expression of love.

The four stories are not in their original narrative completeness. Particular plots were selected to tell a coherent story with a central theme. The stories are told in the form of autobiography in the participants’ own voices, with a brief introduction of the participant’s background in the beginning and the researcher’s commentary at the end. Serving as the point of entry and foundational resources for the subsequent cross-case thematic analysis, these cases provide an opportunity for the readers to relive the narrators’ lives in the forms of “scene, plot, character and event sketches related to critical events” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.23).
Ms. Chiu

*Introduction*

Ms. Chiu is from Taiwan. She came to the United States (U.S.) in the late sixties to pursue graduate studies and received her master’s degree in Engineering. She became a Christian, and got to know her husband, who is also a Christian, at a retreat event co-organized by several churches. As Christians, Ms. Chiu and her husband did not have purposeful plans for having children, leaving it to God’s will. They ended up having three daughters followed by one son. Here is her parenting story.

*The Story*

Right before our first daughter, Leah, was born, I quit my job and became a full-time homemaker. During the time of my pregnancy, I kept praying and worried whether I would do a good job raising and educating the coming baby. I worried that my child’s normal development at God’s wish might get affected as a result of my incompetence. God gave me this life; I need to take very good care of her. On the 6-week check-up for Leah, I had a piece of paper full of questions, double sided. I really worried if I did anything incorrectly in baby caring. The pediatrician looked at me behind her glasses, smiled, and said, “She loves you very much. You just love her.” That pediatrician’s words greatly relieved my nervousness. She treated Leah really well. Each time Leah was sick, the pediatrician voluntarily came to my home to check Leah in order to prevent her from being infected by other sick kids at the doctor’s office. I think God made this magic happen. Because God is there, I always felt supported.
My second daughter, Mia, was born after Leah turned to two. Although Leah was only two, I always had high expectations for her because she was older. One day, Leah felt very frustrated, asking me, “Mom, why do you sound so mean when talking to me but sound so nice when talking to Mia?” Right at that moment I started to realize that Leah was also a little kid, only two years old. Then I started to change my attitude to her and tried to be equal to both of my children. Later I had my other children, and I surely became more and more experienced.

In order for my children to receive education with Christian beliefs, I sent all my four children to a private Christian school. As Leah grew up, she found out that Christian schools also have all the bad aspects that public schools have. The difference is that bad things happening in public schools happen in Christian schools a couple of years later. Then it so happened that we attended a seminar that summer and we were introduced to a very good Christian curriculum, which can be used for home-schooling. The root of the curriculum is the Bible, and all the other subjects come out of the root. Subjects like English language arts, history, science, law, and so on are all interrelated and integrated into the Bible, so it is great to help develop the children’s imagination and mindful thinking skills. Therefore, when Leah reached high school, and my youngest son was going to start first grade, my husband and I made a big decision to home-school all our children.

Homeschooling was a very tough decision for us to make. Being a Chinese family living in the U.S. with English as a foreign language, teaching the kids in English made me scared. In particular, I did not think that I had the confidence and ability to fulfill this
task. So, as a Christian, I kept praying to God for guidance. One day I heard the positive response from God, I made my decision for homeschooling. However, although my daughters were not satisfied with the Christian school, they were strongly against homeschooling. They felt it was already unfair for them to be put into Christian school, unlike most other children. They felt they were at a lower level academically than other children from public schools because they had to spend so much time learning religion. They thought homeschooling would be even worse.

I respected my children’s suggestion, but this time I insisted the decision of homeschooling, because it was God’s will. It turned out to be more of a learning experience for myself, as a parent. I was actually the one who received most of the education during the process of homeschooling my children. The first year, I was disappointed with my children. I always wondered why they didn’t cooperate, why they were not willing to follow God’s will. The second year, I was disappointed with my husband, I wondered why he didn’t do as the Bible says. The third year, I started to realize that many of the problems were because of me. As a mother and teacher, I had to set a good example for my children. I started to be more aware of how I behaved and what I said, because I knew all my kids were watching and learning. For example, if I want them to concentrate, I need to concentrate. If I want them to be appreciative and grateful, I need to be appreciative and grateful too. I also became more open-minded and tolerant, having four children with varied personalities. Homeschooling created an opportunity for me to be with my children all the time. Once I started to change, I saw the
changes in my husband and my children. Every year my children needed to take standardized tests for evaluation. It turned out that they were all at the right levels.

A couple of years later, my family went back to Taiwan and established our own training institute based on this set of curriculum. All my children helped in the institute, and learned by doing and experiencing. Leah later helped us with the training a lot, so she gained a lot of work experience and life experience by doing it. Mia is very organized, so she had been our main accountant. Later she got married and left, we needed four people to do her work. She got her college diploma through taking CLEP (College-Level Examination Program) tests. My youngest daughter is more social, so she worked on communication and English teaching, and has published her own English textbook featured with character education. My son is crazy for music. While helping us in the institute, he designed the music program for children.

I never worried about my children making a living without college degrees. I believe with a good personality, rich life experience, and good English, it is easy to find a job anywhere. The most important thing to me, as a loyal Christian, is that my children must respect God. If they respect God, they will not do anything bad. Everything is in God’s hand.

**Commentary**

As a Christian, Ms. Chiu’s parenting experiences were profoundly shaped by her Christian faith. Whenever familial conflicts occurred, she always turned to the Bible for help and guidance together with her husband and children. Since the Chiu family believes

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3 The interviews were conducted in 2011 in the U.S. when Ms. Chiu came to visit her daughters.
in a higher power, they believe they are all equal, both in the eyes of God and within the household. The decision to homeschool one’s child(ren) is hard for any family, but this decision is particularly difficult for immigrant parents. Attracted to the idea of homeschooling, I once asked an American mother who was homeschooling her daughter about the practice and her immediate reaction was “homeschooling is not good for your kids. Because you are from another country, you need to expose your children to the language and culture in the U.S.” Ms. Chiu’s children did not want to be homeschooled in the beginning. This was probably due to the fact that as immigrants, they knew few American families, and being homeschooled would potentially limit their ability to meet new people. However, Ms. Chiu was committed to homeschooling because she worried about the negative influences of the schools on her children, and most of all, serving God was the most important goal for her educational expectations for her children.

Homeschooling became a great learning experience for Ms. Chiu. Being the primary educator for her children allowed Ms. Chiu to grow as a parent, especially as she learned that her behaviors as a parent had a significant effect on her children. For example, Ms. Chiu learned that if she wanted her children to express gratitude, she needed to model that behavior for her children. These kinds of lessons have the ability to transcend the classroom and positively influence the Chiu family in other ways. Furthermore, through homeschooling her children, Ms. Chiu found educational and employment empowerment by establishing a training institute in Taiwan that utilized the curriculum she used for homeschooling. Through starting this company in Taiwan based on her family’s experiences in the U.S., Ms. Chiu directly challenged many stereotypical
beliefs that parents who homeschool their children in the U.S. are isolating their children, and that women who homeschool their children do not have their own educational and professional ambitions.

Ms. Kwan

Introduction

Ms. Kwan was born and raised in Hong Kong. She was enrolled in Hong Kong schools through high school, and then won a scholarship to attend a college in England, majoring in occupational therapy. Ms. Kwan speaks fluent English and Cantonese Chinese; thus, we had our interviews in English. She has two boys, four years apart. Her older son, Leo, was born in Hong Kong. In the mid 1980s, Ms. Kwan and her husband, together with three-year-old Leo, immigrated to the U.S. The main reason for the family’s immigration was their uncertainty of what would happen after Mainland China took over Hong Kong in 1997. After arriving in the U.S., Ms. Kwan found a job in a public school district as a child therapist. Soon after immigrating, the family started a business out of their house. Later they had their second son, Liam, who was born in the U.S. Now both boys are grown up. Ms. Kwan has just retired from her school work and manages the family’s home business. Ms. Kwan’s story primarily focuses on her parental experiences with her older son, Leo.

The Story

My first child, Leo, was not expected, so I was very depressed. Even when he was born, I wasn’t that excited, because I was not prepared to be a mother. I wasn’t prepared at all to be a mother. Although I had a lot of knowledge for kids from my work, it’s very
different when you raise a child on your own. It’s a lot more than knowledge. Even so, after Leo was born, I had to become a mom right away. I just knew I had responsibility. I took up the responsibility right away. You don’t have much choice on that.

After we came to the U.S., because both my husband and I worked and there were no extended family members who could help us, the care for Leo became a problem. Leo just turned three then. I hoped to have opportunity to watch him now and then during the day. Then I decided to have him come to work with me as I worked in school too. At the time, he did not have one word of English, so the preschool teachers in the school I worked at looked at him as speech delay. How can a child, who just came to the country without a single word of English, be diagnosed as speech delay by taking tests in English? This just did not make any sense. Actually he is a very very smart child. He is a prodigy. But he did not know the language. In those days, the school admission requirement was not that strict, so I was able to get him into one of our preschool classes so that he could be fully immersed into English language environment. Basically I just stuck him into one of the preschool classrooms. I worked in the rehab center at the same school, so I was able to visit him a couple of times during the day. It did not take Leo long to pick up English, much easier than Chinese.

I worked with kids physically or mentally delayed. Actually it was interesting watching my child grow, because I could see normal development. There were a lot of things that I was really amazed that a child can do at very young age, and how much he could learn. He actually could learn far more than I expect. Working in the school system as a child therapist made me good at watching and observing while my children were
playing. When my kids were awake, any of their waking moments, I used very effective ways to teach them new things, so they learned all the time. I believe children learn a lot through play, so I have a lot of toys. I had all the new stuff, even little things, even just pencil and paper. I was just watching them behave and then pushing for the next step. For example, if they could draw a circle, I would challenge them maybe put two dots to make a face, you know, things like that. You just encourage them and get them to the next level. And they learned very fast. So I watched and observed a lot. I watched them closely, pushed them to the next level, and went with their interest.

About one year after we arrived in the U.S., Leo became very advanced compared to his peers. When Leo reached the age of attending Kindergarten, I bought a house in the best school district in the city, which is 26 miles away from my work. However, problem came. After the first day Leo went to kindergarten, he came home and said, “mom, school is boring.” I said, oh my God, boring, what am I going to do? I know exactly what he meant when he said boring, because he always looked for things to do, and looked for things to learn. Then the second day he came home and said “I’m not going to school any more.” He decided he was not going to school any more. So I went to see the principal, and he said in kindergarten kids come to play, they don’t need to study. I said “but my son said he’s not coming any more, it’s boring.” And I asked if he could just at least advance him, putting him in reading class with first grade to keep him happy. The principal said “no, we don’t do that.” He just did not want to do it.

As a child therapist, I fought for the kids with disabilities. However, with my own child, I found it a lot easier to fight for kids with disabilities than to fight for gifted kids,
because there was no such thing in existence for the talented and gifted people in America. Later, with my colleagues’ suggestions, I visited some private schools and finally settled in a Christian school, where the teachers agreed to place Leo in the proper class. They would love to place my son in class based on his level. I said that was fine, that was all I was asking for. You can go at his pace, and whatever level he can go, let him go, just don’t hold him back. Then Leo found the school interesting, and not boring. So I enrolled him into private school. At the time we didn’t have much money, but we still had to come up with tuition and everything. And on top of that, this school is so far from my house, like 25 miles away, so they wouldn’t bus him. So I was the bus. I even had to drive him to school on the days I was sick myself. And this private school, truly, they let him go on his own pace.

When Leo reached the third grade, we transferred him to a public school which had a great gifted program called triad program for kids in grades 3-6. What happened was that they put all the gifted kids together, not just gifted in one or two subjects. They were accelerated in math, science and reading. So you saw older kids too. The best thing of this program was that my son had friends. This was a group of smart kids. When you are in that category, you need to have friends who think the same way and play the same way. That made big difference, because when they played with the normal kids of the same age, they easily got frustrated and bored. Then they either became aggressive, or got upset and gave up socializing all together. So that really helped Leo. His new friends also advanced him in many ways.
I was really happy with this gifted program, and Leo too. Based on my knowledge of normal schools, I believed that Leo would not make any progress if he were in a regular class. In most school system, if you finish a worksheet, they will just give you another worksheet. It doesn’t take the kids one hour, or half an hour, to figure out that it doesn’t matter whether they do it fast or get it well done, they just get more work, so they stop completing the work. In that way gifted kids do not progress. American school system is designed for average kids. They do not meet gifted kids’ needs. It turned out a waste of time if a kid got the same working sheet all the time. I knew some friends who have kids gifted. That’s what happened to them. So I felt really blessed to have had my son in the gifted program.

When Leo was ten, the gifted program could not meet his math demand, so I started to look for something that challenged his math brain. I called up different places. I enrolled him into different programs. Then I found a math professor at the local university. This professor was very interested in a child that is a prodigy, so he worked with Leo voluntarily. I dropped off Leo with the professor for an hour every week for a couple of years, just the two of them. Each time I picked him up, they had all these equations on the chalkboard. I am from a science stream, but I don’t understand those. Leo found it very stimulating and challenging working with this professor.

At the end of Leo’s 6th grade year, when the gifted program was ending, the same old problem occurred again. I had to send Leo to a regular middle school. Because he was so advanced in math, the school decided to send him to high school just for math. Kids didn’t accept him. Some kids were very mean to him. Kids can be very mean. So at that
time he really didn’t have many friends. When he went to high school for math, he was obviously different from other kids, much younger. They looked at him and say, “oh, this short guy, short and chubby guy can do math…” he got all As in math. He actually was teaching those high school kids math.

When Leo was fourteen, he started to go to college for math class. I worried about letting Leo take school bus, so I talked into the principal to agree letting Leo take a taxi to college. Because I pushed the school really hard, when Leo reached 15, the school strongly suggested him go to college directly. Then he did and gained his master degree at the age of 20. I had to fight for him all my life. I just did not want anything to hold him back and let him go. I fought within educational system. It’s natural. Every parent would fight for their kids. I never taught Leo math. He was just interested. My younger son is a totally different person from Leo. He was not so much into academic, but more of an artist. I also supported him too.

Commentary

Many factors played a role in Ms. Kwan’s parenting experiences in the U.S. Growing up in Hong Kong, which used to be governed by British government, made it easy for Ms. Kwan to navigate western culture with fluent English. Working in the U.S. educational system provided an opportunity for Ms. Kwan to become familiar with the educational values and ideologies in the host culture. Such working experience increased Ms. Kwan’s awareness of her children’s educational needs and enabled her to make the best use of the U.S. educational system to find the learning environment that best met her son’s needs, and even pushed the school to make changes.
The way she “educated” her preschool-age son is very impressive. She took him with her work and kept challenging him with new input, which improved his learning ability. Preschool age is actually the most important time to develop a child’s learning and thinking skills. Therefore, Leo was way beyond many of his peers at the age of three, and this gap continued to grow bigger and bigger. Once he grasped reading, he would read more and more; once he grasped basic math knowledge, he would go deeper and deeper. Echoing Bronfenbrenner’s (Luster & Okagaki, 2005) emphasis on the parent’s role in child development, a devoted parent can make a big difference in a child’s life starting at birth. Research indicates that one of the primary ways that Asian immigrant parents ensure their children’s welfare is by providing not only instrumental support, continually ensuring their daily needs are met, but also providing parental involvement and resources they need to succeed in school (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Pyke, 2000). Ms. Kwan sacrificed a lot in order to have the best education for her children.

One interesting component of Ms. Kwan’s narrative is her claim “It’s natural. Every parent would fight for their kids.” However, Ms. Kwan’s parental experiences were not all “natural.” In fact, she had many privileges that many other immigrants do not have, such as linguistic, cultural and work experiences that enabled her to help secure proper resources for her son.

Ms. Wang

Introduction

Ms. Wang was born in northern China in the early 1970s. She came to the United States in 2002 to join her husband, who was pursuing a Ph.D. in computer science. They
have a daughter in 2nd grade, and a son in 6th grade. Ms. Wang holds a bachelors degree in China. She has been a homemaker ever since she came to the U.S.

When I first invited Ms. Wang to participate in my study, she was initially hesitant. She said it would be painful to relive her past experiences, but later she called me and agreed to share her story. She said, “I think I have the courage to recall all those bits and pieces during my growth as a parent, but there is also something buried deep in my heart that I would never be brave enough to touch again and share” (interview transcript, 10/10/2011). We met almost ten times in person, and also had occasional phone calls. Each time Ms. Wang had many stories to share, many thoughts, feelings and experiences, including those that have been deep in her heart for a long time and those that have happened more recently. She cried several times during our conversations. Sometimes I felt it was cruel to ask her to share her stories and wondered if she wanted to stop, but she always comforted me by saying, “Don’t worry. I just can’t help crying, and I’ve gone over these already. I am okay now” (interview transcript, 10/10/2011).

The Story

I majored in finance and used to have a very good job in China. I was unexpectedly pregnant when my husband was planning to study in the U.S. At the moment I did not want to leave my job, so I talked with my husband wondering if it would be okay for him to study abroad while my son and I stayed in China. He was strongly against it and insisted that the family should stay together. Therefore, I joined him soon together with our baby boy, Lei. At the same time, I lost my job in China. Later I did try to pursue a master’s degree in a local college in the U.S. However, a terrible car
accident stopped my study in the half way. As a result, I became a homemaker. We had our daughter, Ellie, three years after we arrived in the U.S.

Being the only child in my own family, I was not ready to fully take the responsibility of a mother after my son was born. Every day my husband would come home finding something wrong I did related to caring for the baby. Every “dangerous” thing had to be hidden. No pens could be left on the couch. All the corners must be padded. My husband and I have very different personalities. I am a laid-back person, emotional and careless. He is very careful with everything. On one hand, we complement each other, but on the other, I always make mistakes in his eyes. If he talked calmly, I would be able to accept it better, but he always yelled at me. Often times he yelled at me in front of my kids, “Do you have your head up your ass? Use your brain!”

I was very depressed during the first couple of years after Lei was born. I took my husband’s criticism very seriously. I cried hard when he wasn’t around (because he doesn’t like tears) and I had three cases of mastitis with a fever as high as 104°F. My husband never allowed for hiring a babysitter, because he didn’t feel safe with letting an outsider take care of our child. Financial reason came second. Being depressed, exhausted, and losing confidence, I even thought of committing suicide. I went out one night after Lei fell asleep. I walked around the neighborhood crying. I thought about how useless I am, making mistakes all the time. Maybe after I leave this world, my husband would find a better wife and my kid would have a more competent mom. I walked for about an hour, crying and thinking. Then I started to worry about Lei. If Lei woke up but did not see me, he would cry. Then I went back home.
As I built up motherhood and love for my child, I became more tolerant for my husband’s temper, kept silent most time and tried to do things in the way he demanded; however, fight was still unavoidable. One day, I reminded Lei to practice piano. I said, “Even a ten-minute practice is better than nothing.” Hearing this, my husband got very angry, “What? Ten minutes? He should play 30 minutes every day. You know how much we pay for his piano lessons. How can you let him play for just ten minutes?” I did not know why I talked back at the moment, but I responded, “Sometimes it is hard to keep watching him. I have so much housework to do, and I also have to take care of Ellie. You said you take care of Lei’s math, do you keep up on it every day?” This last sentence made my husband furious. He first threw a big book at my knee, then jumped up and hit me in the back, and yelled, “You are the mom, how can you not be responsible for our children’s education? How dare you talk to me like that?” Lei was dumbfounded at the scene. Ellie (not yet three years old then) came to stand between my husband and I, trying to separate us with her little arm, saying “nobody can cross this line. Nobody yells.” Then she started to cry very hard.

I started to think about divorce, but I hesitated because I felt it would be a disaster for my husband and also may not be good for my children with separated parents. Our children mean everything to my husband. He actually cares about this family very much. He is not happy with his job, but he stays with the current job in order to financially support our family. He buys cheap clothes for himself, but always tries to satisfy our family’s needs. Sometimes I feel sympathetic for him. Once he told me that he got spanked many times when he was little, and his parents were always fighting. I guess he
has temper control problem due to his family’s influence. He needs help too. On top of these, my incompetency with child rearing is also a big trigger for his temper.

I talked with several Chinese friends about my frustration. One friend immediately warned me that I should never call the police. She told me that her friend in California called 911 after her husband tried to strangle her neck. Then everything went out of control. The police came and sent her husband to jail. She had to ask around to borrow money and bail her husband out. As the same time, her husband has got a bad record for the rest of his life. The wife called the police hoping to give the husband a warning, without expecting any real consequences. Now she regretted making that call and the family fell apart.

Another friend emphasized that this is a normal phenomenon in China. She grew up in a family with a father like this too. The father was always the most dominant person in the family in China, and the rest of the family members had to take any abuse from the father and suffer without any complaint, not to mention taking actions. This friend is a Christian too, so she tried to persuade me to love my husband based on God’s words: “Love suffers long” (1 Corinthians, 13) and love will change him. She suggested that this experience is actually a good way to build my personality and help me mature. I had to agree because I have changed a lot over the past couple of years. I tried to follow all my husband’s orders, to correct all my mistakes he pointed out, which surely helped to reduce the fight.

My friends all tried to make me understand that my husband is such a nice person who really cares about the family. His temper is something I can work on, and is more of
a cultural issue. I should not judge my husband’s behavior using western culture. On another thought, while generations of Chinese women have lived the role of “servants” at home, how can I not be happy with this role too, even though we live in a different land?

My husband often yelled at Lei too and spanked him occasionally. He easily got mad at Lei because Lei’s personality is more like a girl. Most times when my husband yelled, Lei could not control his tears, which triggered my husband’s anger even more. I felt hopeless changing my husband, so I always comforted Lei afterwards, and told him to be alert of not triggering dad’s anger.

Lei is not very talented at sports. Although he uses his brain a lot (based on what my husband has said about his soccer play), he is slow with body movements. When he was about seven, we followed the U.S. trend and signed him up for baseball – the U.S. national sport. Because my husband did not know much about baseball, everything looked fine. Later when we signed Lei up for a swimming team, the problem came. It is so obvious when Lei swam slower than other teammates, especially at the meets. My husband started to get angry and yell at Lei, and swimming became a pain for Lei to go. Later, my husband asked Lei to try soccer. Lei agreed because he thought with teamwork, the competition would not be as harsh as swimming, and he did like soccer very much. Then the tragedy began. My husband watched closely almost each practice and game, and blamed Lei for the problems he had and the mistakes he made. The biggest problem is that Lei is slow. Lei is not an aggressive boy. He’d like to take his own time to take actions. Unfortunately, this is not good in soccer. Each time my husband took him for
soccer practice or game, I would worry at home. Rarely did Lei come back home with a happy face, either sad or in tears.

One day about two months before Lei’s 11th birthday, after Lei practiced the piano, my husband felt that he didn’t practice carefully, so he said to Lei, “you played in such a careless way. No game (video game) today.” Lei’s eyes became wet, because he was a bit addicted to the game those days and it meant a lot for him to play. I didn’t know exactly what happened. Later Lei came to complain to me that it was unfair because he did practice carefully. I told him that he should defend himself, since daddy didn’t really know much about music. It might sound inconsistent when he was practicing a new piece. I asked him to go and tell dad that mom thought he practiced well. He went and tried, but his tears ruined the chance.

The next morning, I asked Lei about this incident. To my great surprise, he said, “I want to leave this family.” I said, “No. You know we all love you. You won’t be safe leaving us.” He answered, “I will go to the police, and ask them to put me into jail, so I have shelter and food.” Then he said, “or I want to die.” I was shocked. He never talked like this before. I cried and hugged him, “Lei, please don’t say these crazy things. You know, we all love you. Daddy just has some difficulty controlling his temper. It’s so hard to change him. Maybe we try not to trigger his temper.” Lei said, “it’s okay if dad yells at me or spanks me because I did something wrong, but it’s not okay if he treats me that way because I cry.” Later, I purposefully asked my husband to go to an activity with Ellie, and I sent Lei to his soccer practice. I could not help telling a parent friend about what had happened and my worries about Lei. She took it very seriously, and immediately
contacted another parent who is an attorney about family abuse and asked me to set up a
time to meet with her. At the same time, she warned me that it is her obligation to report
the abuse if she finds anything wrong with Lei physically in the future. This was the first
time that Lei mentioned the word of “death.” We worried that a recent accident might
influence Lei’s understanding of death. A week ago, a 7th grader got badly injured after
he was hit accidentally by a lacrosse ball, and later died in the hospital. The students in
the school might suddenly feel how easy a person could die.

The second day, I met the attorney, Suzanne. When I said that my husband’s
abusive behavior (yelling or spanking) did not happen so often, maybe several times a
year, she reacted strongly, “no, once a year is too much already!” She drew a cycle of
abusive behavior, showing me that there is always a honeymoon stage between two
explosive behaviors. But the explosion is unpredictable, and its influence on the children
and family is unpredictable too, so even once a year is dangerous. I thought that made a
lot of sense. Most time my husband is okay, but when he burst out, both Lei and I
suffered a lot. All these years, my confidence has gone little by little with each scolded
yell from my husband. Lei is not a confident or happy boy either, with constant blame
from daddy. He always has negative attitude for life and has also started to show bad
temper just like his father. Suzanne explained to me in great detail about many options I
can do to deal with this family issue. Immediate help includes free, confidential hotline
that provides counseling, safety planning and housing; school counselor; child/adolescent
psychiatry hotline; police -911. Other options include family court that can do non-
punitive and non-offensive contact order. The extreme choice is to go to criminal court
that would put my husband into jail. She strongly recommended me first see Lei’s school counselor, and then go to family court.

I went to Lei’s school immediately and told the counselor about my concern. I did have some concerns about family court. I do not feel quite comfortable if they send a policeman to my home to pass a notice to my husband. I think that action would make him even angrier, and then Lei and I would suffer even more, and finally the family might fall apart. I asked a close friend for advice. She is from China, familiar with my family’s background and sharing the same cultural background with us. She was strongly against me going to family court as, in her opinion, my husband loves this family and cares about this family a lot. I had to agree. My friend suggested me seeing a school psychologist, Athena. Different from the attorney, Athena recommended us seeing a family psychologist as a family. I thought it was a better and more comfortable choice for me.

Later I got home, Lei told me the school counselor talked with him, but he did not feel quite comfortable talking with a stranger about family experience and his feelings. He also told me he exaggerated his reaction the other morning when he mentioned death and leaving home. He said he was not serious about those words. I believed so but still told him that sometimes we did need professional’s help when we cannot work things out. Daddy needed help too. I also talked with my husband about Lei’s words of leaving home and death, and it did worry him too. For the days after the incident, we entered the period of “honeymoon.” My husband tried to hold his temper and rarely yelled at Lei any more.
I had thought that by oppressing and sacrificing myself, I could keep the family harmony. However, based on American friends’ comments, I was doing something wrong, which may have a negative and even harmful influence on my children. In fact, I already saw changes in Lei. Lei started to be resistant to me, yelling at me and yelling at his little sister while being seemingly submissive to my husband. He even cursed me a couple of times using the exact words that my husband used on me.

Commentary

Ms. Wang’s story centers on how she made meaning of family abuse while caught in between western and Chinese cultures. Ms. Wang’s husband has shown verbal and physical abuse to both Ms. Wang and her child. In Chinese culture, her husband’s behavior is normal and acceptable, and she would be blamed by even questioning this fact; in western culture, her husband’s behavior is abusive and cannot be tolerated. Caught in between the two cultures, Ms. Wang was frequently unsure about how to make the best decisions for her family, especially because she does not want to be fully submissive, but is also unwilling to define her husband’s behavior as “abusive.” Ms. Wang ultimately decided that it is impossible to change her husband; therefore, she chose to change herself to be more tolerant and submissive, and even asked her son to do the same. Ms. Wang seems to know that being passive and submissive is not the ideal solution, and that it has negatively influenced her son’s well-being; however, her choices of how to deal with this family issue are severely constrained by the complexities caused by straddling two cultures and by her fear that any rash decision will have an extremely detrimental effect on her family.
Ms. Wang told me that once they saw a sculpture (see appendix F) of a distorted chair-shaped boy in a museum, and her son, Lei, said immediately: “this is me.” The sculpture is made of opaque deep green glass. It is a chair, and it is also a boy. “He” looks shiny, but with distorted body and legs, and a plastic smile on his face. Lei has been negatively influenced by his father’s high expectations and abusive words and behaviors, and his mother’s submissive attitude. Maybe this is how Lei felt when he saw the sculpture: in many people’s eyes, Lei is a great child with high academic achievements and brilliant future; however, he is hurting on the inside. There are many adults providing him attention, but he does not feel any of the positive feelings of belonging because he felt fragmented with sadness and anger. He felt distorted. The specific home environment, abusive father and submissive mother, renders him voiceless.

Ms. Wei

Introduction

Ms. Wei was born in the early 1970s in Mainland China. Her parents divorced when she was 12 years old, and she lived with her father and her younger brother until she went to college. She said, “I started to be a mother since the age of 12” (interview transcript, 02/08/2012). Living with only her father and her younger brother without a mother at such a young age definitely pushed Ms. Wei to be more considerate and more mature than her peers. Ms. Wei came to the U.S. to pursue a master’s degree. A couple of years after graduation, she met her husband and got married. Now they have two daughters, Lily, three years old, and Leah, six years old. Her story will mostly focus on her relationship with her older daughter, Leah.
The Story

To many of my Chinese friends, I am a very successful mother. My older daughter, Leah, started to win medals in state-wide figure skating competitions at the age of five. Plus Leah is also one of the best students in her class in math and reading. However, when Leah was little, she was an ugly duckling among her peers.

Soon after Leah was born, I started a home business and was very busy, so sometimes I just put Leah in front of TV or dropped her at my friends’ houses. You know Chinese parents love to compare. I have two friends whose daughters are of the same age as Leah. Each time when we were together, they would talk about how great and how smart their daughters are. One said, “My daughter started to walk and talk at the age of nine months.” Another said, “My daughter is very smart, she can do multiplication already.” I hated hearing that. Compared to her other Chinese peers, Leah seemed slow in everything. When other mothers kept boasting about their daughters, I felt pressure, but my personality doesn’t allow me to push my daughter to do what she doesn’t want to.

Having tried different activities, Leah started to learn ice skating. She was a little chubby when she was little, so she was not good at gymnastics. Accidentally, she settled on figure skating. I had never expected Leah to soar in skating. She was not a sports person, but all of sudden, she loved figure skates, and I said, okay, I will support you. Compared to the other mothers whose daughters were “superior” to Leah, I had money and time. My husband is a very hard worker, so financially I could afford Leah’s skating lessons. I was a homemaker, so I had time for her. Not many Chinese immigrants can afford the money and time to succeed at this task. Even when some can, they do not want
to take the risk, because the chance of becoming a medalist in a sport like figure skating is rare. Also it involves a lot of hard work. They do not want to be too hard on their children. Although I don’t look that competitive, I did have an inner desire to see my girl better than others. Even so, the most important factor for me to support Leah in this sport is the interest from Leah herself. I wouldn’t have pushed it if Leah didn’t love it.

Unlike other girls, Leah didn’t care about falls. I thought this is great for figure skating. Maybe this is a result of my attitude to her since she was a baby. I raised Leah like a boy. Since she started to walk, each time she fell, I would blame her for her carelessness and causing trouble to others. So she got used to saying sorry to me each time she fell. She loves figure skating. Winning medals has given her great confidence and even a passion for it. One day she told me, “mom, I’m crazy for ice skating.”

Some American friends cannot understand why I treat my kids this way. I guess it is the way I was brought up in China. I believe that children need to be “guan” (“to govern”) and “chiao” (“to educate”), especially at an early age when the children are easily affected by the environment and can go awry. One day I saw Zoe, a girl in Leah’s skating class and of the same age as Leah, was very fussy and behaved crazily. When her mom blamed her and tried to educate her, she just covered her ears without looking at her mom at all. The mom gave up soon. You know, if Leah behaved like that, I would grab her and spank her right away even if the police would come and get me. This is good for my children in the long run. The more you tolerate your kids, the harder they will challenge you. Now parents want to educate their children, but are afraid of hurting their self-esteem. Then they just give up, which is bad for their children.
I am also open to some of the western way of parenting. For example, American parents let kids do things independently at an early age. A four-year-old can put on skates on her own, but Chinese parents like to do all the things for their children. I purposefully cultivate my daughter’s independence at an early age. I taught Leah to put on skates on her own when she was four. Maybe she could not do it well in the beginning, but the more she did it, the better she could do it, and this way she developed a good life habit. I tried to give as many opportunities as possible to Leah to do things on her own. For another example, I used to purchase ice skating time for Leah. One day, I asked Leah to do it. Leah hesitated at first. Then after she did it, she was so happy she ran back to me and said, “Mom, I did it. Here is the change. Let me put it into your purse.” Sometimes we just need to give the kids some chances, instead of doing anything for them.

I also found that letting Leah use money is a good way to develop her sensitivity for money. On different occasions, I told Leah about how much money mommy and daddy need to invest for her skating. Sometimes when my husband was eating leftover food, I found it a great moment to talk to Leah about how much the parents have sacrificed to support her skating. As time went by, Leah developed a strong impression about how much her parents have devoted to her and how she should work hard to show her appreciation. Each time during her training lessons, while other kids could not wait to leave the ice rink towards the end of the free skating, Leah always makes the most use of the training time. She carefully practices different movements until the last second, because she knows mommy and daddy have to pay a lot for these skating lessons.

Another time when I wanted to buy a hair clip with an Angry Bird character that Leah
really liked, Leah thought about it and then said, “Mommy, let’s not buy it, but save the money for my skating.”

One other thing I like in the U.S. is that parents express love for their children openly. Traditional Chinese families seldom openly express love among family members, so there is no hugging, no kissing, and no direct expression of love. I always tell my daughters how much I love them. I also like to kiss them and hug them so that they develop a loving personality. I believe that children learn from their parents by listening to their words, watching how they behave, and experiencing their experiences. Most of the time children are doing what they learn from their parents. The fact that Leah tries her best to study and to skate is also influenced by watching her father. My husband always works and studies at home, which directly affects Leah’s behavior.

It is also important to educate my kids at the right moments so that they could understand and absorb the words. For example, I always invite friends to my home or take Leah to other families for play dates. She learned from me how to treat people, how to care for others, and how to be considerate. One day a little boy was very rude to her, he pushed her and said some bad words to her. Leah was very angry and upset. When the boy’s mom asked him to say sorry to Leah, Leah was still very mad. I told her that when others treat us unfairly we need to be more open-minded and forgiving. We should give the other people a chance to learn. If we are always nice to them, they will learn from us. She might not quite understand, but I think she at least learned a way, and an attitude, to deal with such an issue.
I made use of every opportunity to educate my daughters. The best influence I had on Leah was time management. Because I made use of every “spare” minute to work with Leah, Leah is very sensitive and efficient with timed tasks. Here is a typical weekday schedule for Leah.

7:30-7:40am: Get up, get dressed, eat breakfast
7:40-8:00am: Practice piano
8:00-8:15am: Chinese language work
8:15-8:25am: Wait for bus on sidewalk while reading an English language book

During School: Write during free time

3:15-3:40pm: Get picked up, eat, and then sleep for 8 minutes
3:40-4:00pm: Arrive at ice skating rink, change clothes and skate shoes individually for 17 minutes

4:00-7:00pm: Various skating and training
7:00-7:25pm: Drive home
7:25-8:30pm: Eat dinner, practice piano, do homework, read with dad
8:30pm: Go to bed, sleep right away.

Leah’s weekends are not as structured, but there is still a significant amount of predetermined activities:

Saturday
10:00-11:00 am: Practice math, reading, and writing with mom while sister skates
11:00-1:00pm: Skating practice
1:30-2:00pm: Piano lesson
After 2pm: free time, Leah’s happiest time of the week

Sunday

Morning: Drawing lesson
Afternoon: Chinese school
Sometimes after Chinese school on Sunday, Leah would request to run on her own. Sunday is the only day that Leah does not have skating training, but Leah said she needs to run to build muscles when nobody else is pushing her to do so. Because of her very busy schedule, Leah can easily fall sound asleep in the car for as little as eight minutes on her way from school to skating training. During that nap time, her little sister, Lily, was not allowed to make any noise. Once we arrived at the ice skating rink, Lily would wake Leah up. Under such circumstances, Lily unconsciously develops a clear sense of time and rules while Leah has developed a high degree of time management.

About school involvement, I have my own way and understanding. One day when I went to pick up Lily from nursery school, the teacher looked very worried and told me that Lily got bumped close to her left eye. Seeing a big bruise under Lily’s left eye, I did not blame the teacher. Instead, I comforted her and said it was okay. The next day, I bought a bunch of flowers to the teacher. I knew the teacher must have felt terrible and guilty already. It was an accident. After all, Lily did not get hurt in her eye. When we allow the teacher to take care of our children, we cannot put all the responsibility on the teacher. I, the mother, am still the person who takes full responsibility. We need to trust the teachers.

Although I showed sympathy for the teacher in the incident like this, I could be bothered by other trivial things. Once Leah went to drawing class right after her skating training and did not change, so she still wore her tight practice dress. When she got home, she was sad and said “Mom, I’ll never wear this dress to drawing class again!” Later I learned that when she needed to go to bathroom, the teacher got impatient with her
because she needed help to unzip the dress. At the moment I decided to request a change to another teacher after the session. However, when I asked Leah about my idea, she liked the teacher and hoped to continue learning with her. I then decided to respect her decision. I think the child’s feelings are most important. If she feels happy, then she is happy. We, as parents, should not force our feelings and thoughts on her. For my daughter’s sake, I’d rather hold my feelings and thoughts, but respect hers.

To set a better example for Leah and also help with Leah’s schooling, I have been actively involved in Leah’s school life. One winter day the school organized an activity named “put on your shoes,” a way to give people an opportunity to experience the poor people’s lives and support them. To participate, you needed to donate $100 and jump into an icy lake for a couple of minutes. Not even many U.S. parents participated, but I went with her family. I thought it was a great chance to teach my children how poor people live, and also to show them the importance of caring and sharing through my behavior.

Since Leah started her school year, I have volunteered at Leah’s school every week. I helped in Leah’s classroom and also in school library. For one reason, I felt that through my presence at school, I could help Leah to be more comfortable in the school without the sense of rejection. I had worried that Leah might be excluded or even bullied at school because she is more advanced in academic knowledge compared to her peers. Other kids might stay away from her and view her as a “nerd.” Each time I went to school for volunteer work, I tried to appear professional, nice but firm, so all the kids respected me. Thus, they respected Leah too. Actually I did not expect the teacher to give Leah harder work, but I did want the teacher to be aware of Leah’s advanced level. For
example, the school assigned 20-minutes of reading daily. Every day, after reading, I asked Leah to write a summary. Then I attached this writing with the reading assignment for her to take back to school, so that the teacher could see. It did not matter whether the teacher graded it or not, but there was communication between me as the parent and the teacher to see what this little girl can accomplish. It is not necessary to talk about this openly. But if you show the teacher Leah’s work, she will feel that Leah is different. Then the teacher can feel the parents’ efforts and respond accordingly.

I believe that the teacher’s attitude for a child is very important for the child’s social status at school. Because the teacher knows well Leah’s academic level, plus Leah is a very sweet and considerate girl, the teacher showed her preference for Leah openly and gave Leah opportunity to act as her assistant. Now every child in class takes Leah as a great girl, instead of a nerd. Therefore, instead of feeling excluded or the sense of rejection from her peers, Leah enjoys school a lot.

To a certain extent, I wish my daughters could realize the dream that I didn’t fulfill on my own. I was an ambitious person. I wanted to succeed, to have a better job, and to live a better life than her peers. Now I am a homemaker so I put all my hope onto my children. At the same time, unlike traditional Chinese parents, who force their children to do what they are not interested in, I respect Leah’s interests and decisions. Although I fill up Leah’s time with learning different subjects, what I really care is not the content Leah has been learning, but her learning ability, confidence and a great personality.

Commentary
Ms. Wei’s parenting story has touched upon many issues related to Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting experiences. In Ms. Wei’s parenting approach, her own childhood experiences and personality have played an important role. Ms. Wei’s parents divorced when she was 12 years old and she ended up living with her father and younger brother. As the only woman in the family, she had to take the role of mother at a young age. This experience prepared Ms. Wei to establish her identity as a mother and easily take on the responsibilities of parenthood.

Ms. Wei’s parenting approach has also been influenced by both traditional Chinese and contemporary American educational values. Based on traditional Chinese values, Ms. Wei believes that children need to be “guan” and “jiao,” two most popularly used words among Chinese parents. “Guan,” literally means “to govern” (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989), and “jiao” means “to educate” and “to train” (Chao, 1994). These two concepts are rooted in Confucian philosophy. Confucian principles require that children must show loyalty and respect to their elders, and also that the elders must responsibly teach, discipline, or “govern” their children (Chao, 1994, p.1117). Such philosophy was expressed in Ms. Wei’s strictness. When a little child falls, many parents will go and hug her/him and comfort her/him. Some might ignore her/him if it is not a big fall. In contrast, Ms. Wei blamed her children for their falls and requested them to apologize to her for their carelessness. Like many Chinese parents, Ms. Wei also has high expectations for her daughters’ diligence and academic achievements. Leah’s weekly schedule illustrates a profound difference in parenting approaches between many U.S. families and Chinese immigrant families. On the other hand, like many American parents, Ms. Wei expresses
her love for her children openly by telling them how much she loves them and showing her love through hugs and kisses. All in all, Ms. Wei’s demands and strictness are built on the basis of respecting and loving her kids.

Summary

In this Chapter, four Chinese mothers told their stories. Many themes emerged upon analysis of these portraits that enable one to better understand Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting experiences in the U.S. context. For example, Ms. Chiu’s story indicated that religion could have a significant effect on Chinese immigrant parents. Her personal faith had a stronger influence on her educational decisions than Chinese or western cultural factors, or maybe the western culture did play a role because she converted to Christianity after immigration. Ms. Kwan’s narrative illuminated how having privileges with language and cultural familiarity upon arriving to a new country could offer tremendous benefits to immigrant parents. Ms. Wang’s story highlighted the complexities of navigating the value systems of two cultures, and how this caused constrained choices for a Chinese immigrant mother. Many Chinese immigrants to the U.S. do not have free “choices;” rather, their experiences are often limited by their lived realities of managing two diverse cultures, and often make the acceptable decisions for themselves and their families given their complex circumstances. Ms. Wei’s story highlights two important factors when considering the experiences of Chinese immigrant parents. First, Ms. Wei’s personal history profoundly shaped her experiences as a parent, which illustrates the importance of one’s personal history in determining their parenting style upon immigrating. Also, her story demonstrates a kind of “hybrid” model of
immigrant parenting whereby Ms. Wei utilizes some aspects of traditional Chinese parenting and other facets of U.S. child-rearing strategies. These findings suggest that Chinese immigrant parents are not a monolithic group, and indicate that the individual experiences of particular families need to be considered upon specific sociocultural contexts.
Chapter Five: Cross-Case Thematic Analysis

Based on the sixteen Chinese immigrant parents’ narrative stories, this chapter presents the findings in the following four categories: (1) parenting beliefs and practices depicting direct interactions between the parents and their children; (2) acculturation dynamics showing changes in family system as a result of immigration, which indirectly influence parenting; (3) interactions with home and host cultures; and (4) school involvement. Thick descriptions from the participants’ narratives (Geertz, 1973) are provided in presenting these themes.

Parental Beliefs and Practices

This section will present findings from the 16 participants’ narrative stories that pertain to their parental beliefs and practices. Although almost all the parents hold high educational expectations for their children, they had different understandings of the meaning of success, different educational expectations for their children, different levels of acculturation to western childrearing ideologies, and different religions. The findings on parental beliefs and practices will be presented based on three parenting approaches and parental expectations: traditional parenting (focusing on academic achievements), democratic parenting (focusing on the whole child), Christian parenting (focusing on God and religious ambitions).

Out of the sixteen parents that comprised my data set, most of them hold high educational expectations for their children, regardless of the parents’ educational levels and socioeconomic statuses. Almost all of the participants, except for three parents, believed that it was mandatory for their children to attend college, although there are
differences in the type of universities in these parents’ minds, influenced primarily by their own educational levels. The working class parents like the Qians and the Chus were not able to attend college themselves; therefore, they believed that sending their children to any college is part of achieving the “American dream,” which would finally change their social status and financial situation. Due to the Qians’ and the Chus’ limited educational experiences, it was difficult for them to supervise their children’s educational pursuits; however, to compensate for their lack of knowledge with the U.S. educational system, they tried to financially invest in their children’s education as much as possible. For example, Mr. and Ms. Chu worked long hours to make as much as money they could. Outside of basic family expenditures, they paid 30 dollars per hour for a tutor to help with their daughters’ English and writing. To them, nothing would be more important than sending their daughters to college.

The participants in the current study who attended college or graduate school were more knowledgeable about the U.S. school system than those with lower educational levels such as middle school or high school. The parents with higher educational levels were more likely to focus their expectations on their children on attending an Ivy League school or one of the top ten to twenty universities based on national university rankings. These parents believe that encouraging their child(ren) to attend a top-tier college will enable their child(ren) to find well-paid professional jobs after graduation. With a belief in hard work being rewarded, many parents in the current study work closely with their child(ren)’s sports, academic work, learning of a musical
instrument, and several of them assigned their children extra homework in math and reading.

*Traditional Parenting - Focusing on Academic Achievements*

Many of the parents in the current study believed that focusing on their child(ren)’s academic achievements was of the utmost importance and utilized a diverse range of strategies to help realize the goal of sending their children to high-ranking universities. For example, Ms. Shen’s son was very talented in playing the violin when he was young, and had won several prizes in local and national competitions by the age of twelve. The violin teacher highly recommended him going the route of professional violinist. However, Mr. and Ms. Shen did not agree. Ms. Shen said:

> So many people play violin, and only one or two will become famous. We don’t want to take risk. But we’d like to have his records of winning the competitions as a resource to help him get into the best university in the future. (interview transcript, 12/27/2011)

Ms. Shen’s comments reflect a narrow vision of “success” for her son. To be a non-famous violinist is not considered successful in Ms. Shen’s eyes. Ms. Shen’s words also indicate the high value she places on higher education, as she wished to utilize her son’s violin accomplishments as a way to improve his college applications. Her expectation for her son was to attend “the best university,” based on the national rankings. It has become evident that Ms. Shen claimed responsibility for making decisions about her son’s educations, and also seemed to value a college education over her child’s extracurricular interests of violin.
Some of the parents in the current study required their children to learn instruments such as violin and piano, and did not allow their children to make choices regarding their musicianship. Ms. Zhou’s son, Ming, started to learn violin at the age of four. Ms. Zhou was very strict with his daily practice. As Mr. Zhou recalled:

Ming’s mother used to ask Ming to practice violin 30 minutes every day. If not, Ming would get punished. So no matter Ming was interested or not, he had no choice. Ming always got praised in violin class (group lesson), which might motivate him to practice more. His mom was very proud each time when people said highly of Ming’s violin playing. (interview transcript, 08/22/2011)

All of the participants’ children learned to play one or two instruments, piano, violin or both. Ms. Chang told me that most of her friends’ children quit instrument after graduation from high school:

I have many friends whose children took Suzuki piano or violin lessons, and they played so well that they performed as concertmaster or concertmistress at local orchestra; however, once they went to college, they never touched their violin again. They said they learned violin from 5 years old to high school only for their parents, not for themselves. So I feel it is not good for many Chinese parents to push their children too much. (interview transcript, 01/11/2012)

When children are forced to do things, they may not inwardly want to do them. Once they leave home and are free of the forces from their parents, they’re very unlikely to go in the direction their parents want them to pursue because they do not have as much direct pressure to accomplish goals based upon their parents’ values. In contrast, these parents were confident that their decisions were the best decisions for their children based on their maturity and years of life experiences. As a result, many of the children had limited choices before going to college, with some even developing a docile personality for life.
Almost all the participants in the current study believed in human malleability—an emphasis on human efforts instead of innate ability for success, although at different levels. Some parents believed failure only means that not enough efforts have been made; others thought that achieving success requires both effort and innate ability. Ms. Zhou is an example of working really hard to make her children perfect in every aspect. She always wanted her son, Ming, to be the top one in everything among his peers. If he was not, she would make him. She believed that, with effort, there is nothing that a child cannot achieve, even the height of his body. As Ms. Zhou recalled:

Because neither my husband nor I am tall, I really worried about Ming’s height when he was born. I believe being short influences confidence. People will despise you. So once Ming was able to run and jump, I taught him to jump rope and required him to jump daily, from 50 to 100, then 500, then 1,000 and more. In case he got bored, I invited our neighbor’s kids to come and jump with him, and provided them with snacks. Playing monkey bar is another good way to help growth. So I made a bar at home to let him practice hanging there as long as he could. These activities really helped. When Ming was 11 years old, he was already taller than me. (interview transcript, 10/04/2011)

Ms. Zhou’s husband, Mr. Zhou did not agree with Ms. Zhou’s way of parenting. He stated that upon immigrating to the U.S., Ming performed at his school’s talent show, and everybody was very impressed. Following the talent show, Ming’s music teacher helped Ming apply for a scholarship so that Ming could study violin with a private teacher; however, Ming did not want to practice any more. Every day Ms. Zhou needed to ask Ming several times to get him to practice violin for a short time, which caused many conflicts. Half a year later Ming refused to go to violin lessons. He even did not want to touch it any more. Mr. Zhou felt very sad about this because he believed that Ming is an excellent violinist. Mr. Zhou believed that Ms. Zhou’s harsh way of parenting
ruined Ming’s love for the violin. Emotionally, Mr. Zhou proclaimed, “when you force a
child to do something without caring for his emotional needs, there will be a shadow
shaped in his young mind, which will never go away” (interview transcript, 10/15/2011).

Ten of sixteen parents used physical punishment for their children’s misducts.

Physical punishment is very popular in China, and most of the parents experienced it
when they were young. Some parents in the current study tried to use corporal
punishment “lightly” and then stopped; some used it together with rewarding in order to
make the children do what they were asked to do; some parents always blamed and
punished their children due to their high expectations. The third group of parents in the
study felt distant from their children and felt tension in their families. As Ms. Wang’s
narrative showed in Chapter three, her son felt distorted from having an “abusive” father
and a “submissive” mother,. When he was pushed to do things most of time, he became
more “approval-seeking” and “apathetic” (interview transcript, 02/27/2012).

Democratic Parenting - Focusing on Whole Child

Some parents utilized a more egalitarian method of parenting since the beginning;
others changed their original beliefs and ways of parenting during the process of
parenting and acculturation. For example, Ms. Chen’s narrative reveals that Ms. Chen
does not believe in sacrificing her daughter’s aspirations for the ultimate goal of gaining a
prestigious education. Ms. Chen’s family came to the U.S. nine years ago when their
daughter was eleven years old. The main reason for their immigration was to provide a
better education opportunity for their daughter. When asked about her expectations upon
immigrating to the U.S., she replied:
We came to the U.S. for the sake of our daughter, because we do not want her to live a crazily tense life in China. In China, thousands of high school graduates compete to go to college every year by taking the College Entrance Exam, so all the schools work hard for the purpose of the big exam. We want our daughter to be happy, to do what she is interested, and to live a happy life. (interview transcript, 01/07/2012)

While many of the aforementioned parents had strict and regimented expectations for their children, Ms. Chen simply wanted her daughter to follow her own interests.

Furthermore, the above quote illustrates that Ms. Chen wanted her daughter to be happy, as evidenced by the fact that she mentioned happiness twice.

Ms. Chang used to follow traditional Chinese way of parenting, trying to be strict, and later her daughter Nancy’s experience learning piano changed her attitude. Recalling the experience of piano lessons, Ms. Chang still felt the stress.

Nancy started the Suzuki piano lesson at the age of five. Suzuki method put all the responsibilities to the parents. I went to class with my daughter, and then I must have made sure she practiced all the assignments. If she did not practice well, I would be blamed the next class. So sometimes both my daughter and I felt stressful when she didn’t want to practice and I had to push her. (interview transcript, 01/11/2012)

Later Nancy wanted to stop piano lesson, so Ms. Chang told Nancy if she did not want to learn piano, she would sell it. The little girl wanted to keep the piano, so they continued the lesson in a soft way until Nancy graduated from high school. Ms. Chang told me that Nancy started to be more interested in playing piano on her own after she went to middle school, as she had built up skills and confidence. Ms. Chang did not push Nancy so much in case Nancy totally lost interest. Now, piano playing has become a hobby for Nancy, and she played it occasionally for fun.
Some other parents also talked about the changes in their parenting expectations and practices. Ms. Chan used to spank her kids if they did not behave. She told me that she got physical punishment a lot when she was young. After receiving the Christ, she started to read the Bible together with her kids, and discussed the mistakes everyone in the family had made as a family, which turned out to be more effective than spanking. Although she sometimes still used corporal punishment occasionally, she was aware of the drawback and uselessness of the approach as the kids grew older.

Ms. Han’s change was influenced by her daughter’s reaction. Ms. Han had had very high expectations for her oldest daughter Zoe’s school performance. Ms. Han got disappointed when Zoe did not make the honor program for English Arts, so she bought some books on writing to urge Zoe to work hard on it. As time went by, there was a growing tension between Ms. Han and Zoe when Ms. Han asked Zoe to do reading and writing. Ms. Han later found that Zoe is more talented in math and organization skills, so eventually she gave up pushing Zoe to do what she is not interested in. This experience also influenced Ms. Han’s parenting with her other younger children.

Living in a new country, some parents’ beliefs have also been influenced by western educational ideologies. Although Ms. Wang’s husband still often asked his son whether he would go to Harvard or MIT in the future, Ms. Wang told me that he also started to make positive comments on the philosophy of American school – “learning through play”:

There is a reason that American schools emphasize play and social skills starting from nursery school, instead of focusing on math or reading. Social skills and good personality are more important than academic subjects in our life, so it is
good to start to cultivate those qualities at a young age. (interview transcript, 02/27/2012)

In contrast to many Chinese families that wish to cultivate their children to “become successful, go to the best schools, find the best job, buy the big house and best car” (interview transcript, original, 12/21/2011), Ms. Chiu, had a different understanding of what is most important for a child in the long run as a result of her own life experiences:

After several years of living in the U.S., I started to realize that even if a person went to the best college, if he doesn’t know how to get along with people, how to behave at home, how to respect the elders, the rest of his life will not be happy. It may even be hard for him to find a job. For a child, academic knowledge is easy to grasp, but a good personality is harder to cultivate and requires a lot of time. If a person can work diligently, with good concentration and creation, then no matter what job he/she takes, he/she can do it well. (interview transcript, 03/10/2012)

Similarly, Ms. Wei also expressed her concerns about the possibility of her daughter being bullied if her daughter only excels academically, not socially:

Introverted kids and minority children are easy to become the victim of bullying. When your child really stands out with all her talents and strengths, she will be left out as a nerd and even get bullied. Kids do that, even the young kids. Many Chinese parents overprotect their children, but we cannot always be out there to protect them. So to me, most important is to develop my daughter’s resilience. This is a lifelong gift I can give her. (interview transcript, 02/08/2012)

Along the same line, Ms. Zheng thought more parents’ efforts should focus on developing children’s confidence and open mind, especially for immigrant children:

I really hate traditional Chinese way of parenting. Unreasonable strictness deprives children of their confidence. In this “White” country, we must cultivate confidence and open mind in our children. When we look around, it’s easy for us to see a White kid standing with free gesture (posture) — crossed arms or dancing feet; in contrast, Asian kids always sit or stand conservatively, lacking confidence. I believe this is the result of improper old-fashioned parenting. Living in America,
we don’t want to be Americanized, but we definitely should learn their good aspects, such as their democratic parenting. (interview transcript, 09/21/2011)

Christian Parenting – Serving God

Some parents changed their parenting beliefs as a result of a change in religion. Among the sixteen participants, seven became Christians after immigrating. They were all baptized in U.S. Chinese churches, which have been increasing rapidly in the U.S. during the past four to five decades. Gathering the largest group of Chinese immigrants locally, Chinese churches have attracted many immigrants who seek a social network and a Chinese community. Many participants first attend the church to meet more people and socialize. Also, some wives with tough husbands initially sought peace at church; however, as time went by, many of the participants wholeheartedly received God as their savior. Once many of the participants became devout Christians, all other contextual factors seemed to have significantly less influence on their parenting compared to the Bible.

One unique aspect in the parental approach of many Christian Chinese parents is that they encouraged their children’s talents and interests, and rarely pushed their children to do activities they did not enjoy or activities they did not excel at, because they believe God makes everybody with unique strengths. This parenting philosophy is in sharp contrast to the more traditional practices of many Chinese parents. Influenced by Confucian value of human malleability, many Chinese immigrant parents spare no efforts to push their children to do extremely well in everything.
Another parental aspect that most Christian parents talked about is that upon becoming Christians, they thought it was easier for them to apologize to their children because they believe every human being makes mistakes based on the Bible. If an issue arose, the family would seek help from the Bible together. As a result, there were seldom fights in the family, because every family member was following the code of conduct presented in the Bible. As Ms. Kwan claimed,

I am a Christian. That made a big difference in the way we raised our children, because you don’t have much disagreement. Because a lot of things have been spelt out in the Bible, you know what is right and what is wrong. There is not much disagreement. This is also very important for marriage, because you both have been saved (by God). So being Christian makes a big difference in raising a family. (interview transcript, 12/21/2011)

As pointed out by Ms. Kwan, sharing a religion among family members helped to keep family harmony. She also believed that the best thing that happened to her older son, Leo, was not his aptitude in math, or his going to college at the age of 15, but the fact that he accepted Christ when he was five in the Christian school. She was moved when talking about Leo’s receiving Christ: “That’s the best thing that has ever happened to him and to us, nothing else compared to that” (interview transcript, 12/21/2011). Similarly, many other Christian parents also changed their traditional parental expectations upon becoming Christians. After converting religions, many of these parents claimed to be less interested in their children’s academic achievements. Instead, many of these parents contended that serving the God is their highest expectation for their children.

In conclusion, great diversities were found among the sixteen participants in regard to their parental beliefs and practices. Some parents, deeply influenced by Chinese
traditional value and the educational environment in China where they grew up, highly valued children’s academic achievements and spared no efforts to push their children to reach academic excellence, even at the cost of the children’s personal interests and self-esteem. Other parents, influenced by western educational ideologies, as well as their personal life histories, followed their children’s interests and strengths, and tried hard to bring their children’s potential into full play. Some other parents became Christian after immigration, and the Bible plays the leading role in their parenting expectations and approaches.

Acculturation Dynamics and Family System

Immigration is a crucial event in almost all Chinese immigrants’ families, and it brings about many changes in the families; these changes greatly impact parenting approaches and styles. This section presents several themes that emerged from the findings related to these changes. Heavily relying on the narratives of the participants of the study, this section discusses how Chinese immigrant family dynamics, including the relationships between husband and wife, between children and parents, and between parents and grandparents, undergo great changes as a result of immigration, and how the unique family dynamics impact the ways children are raised, nurtured, and taught. In the meanwhile, by addressing acculturation dynamics, social and cultural factors that directly or indirectly shaped the immigrant family systems are exposed (this sentence is unclear).

Immigration Challenges

The participating Chinese immigrants decided to immigrate to the U.S. for many different reasons, including: career advancement, graduate study, political reasons, and to
seek a better educational environment for their children. Some families made smooth transitions and adjustments, while the social and economic costs associated with immigration can be significant for others. For almost all the participants from Mainland China, immigration resulted in the downgrade of their social and economic status, which induced family tensions and parental stress, which in turn seemed to negatively influence their child(ren)’s growth.

For Mr. Feng’s family, immigration turned out to be a bad choice. Both Mr. and Ms. Feng had decent jobs in China. This couple, along with their six-year-old daughter, Wen, came to the U.S. together, so that Ms. Feng could achieve the “American dream." Due to limited English language skills, Mr. Feng had to sacrifice the prestige and income he had in China to work as a lab technician in a university in the U.S. He felt very discouraged. After the contract of his position ended, he had difficulty finding another job. At the same time, Mr. Feng’s wife planned to prepare for the entrance exams needed to go to medical school in order to become a licensed doctor in the U.S. However, financial needs made it impossible for Ms. Feng to continue with her study. Due to these work and family tensions, Mr. and Ms. Feng fought a great deal and had little time to take care of Wen. Wen was suddenly confronted with many new experiences: a new language, a new culture, separation from all her extended family members and friends in China, and constant fighting between her parents. Accordingly, Wen became very withdrawn and quiet. She started to love birds. She begged her parents to buy two birds for her, and they became her whole life. Mr. Feng told me:

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4 “American dream” is put in quotes because many people believe the American dream is a myth.
Wen’s study habits became worse and worse. After she started middle school, she sometimes didn’t turn in homework and got some “C”s on her report cards. One day my wife and I were asked to go to school to meet with her teachers. Her math teacher, ELA teacher and social studies teacher all showed concerns about her not paying attention in class and not turning in homework. (interview transcript, 01/25/12)

Mr. Feng also mentioned that one day Wen became infected with lice on her head, and it was because his wife and he fought a lot so Wen was ignored a great deal. Sometimes Wen looked dirty, because her parents did not have time to do the laundry. I saw Wen once at her home during one of the interviews. She was playing a video game on a computer, with hunched back, greasy hair, and her eyes very close to the screen. Wen never caused trouble, but became a “problem student” by no longer paying attention in class or finishing her homework. She was transformed from an outgoing, confident and happy girl to an introverted and distant teenager. Failing to adjust themselves into the new environment, with naïve expectations for immigration, influenced by their given sociocultural context, the whole family of Mr. Feng’s became victims of immigration. The negative influence was especially profound for their daughter.

When the Chinese immigrant parents struggled with the challenges posed by immigration, their children’s needs were not always a top priority. Mr. Zhou’s son, Ming, first came to the U.S. at the age of nine, when Mr. Zhou came as a visiting scholar. A year later, they moved back to China for better job opportunities for both Mr. and Ms. Zhou. It cost them a significant amount of money to get Ming into a local elementary school with very good reputation. One day Mr. Zhou received a note from Ming’s teacher about three behavior problems with Ming, which were:
1. Ming chatted a lot with his neighbors in class, and sometimes stood up or left his seat without getting a permission of teachers (In most schools in China, students are requested to sit upright, not talk each other, and not leave seat during a class.);
2. Ming read other books instead of textbooks at individual self-study time or recess time;
3. Ming was an excellent student, but was always being friends of the students with poor academic performance (interview transcript, 08/17/2011).

When Mr. Zhou saw this note, he was a bit shocked. He strongly felt that Ming would not be able to find happiness in an educational environment that he believes is too restraining for children. The note acted as a catalyst, together with other less influential reasons, for Mr. and Ms. Zhou to make their decision to move back to the U.S. In the U.S., Mr. Zhou worked as a researcher, having a much lower income and social status compared to the position he held in China. Ms. Zhou has been a homemaker.

Without a job or a substantial social network, Ms. Zhou had to become a homemaker upon immigration, which made her very uncomfortable. She used to be a well-respected Chinese teacher in China, living a busy life with both work and family, and was often seen as the “best” mother in her neighborhood. During the first couple of years the Zhou family came to the U.S., they lived in a neighborhood with no other Chinese families. Ms. Zhou was very depressed and often quarreled with Mr. Zhou.

Now Mr. Zhou’s family has been in the U.S. for almost ten years. Mr. Zhou has complicated feelings about his family’s decision to immigrate. He and his wife have both sacrificed their careers in order to give their son what they believed is a better educational environment. Although Ming turned out to be an excellent student, winning medals from Science Olympiad several times, Mr. Zhou felt there was something missing between him and his son. In recollection, Mr. Zhou deeply regretted his actions for the first couple of
years after immigrating; he and his wife fought due to all the pressures associated with their new lives, causing his son to feel lonely. He believed that the negative impact of those couple of years permanently changed his son’s personality. He said,

I think my wife and I did a terrible job during the most important time for Ming. I never regretted coming to the U.S., with a lower quality of life, but I truly regret those days when my wife and I were fighting, with Ming being ignored in his room. His happiness and openness were lost during those days. The first year of immigration was tough for everyone, but we should not have made it so tough for Ming, who was still a child. After that year, I felt it became impossible to communicate with him heart to heart anymore. He would just say okay when we talked to him, and never expressed himself. The bond, the heart-to-heart bond between a father and a son was lost during that year. (interview transcript, 08/28/11)

As is shown through Mr. Feng’s and Mr. Zhou’s stories, when the immigrant parents’ first few years of transition are challenging, their parenting functions can be negatively influenced.

The stress and constant worrying, stemming from perceived economic insecurity, are often heightened in working class families. Mr. Qian was a chef. In order to support his family and prepare for his son to go to college, he had to work long hours daily. The children of Chinese immigrants often face a great deal of pressure, because their whole family’s aspirations are on their shoulders. Lacking time together with their children is another major problem for working-class immigrant parents.

This section talked about the downgraded social and economic status of some participants as a result of immigration, which negatively influenced their parenting functions. The major changes that occurred among the participants upon immigration included: women’s loss of employment opportunities, women becoming homemakers and
men’s disadvantaged status at work, which caused family tensions and negatively influenced their children’s growth. This section also addressed the fact that the first couple of years of immigration are often a key transition period for the children of immigrants. When the whole family attempts to adjust themselves to the new sociocultural environment, children’s needs are oftentimes neglected when they need attention. Many parents, especially the ones from Mainland China, claimed that the major reason for immigrating was to create a better life for their child(ren); however, there are many social, political, and cultural forces that perpetuate false ideas about what it means to immigrate to the U.S. When parents fail or are unable to help their children at the key moment of transition, the negative influences on the children can be unavoidable.

**Intergenerational Gap**

According to the parents’ narratives, after immigration, due to different levels of acculturation, acculturation gap between the parents and their children became bigger and bigger. While the parents tried to find an appropriate balance between maintaining Chinese cultural heritage and assimilating to the western culture, their children became highly acculturated by attending U.S. schools and having English-speaking friends. They started to feel confused or be resistant to their parents’ demands related to Chinese culture.

Ms. Zheng told me that one day her older daughter, Lia, mentioned that she wanted to dye her hair gold. After hearing it, Ms. Zheng became furious and yelled at the girl, “Forget it. You should always remember that you are Chinese!” Based on Chinese traditional culture, for children, “any deviation from the norm may garner undesired
attention. Conformity in appearance and behavior is highly valued” (Huang, Ying, & Arganza, 2003, p.206). Lia became very frustrated. She could not understand the relationship between dying her hair and being Chinese. Ms. Zheng told me about her conversation with Lia after this event, and here were Lia’s words,

I know I am Chinese. I speak Chinese at home, eat Chinese food, and most of my friends are Chinese. I never thought that you, my parents, would not take me as a Chinese. At school, my schoolmates do not take me as an American either. I don’t know who I am. (interview transcript, 10/12/2011)

Ms. Chan and Ms. Han also expressed their concern for their daughters, who started to buy expensive clothes and shoes, in order to match their peers. As a Christian, Ms. Chan was disappointed with her daughters’ materialistic tendencies, but Ms. Chan tried to take time to make her daughter understand what Ms. Chan believes is more important, instead of forcing her to do anything. She said that “girls at this age need the feelings of belonging. As parents, we can give advice and suggestions, but we cannot force them to obey us. That way they would be submissive outside but more resistant inside their heart” (interview transcript, 09/12/2011).

Similarly, Ms. Han also had conflicts with her sons. When her older son, Will, asked her for a cell phone, she bought him one without a texting function. Will became mad, telling her that without the ability to text he would have no friends in a U.S. school. But Ms. Han insisted, and told him, “we are Chinese. We don’t follow others. Why do you need texting when you see your friends all day at school?” And then his son became every angrier, yelling, “why am I Chinese? I don’t want to be Chinese” (interview transcript, 12/30/2011). Later, during a casual conversation, Ms. Han learned that at the
school talent show, unlike other Chinese students who played either violin or piano, Will sang a song by Lady Gaga, “Bad Romance.” It seems that Will wanted to release himself at school, without being strictly monitored by his parents who only seemed to focused on his academic achievements.

Ms. Shen told me that recently her son, Zach, started to say that he wanted to go back to China. He felt uncomfortable living in the U.S. when on one hand, he was enjoying the U.S. educational philosophy of finding “joy in learning”; on the other hand, he had to meet all the requirements set by his parents. Mr. and Ms. Shen required Zach to do math and Chinese, and practice violin daily before he could play video games. Zach was also asked to get all “A”s for his school subjects in order for him to be able to play games. Once Lei got a “B” in his English language arts class, he was punished by having no time at all for video games until he gained all “A”s for the following marking period.

When Zach asked why he had so many expectations that his U.S. schoolmates did not have, Ms. Shen’s husband told him it is because he is from a Chinese family. He related his high expectation to Chinese immigrant’s minority status. He told his son:

We are visible minority. If you apply for a job at the same time with a white guy, who has the same educational background as you, the company will definitely hire him. This is the reality. This is why we want you to be better than others. (interview transcript, 12/27/2011)

Zach was in a dilemma, with two different expectations and pressures from his parents and his peers at school. He was in the double accelerated math program since he was in fifth grade. At home, he was proud of it and could use it to get award; at school, he tried to keep it a secret in case other kids would laugh at him and call him a “nerd.”
Marital Discord and Parenting

One stereotype of Chinese immigrant families is the stability of their marriages. Although all the participants are married, many of them stayed in the status of sub-marriage. Sub-marriage (ya hun yin) is a term from China. With such a marriage, the family appears intact; however, there is a crisis and the normal relationship between a husband and wife is missing. “Normal” for a western marriage, which might refer to a loving relationship between the two spouses, might be substantially different from what “normal” is for a Chinese marriage. On this subject, Ms. Wang told me,

Since our first son, Lei, was born, my husband started to write on my birthday cake, “To Lei’s mom.” He takes me solely as our kids’ mom, instead of his wife. Our two sons are his proudest things in the world. In traditional China, boys are still more popular than girls because they carry the dad’s family name and will produce more generations for the family in the long run. (interview transcript, 01/15/2012)

Confucian ethics places a strong emphasis on the authority role of the father within the family (Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003), which places the mother at a disadvantaged position. Based on Chinese traditional values, the husband-wife relationship is regarded as secondary to the parent-child relationship (Lin & Liu, 1999).

According to the parents’ narratives in the current study, family tension arose after immigration, due to downgraded social and economic status, as addressed in the previous section of “Immigration Challenges.” A typical story of immigrant families from mainland China is that upon immigrating the husband got a job, and the wife took care of the kids at home. Due to work stress upon immigrating and the glass ceiling phenomenon (when Chinese employees are bypassed for promotion to management positions) (Kwong,
the family members become the only people the husband believes he can effectively get angry at, especially the wife.

Besides Ms. Wang’s story told in the former chapter that presents an extreme example of marital discord and family abuse, several wives from Mainland China complained about their husbands’ tempers and disrespectful words. These routine behaviors of immigrant husbands were often the result of a mixture of individual, cultural, and social factors.

Ms. Zheng is an example of an immigrant wife suffering from a bad relationship with her husband. Ms. Zheng was from Malaysia, and married her husband who is from Mainland China. She stayed at home and during the three years after they wed, they had two daughters. Mr. Zheng started to blame Ms. Zheng for things he was not satisfied with, including the food she cooked, causing the communication between them to dwindle. Sometimes Ms. Zheng felt so bad that she could not help yelling at Mr. Zheng. When it happened, Mr. Zheng would either walk away or look at her coldly and say, “Look, how could your family have raised such a woman like you?” Ms. Zheng’s family used to be working class in Malaysia, and her father died from alcoholism. Mr. Zheng’s words were humiliating. Without understanding and love from her husband, Ms. Zheng felt very depressed, which also negatively influenced her role as a mother. Sometimes she told her daughters that if she died, they should always remember that their mommy loves them. More times she became less involved with her children’s lives and sometimes appeared rude and even hostile.
Compared to Ms. Zheng, Ms. Shen holds a higher educational degree than her husband and also has a full time job, but she still took full responsibility as a homemaker and mother at home. She told me that upon returning home from work, her husband would frequently sit in front of the home computer and read Chinese news. He always complained of being tired after work and typically sat at the computer until dinnertime. “I am also very tired, but I have to cook for the family and take care of our son,” said Ms. Shen (interview transcript, 12/30/2011). She told me that sometimes she just could not tolerate her husband’s temper, and she would go to church for help because she believes that only God knows how much she has been suffering.

When a nuclear family lives in a foreign country, it is common for conflicts to occur between the couple, because the husband is frequently stressed about work and the wife is often completely devoted to raising her child(ren) and is therefore deprived of personal space and time. Some of the female participants expressed that they preserved their marriages only for the sake of their children. Also, because many of the female participants did not work, they worried about losing the custody of their children if they get divorced. To further complicate this situation, many of the fathers would likely not agree to divorce because they believed their children would not live well without two parents. Ms. Shen told me that to her husband, their son is his whole world. In China, sons are still popular because they carry family names. Her husband once told her that he did not care about living without her, but he did care about their son living without his mother, illustrating that their family life centered primarily on their son.
While most participants emphasized that they kept their marriages for the sake of their children, a bad marital relationship can negatively influence parenting (Belsky, 1984; Belsky & Jaffee, 2006). Research indicates that marital discord undermines and disrupts effective parenting practices and is associated with poor child adjustment (Belsky, 1984). In the ecological model centered with the child, the marital relationship constitutes part of a child’s microsystem, and thus directly influences the child. Behavioral exchanges between spouses are one of the major vehicles through which the immediate environment directly affects a child’s psychological growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As was shown in Ms. Wang’s story, the conflicts between her husband and her have had negative effects on their older son, Lei, who started to have a violent temper and a change from an outgoing boy to be more introverted due to the family atmosphere.

Interactions with Home and Host Cultures

Another theme addressed in some participants’ narratives is their extensive interactions with their homeland. Because of the rapid development of communication technologies in the past two decades, it has become significantly easier for Chinese immigrants to travel between China and the U.S., and to frequently communicate with their extended family members and friends in China through email or phone. It has also become common for the immigrants to purchase books and other things online from China. Several participants mentioned that they sent their children to China for summer Chinese camps. Their friends in China also sent their children to the U.S. for study. All of these transnational interactions, to a certain extent, influenced the parents’ parental values and behaviors in both cultures and helped to bridge eastern and western cultures. Two
phenomena will be addressed in this section: the role of grandparents in childrearing and some fathers working remotely.

**Grandparents**

Four parents in the current study had close relationship with their parents, who helped enormously with childcare and housework. Through a brief survey of the flight demographics of several major U.S. airline companies, it is not difficult to notice that a large amount of Chinese seniors travel round trip between China and the U.S. in six month periods. Based on the U.S. visa policy, visitors from mainland China can stay in the U.S. for as long as half a year and then they need to go back to China to stay at least the same length of time before returning to the U.S. again. The time varies for visitors from Taiwan and Malaysia. Another transnational group is the large number of babies sent back to China from the U.S., and five- or six-year-olds flying to the U.S. from China.

This international migration frequently occurs within working- and middle-class Chinese immigrant families. For example, Ms. Chu, a working-class immigrant, sent her daughter to her parents back in her hometown in China when Ms. Chu’s baby was two months old, first because she and her husband did not have time to take care of the baby; second because nursery school in the U.S. is very expensive. Ms. Chu said that this was a common occurrence within many other working-class Chinese immigrant families. Because the couples had to work long hours at their low-paying jobs, they did not have time or money to take care of their children. Sending their children back to their parents in China was the safest and cheapest way. For some immigrants who were still undocumented, they had to pay agents to fly the baby back home. There were about
10,000 U.S.-born Chinese babies or young children in Ms. Chu’s village and neighborhood in southern China when Ms. Chu sent her daughters back. The kids were eating food and snacks sent by their parents from the U.S., but never saw their parents after their separation as early as two months old until they reached age five, when they were old enough to go to the public schools in the U.S. When I asked Ms. Chu if she missed her girls during the separation, she said:

Not really. I was too busy and exhausted. I think she lived a much better life with her grandparents back in China. To me and my husband, we just had no choice. Work and live. Once we landed onto this land, we had no way back. Now all our hope is with our children. (interview transcript, 01/31/2012)

Ms. Chu’s words illustrated that many immigrant families have few choices upon immigrating; making a living is their top priority.

Many middle-class Chinese immigrant families either send their babies back to China, or invite their parents to come to the U.S. to take care of the kids if it is financially possible. Similar to working class parents, time and financial reasons are concerns for middle-class immigrant families. In addition, some parents hesitate to send their children to nursery schools in the U.S. because they worry about the quality of the schools in the U.S. Traditionally, many Chinese parents tend to overprotect their children, especially when they are young; therefore, the immigrant parents often believe that sending the children to live with their grandparents is the best choice if both parents are working.

Another reason some parents send their children back to China is to receive early childhood education in China, which emphasizes academic learning, in contrast to the emphasis on play in many U.S. schools. This arrangement is also a good way for the
immigrant parents’ children to learn Chinese at an early age. Ms. Han has a very good friend who is a teacher at a nursery school in China. The friend strongly suggested that Ms. Han send her little son back to China for early childhood education. Taking the advice, Ms. Han sent her youngest son back to China to live with her parents for two years, from ages three to five, and now his oral Chinese is better than his older sister and brothers.

When Ms. Shen and her husband initially came to the U.S. to pursue graduate coursework, they left their two-year-old son, Zach, with their parents. Their family did not reunite until Ms. Shen finished her graduate study, at which point Zach’s grandparents took turns traveling to the U.S. to take care of Zach and the whole family. For kindergarten, Zach only went to school for two and half hours each day. Ms. Shen told me what happened every day after Zach got home during his kindergarten year:

Zach got home at noon time, and then my in-laws would have lunch ready, with some vegetables, meat, shrimp or fish. From 1:30-3pm, my mother-in-law taught him math and Chinese, using textbooks from China. My mother-in-law used to be an elementary school teacher, so she is an expert at teaching. At 3pm, Zach had some snacks like yogurt, and then my father-in-law would take him to the playground if the weather permitted. At 5pm, when my father-in-law started to cook, my mother-in-law would read books together with Zach. (interview transcript, 12/27/2011)

In order to provide Zach with constant care from his grandparents, Ms. Shen’s parents flew in from China the day following the departure of Mr. Shen’s parents’, then Mr. Shen’s parents flew back to the U.S. the next day following the departure of Ms. Shen’s parents. They travelled like this for a couple of years. Once, Ms. Shen’s mother was not able to come because she needed to take care of Ms. Shen’s younger brother’s
This constant extra support helped Zach immediately excel in his U.S. classes. In less than one year, he spoke English fluently and could read better than most of his classmates, which can be attributed to his Chinese proficiency. In second grade, Zach’s math and Chinese skills had both reached fourth-grade levels in China. He was confident and happy in the U.S. school, thanks in large-part to his grandparents.

Having grandparents come to the U.S. to look after the children of immigrant parents is very common among Chinese immigrants, but some, especially those from western cultures, might argue this practice is unfair to the grandparents. When I asked Ms. Shen whether this is fair to her parents and parents-in-law, she told me:

They (the grandparents) love coming to live with us. Chinese people like the feeling of big families. They would take care of their grandchildren anyway if we lived in China. The only problem is that they don’t have any friends or other social connections here in the U.S. because of language and cultural differences. My husband and I are very busy at work. So sometimes they did feel very lonely. (interview transcript, 12/27/2011)

Many Chinese grandparents are very devoting. Ms. Wu’s mother exemplified this personality trait. In order for her daughter to have a successful career, Ms. Wu’s mother wholeheartedly devoted herself to her daughter’s family. Ms. Wu had a baby girl that was unplanned within the first year of coming to the U.S. for graduate study, and she had twin sons the following year. It seemed that Ms. Wu would have had to quit her studies for at least a couple of years because of the birth of three babies within two years. However, her mother offered to come and look after the three kids while letting Ms. Wu finish her degree. In China, women who do not work often have a lower social and family status;
therefore, Ms. Wu’s mother was determined to make sure that her daughter finished her degree and acquired a stable job so that Ms. Wu would be financially independent and socially equal to her husband. Aided by her mother’s devotion, Ms. Wu studied very hard day and night, and received her doctoral degree within four and half years. She then found a professional job upon graduation.

While Ms. Wu heartedly appreciated her mother’s devotion, there were some regrets she felt for her children though,

When I had my daughter, my first child, I had some time to be with her. I read some books on baby caring, so I learned how interaction with the baby is very important. I talked with her, looked her in the eyes, and sang songs to her. She started to respond with smiles and making silly sounds even at one month. Later after I had my two boys, my mother took over babysitting. She had all the traditional thoughts about raising children. When I asked her to interact with the babies, she did not think it made any sense, plus she had a lot of housework to do, so she did not listen to my suggestion. I was so busy at that time with my studies I didn’t have time with the kids either. Now five years have passed, I noticed my daughter has much better communication abilities and EQ (emotional quotient or emotional intelligence) than my sons. (interview transcript, 09/10/2011)

Ms. Wu’s narrative about her mother’s role in her children’s education indicates a generational gap between the parents and grandparents. When there were disagreements regarding childcare between Ms. Wu and Ms. Wu’s mother, Ms. Wu had to compromise due to the cultural tradition of filial piety. Sometimes she felt that her mother’s presence prevented her from assuming her parental role.

Although it is popular among Chinese immigrant families to have grandparents take care of young children, there can be problems associated with such a phenomenon, especially when the children are sent back to China for several years. Early childhood is very important for the development of both child and parent, and for the parents and the
child to develop attachment. When the grandparents take on the role of parents, they tend to spoil the child and have different parenting approaches from the parents. Four to five years later, when it is time for the child to reunite with her/his parents, both the child and the parents need to adjust themselves with the new environment. Ms. Shen told me that when her son Zach returned to the U.S. after four years in China, Ms. Shen found that Zach was very spoiled and disrespectful to adults. So she had to make new rules and kept monitoring him to change all the “bad” habits he acquired while in China. Because Ms. Shen’s in-laws lived with her family during that half a year, there were frequent arguments between Ms. Shen, her husband and the two grandparents. Before returning to the U.S., Zach was excited to finally reunite with his parents; however, that excitement turned to confusion upon returning to the U.S., as he was confronted with strict parents who kept criticizing his mistakes and making him change. Zach was only five years old when he returned to the U.S., and he was confused about the different roles of his parents and his grandparents.

When talking about the phenomenon of many Chinese immigrant parents sending their children back to China, Ms. Chiu was very sad. She got an opportunity to take care of her four children all on her own and she felt the most important gift parents can give their children is to take care of their children on their own. As she said, “It was amazing how my baby had different reactions to my different attitudes, the tones I talked with and the way I hugged him. Then I told myself that I would not let anybody else influence my baby. I must take care of him on my own” (interview transcript, 03/02/2012).
Grandparents are a primary component of family unit in China. The process of migration disrupts these family relationships to a certain extent. As a result, some mothers experience many struggles due to parenting alone. Many Chinese immigrants in the U.S. have attempted to reconstruct their lost kinship networks by having their parents come to the U.S. to help with childcare. For some immigrants, grandparents are clearly identified as an important source of social and sometimes financial support. For example, Ms. Shen’s parents and in-laws took turns coming to the U.S. for three years to act as the family’s babysitter and teacher (math and Chinese) for Ms. Shen’s son, and also as the family’s housekeeper. The help from the grandparents can amount to tremendous financial savings for a family, as hiring a babysitter, tutor, and housekeeper each month would be incredibly costly for a family. However, for some families, grandparent may also be experienced as a burden and a restriction on one’s autonomy (Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003).

Sending children back to China and separating the immigrant family for four to five years can be detrimental for both the children and the parents in the long run. At the same time, some argue that it is unfair for Chinese grandparents to bear the full responsibility and the work-load of childcare instead of enjoying their own lives. As the quality of social services improves, this family dynamic has changed as more and more young parents have started to hire babysitters in China, if they can financially afford it. There are also some grandparents who would rather give their children money to hire a babysitter instead of caring for their grandchildren on their own due to all the work and responsibilities associated with taking care of a child.
Among the eleven participants from Mainland China, six female parents immigrated to the U.S. because of their husbands’ pursuit of graduate studies. Since 1978, when the former General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Xiaoping Deng, initiated the largest Chinese study-abroad movement in Chinese history (Li, 2005), the U.S. has witnessed an increase of middle-class Chinese immigrants with higher educational levels (Li, 2006). Although most of these scholars find jobs in the U.S. and end up living in good school districts, the language barrier and minority status of these immigrants have affected these scholars at work. For example, with limited English speaking abilities, Mr. Feng found it very frustrating to work in a lab as a technician, which was already a big downgrade compared to being a researcher in China. Mr. Zhou is not happy at work either, but he is more understanding and would like to put himself in others’ shoes:

> We are foreigners in this country. You can never change this fact. We can never reach the management position or have the power in decision making. That is actually understandable. Who will let a foreigner make decisions? Imagine back in China, we used to have a couple of foreign professors from other countries when I worked at a university. How could it be possible that we let them make big decisions as university administrators? (interview transcript, 08/22/2011)

As Mr. Feng and Mr. Zhou described, the combined factors of being a visible minority, the language barrier, and cultural differences, make it hard for Chinese immigrants to find decent jobs in the U.S. Due to the conflict with his wife and the loss of his job, Mr. Feng chose to go back to China and has started a new job, where he is a team leader. Of the researcher’s acquaintances in the U.S., two Chinese families have moved
back to China during the last two years. Both the two husbands were lecturers at U.S. colleges and it was hard to get a tenure-track position as a foreigner, so they accepted tenure-track, full professorial positions in two prestigious universities in China.

During recent years, due to the downward economic trend in the U.S., China has been providing competitively beneficial policies to attract overseas scholars to return to China. Nationw ide, numerous research parks have attracted overseas intellectuals by providing great opportunities for them to create research and development organizations (Mohrman, 2008). Ms. Wu’s husband used to have a well-paid job in the U.S., and he could work from home. However, he always felt it was unfair that he had not been promoted. He believed his lack of a promotion was due to his status as visible minority. So he quit the job two years ago and started his own company in China. As an “Outstanding Overseas Scholar” recognized by the Chinese government, he received a funding of ¥3,000,000 RMB (Chinese currency) upon the start of his company, a house and all the support he needed. However, at the same time, the cost for his career advancement is the separation from his wife and his three children, who were all enrolled in elementary school. When I asked about this, Ms. Wu said,

It was a tough decision. It took us a long time to finally make the decision. I was strongly against it in the beginning, but my husband was so unhappy working here in the U.S. that finally I agreed. Now he is doing a great job in China. He comes back every three months. It seems to be working fine. I am really busy though. I work full time. Every day after work I hurry home, and take my kids to swimming lessons, karate, etc. etc. I feel like I never get a minute to rest. (interview transcript, 10/06/2011)

When I asked Ms. Wu whether they had ever thought of moving back to China as a whole family, she said, “No. I like the American way of education. I suffered through
my Chinese education. I had no play time, living like a machine. I don’t want my children to go through that again” (interview transcript, 10/09/2011).

Among the sixteen families I interviewed, four fathers (Mr. Feng, Ms. Wu’s husband, Ms. Chen’s husband, & Ms. Han’s husband) have moved back to Mainland China to pursue their careers, leaving their wives and children in the U.S. The Chiu family went back to Taiwan after Mr. Chiu retired, and started their training center advocating the Christian curriculum they used for their homeschooling. The Chen family came to the U.S. nine years ago when their daughter was eleven years old. The purpose for their immigration was for their daughter’s education. Mr. Chen was a doctor back in China but after coming to the U.S., he worked as a researcher in a research lab of a university. Now their daughter is in college, so Mr. Chen took a job as a director of a hospital in a big city in China. Ms. Chen plans to join him after their daughter graduates from college. Ms. Han’s husband got laid off three years ago during the U.S. financial crisis. He found a job back in China as a manager of a group of scientists. Mr. Han comes back to the U.S. every couple of months, and Ms. Han takes her four children back to China for the whole summer vacation.

Besides the attraction of better career opportunities, some wives also wanted to go back to their home country because of feelings of loneliness and stress in the U.S. Ms. Wang told me:

If possible, I want to go back to China, maybe after my children go to college. All my extended family members and my friends are there. I miss them! Every day I am fully occupied by housework and taking care of my kids. I have no time for myself at all. My husband always gets home frustrated with his work, and is temperamental towards me and my kids. (interview transcript, 04/05/2012)
As indicated by the participants’ stories, the major reason most participants immigrated to the U.S. and stayed in the U.S. was for the sake of their children, especially for the immigrants from Mainland China. Therefore, the participants’ role as parents was a very important factor in their decision to immigrate. However, when the husbands felt inadequate in their U.S. jobs, they would take the advantage of socially and financially attractive offers from the Chinese government to return to China, leaving their children and wives in the U.S. At the same time, many Chinese immigrant wives also want to go back to their homeland because they feel lonely and overworked at home, lacking the help and support from their extended families. Some other participants also indicated that they would like to return to China once their children acquire the education their parents immigrated for.

*School Involvement*

Previous research found Chinese immigrant parents’ minimal presence in the schools as volunteers, advocates for their children, or participants in policy making (Ho & Fong, 1990; Siu, 1993). There are many reasons and misunderstandings behind this impression. The findings of the current study show the diversity related to this issue. The results indicate that the Chinese immigrant parents had positive and negative opinions regarding U.S. schools and teachers; specifically, they experienced difficulties and felt frustration when they contacted teachers and participated in school activities. Their specific concerns can be language barriers and cultural issues. Some of the participants
also expressed having positive experiences with and overall high opinions of U.S. teachers.

Concerns and Frustrating Involvement

Ms. Wang told me about her story of trying to be his son’s classroom mother.

When Lei was in first grade, I saw that his friend’s mother worked as a classroom mom, who always showed up at school, and had great relationships with the kids in his class. I mentioned to Lei that maybe next semester I could be his classroom mother. Lei was strongly against it, “No, your English is not that good, and you don’t know what to do.” I was shut out. Maybe he is right. I didn’t really know what to do unless the teacher told me what I am supposed to do. Lei told me that the classroom mom sometimes brought treats to every child, and I might have no clue about what to bring. (interview transcript, 12/11/2011)

As immigrants, some parents hesitated to volunteer at school because of language barrier and not being familiar with the culture. As Ms. Chen recalled,

I volunteered at school for a couple of times, such as a culture night and an ice cream social. Sometimes I did not feel quite comfortable as a volunteer in my daughter’s school because it seemed that I was supposed to know what to do when I did not. Nobody took me as an immigrant, who does not know the U.S. culture well. I have a lot to learn. We did not do that in China (interview transcript, 01/12/2012)

Ms. Han and her husband also experienced one unhappy voluntary experience, as she described:

My husband and I tried to involve into our son’s school life, but sometimes we felt not sure what to do. When our older son signed up for baseball, I signed up my husband for volunteer helper. Then he found out such helpers needed to play baseball with the kids and communicate with them. Because my husband did not know how to play baseball at all, and he was not confident in his English either, he withdrew from the role soon. Then he found the coach and some parents not friendly to him any more. (interview transcript, 09/30/2011)

In fact, now there are a lot of volunteer programs in China too. Due to globalization, many people studying or working in North America have moved back to
China with knowledge of western educational systems. Thus, the Chinese and U.S. educational systems are getting more and more alike, which makes it easier for the immigrant parents to adjust to the new educational environment.

The several anecdotes above presented some frustrating experiences of Chinese immigrant parents’ involvement in U.S. schools. Ms. Shen also shared her experience with her son’s physical education (P.E.) teacher. Her son, Zach’s school conducted a Marathon program one winter. Through this program, each student got a sheet of paper with slots you could check. If you exercised for ten minutes, you could check the box for 0.1 mile; if you ate five servings of fruit and vegetables, you could check another box for 0.1 mile. Each time you reached five miles, you could go to the P.E. teacher to exchange a little toy running shoe. Zach was very motivated that winter. He exercised and ate healthy food frequently, and was excited to see those little shoes accumulate. Finally, he earned a trophy after he gained ten tiny shoes. However, the school stopped the program the second year. Ms. Shen felt disappointed and emailed the P.E. teacher about it. The teacher replied saying he had difficulty doing the program again because it was time consuming and some students and parents cheated; also, the P.E. teacher had the additional duty of supervising a student teacher (please refer to appendix G for complete email communication). Ms. Shen felt disappointed but was also without words to express her frustration. Although the teacher recommended an online program, Zach would take it very differently when it was assigned by his parent instead of his teacher, as many kids take their teacher’s words more seriously than their parents’. Ms. Shen did not think the reasons that the P.E. teacher listed were more important than giving hundreds of children
motivation to exercise and eat well. However, internalizing these complains, Ms. Shen did not know what to do and that winter, her son gained weight.

Active Involvement

Doucet (2011) argues that parent involvement creates a group identity among mainstream parents and schools that marginalizes diverse families, because there is a normalization of the involvement patterns of white middle-class parents (especially mothers). However, he further points out that there are still opportunities for immigrant parents to learn more about the new culture by getting involved with their child(ren)’s school. A number of studies have documented the power and importance of social networks in immigrant mothers acquiring insider knowledge about teachers, school practices and policies, and avenues for meeting their own and their children’s interests (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Reay 2008). Ms. Wei and Ms. Wu have both gotten involved with their child(ren)’s school life.

Doucet’s (2011) argument that social networks are incredibly important for Chinese immigrant parents attempting to navigate the U.S. school system can be seen in the way the participants discussed their involvement with their children’s U.S. schools. For example, Ms. Wu went to her three children’s classrooms separately once a month to help out as a volunteer, which was a request from her children. No matter how busy she was, she always set aside time for those monthly visits. Her children expressed excitement and pride upon seeing their mom at their school. According to Ms. Wu, volunteering in her children’s classrooms was also a great opportunity for her to observe her children’s teachers. In one case she was not satisfied with her son’s kindergarten
teacher and attempted to switch him to another class. Volunteering at her children’s
classes provided Ms. Wu rich information about U.S. school system and her children’s
school behaviors.

Ms. Wei went to her daughter, Leah’s school once a week. She told me that by
volunteering at Leah’s school, she could observe the classroom, and also, Ms. Wei
believed her volunteering at Leah’s school helped to build up Leah’s confidence. She
gained respect from Leah’s classmates, and believed that this contributed to the fact that
Leah’s classmates also respect Leah. Furthermore, Ms. Wei noticed that when she helped
Leah’s teacher with her work, the teacher paid more attention to Leah, which in turn,
resulted in Leah having more positive feelings about teachers and the school at large.
Another reason Ms. Wei volunteered at school was that she can get firsthand information
about the U.S. school system. She told me:

We Chinese often have a misunderstanding that U.S. schools generally have low
expectations for kids. Since I volunteer at school, I got a chance to look closely at
what actually happen in American schools. The teacher is actually willing to teach
more if the child is advanced. Because Leah is more advanced than other kids in
math, the school arranged a special teaching assistant to teach her higher level
math during class time. The classroom teacher also gave her extra work to do. In
the past, I thought U.S. schools only pay special attention to the kids who are
below average level. Now I know that although the overall U.S. education might
have low academic expectations for the children at elementary school, but they
really attend to individual children’s needs, and won’t make these children’s time
at school wasted. (interview transcript, 02/25/2012)

When I questioned that it might happen only at the school that Leah is attending,
and mentioned my disappointment with my son’s former elementary school, she asked
back immediately, “Have you been to his school to observe?” She emphasized that we
can only get a partial truth by listening to what our children told us.
Summary

The research findings of the current narrative inquiry highlight the complexity of the parental values, expectations and practices among the sixteen Chinese immigrant parents. Although most of the parents held high educational expectations, some of them followed traditional Chinese parenting practices with strict parental control, others gradually changed their traditional parenting approach as a result of access to western educational ideologies, their children’s attitudes upon immigrating and their own acculturation experience, and other parents fully followed God’s words after they became Christian. There are potential problems with the parents who took full authority of their children’s education. During the interview, these parents did not address their children’s aspirations, but instead they discussed the parent’s expectations and dreams for their children. Although they asserted that they sacrificed a great deal for their children to obtain a college education and a well-paid job, they may have inadvertently caused their children stress; the negative influence on their children’s personality can be life long.

In the section of acculturation dynamics and family system, several issues have been found in the parents’ narratives that directly or indirectly influence their parenting such as immigration challenges, marital discord and intergenerational gaps. As a result of immigration, some participants experienced downgrade of social and ecological conditions together with a loss of their social network. Failing to adapt to the new society often led to family tension and less attention to the children. Some stories of marital discord were told, which negatively influenced parenting and children’s normal development. Due to the differences in maintaining the Chinese tradition and
participating in the U.S. culture between the parents and the children, intergenerational conflicts were seen in almost every participant’s family, which also put the children in a bicultural dilemma.

Another theme that emerges from the participants’ narratives is their extensive interactions with their homeland. Being aware of the contemporary social, political and economic context in China provided Chinese immigrants more choices in their parenting approaches and career selection. Two phenomena as a result of transnational interactions were addressed. First, grandparents play a very important, yet largely under-researched, role in child rearing among Chinese immigrant families. In actively reconstructing the lost kinship as a result of immigration, some immigrants invited their parents to live with them in the U.S. to help with childrearing and housekeeping. Other parents sent their babies to their parents back to China, when they had no time to care for a baby. Second, the socioeconomic factors in both China and the U.S. has brought the phenomenon of the immigrant father returning to Chinese for career advancement, while the mother and the children stay in the U.S. for their child(ren)’s education. The last two findings indicate the extensive connections between the Chinese immigrants with their homeland even after immigration.

The narratives of the study also provided some information about Chinese immigrant parents’ experiences of school involvement. English proficiency, familiarity with the school system and friendliness of the school personnel all play a role in the parents’ participating in schools as classroom volunteers, PTA members, event assistants, or policy makers. Different from the general impression of Chinese parents’ indifference
for school activities, some participants were actively involved into their children’s school life.

In this chapter, although the findings are structured through themes, individual differences can be easily seen from each participant’s unique parenting perspective and family dynamics. Multiple factors – personal, historical, social, economic, political and cultural – were manifested differently in each parent’s cross-cultural parenting experience. A detailed discussion of what factors and how these factors interact to influence the parents’ parental beliefs and practices will be presented in the next chapter, together with conclusions and implications.
Chapter Six: Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand how and why Chinese immigrant parents differ in the ways they raise their children at an individual level, given their various personal, historical, social and cultural circumstances. The information gleaned from this research will enable those who work with Chinese immigrants to be aware of the within-group differences in the previously pictured homogeneous Chinese immigrant group, to break the stereotype of “model minority,” to be more knowledgeable about different factors that influence Chinese immigrant families, and to “appreciate diversity within diversity” (Wardle, 2011, p.68) so as to better serve the immigrant children. This chapter discusses the findings, and offers conclusions, implications, recommendations for future research and limitations of the study.

The discussion in this chapter draws on the results from the sixteen Chinese immigrant parents’ narratives related to their parenting experiences in the U.S. and the acculturation dynamics that directly or indirectly influenced their parenting. Although all the parents in this study valued education, there was considerable variation in the parents’ understanding of success for children, parental beliefs, childrearing practices and school involvement, which are shaped and influenced by multiple, interrelated factors. Structured by the bioecological model, this chapter first presents how different factors influence Chinese immigrants’ parenting and family dynamics as well as the linkage among the factors. I then discuss that Chinese immigrants are not a monolithic group. Distinct cultural, historical, political and economic background among sub-cultural
groups could also result in differences in parental beliefs and functioning. In the end, the conceptualization of understanding the process of acculturation as a continuum of enculturation and acculturation is discussed.

I conclude that the Chinese immigrant parents are a diverse group, with each individual’s parental beliefs and practices influenced by multiple personal and contextual factors. The consistencies and changes in the immigrant parents’ parental beliefs and practices are determined by complex processes occurring at various levels within their ecological environments between the two cultures. The current study also offers suggestions for future research on immigrant parents. The bioecological model is an overarching framework that addresses all of the factors that may possibly influence immigrant parenting; and the continuum of enculturation and acculturation can be used to discuss the effects of the constant re-evaluating and learning of the changing first culture and second culture on immigrant parents’ changing hybrid cultural values.

In the implication section, I suggest that school personnel need to work towards eliminating pre-assumptions about any cultural group, attending to each child’s unique identity without over-emphasizing the role of culture. Schools need to take efforts to build effective and reciprocal relationships with immigrant families to better address the immigrant students’ needs.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss three themes pertinent to the results of the study. This section also serves to address the second and third research questions:
What do these stories tell us about the factors that influence Chinese immigrant parents’ parental beliefs and practices?

How do the cross-cultural parenting experiences of Chinese immigrants help us understand the role of first culture and second culture in shaping immigrants’ parenting?

Structured by the bioecological model, the first theme presents different factors that influenced the participants’ parental beliefs and practices. The second theme discusses within-group and individual differences among Chinese immigrants. The third theme presents a continuum view of the acculturation process.

**Determinants of Chinese Immigrants’ Parenting: the Bioecological Model**

To understand the parenting experiences of Chinese immigrants, it is essential to contextualize their experiences because their beliefs and practices are derived and conditioned by particular social, cultural, historical, and family circumstances. As the participants’ narratives suggest, the parenting experience of each Chinese immigrant parent is affected by many different factors, from an individual parent’s characteristics to family dynamics, and from religious institutions to the overarching cultural context. To analyze these factors, Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model provides a heuristic overarching guiding framework. There are four interrelated components in the bioecological model: process, person, context and time. Based on the model, the process involves the complex reciprocal interaction between the individual and “the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment,” which is referred as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996); the person refers to the
individual’s “biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural characteristics” (Lerner, 2005, xv); the context refers to the four nested ecological environment; and finally, the time refers to the chronological aspect of changes in a cross-cultural context. In Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model, the characteristics of the person mainly refer to the psychological attributes. For the current study, the individual’s characteristics refer to some biological features, such as age, gender, and also extend to socially constructed features such as personal growth history, religion, and language and educational background.

Figure 6.1 provides a visual rendering of the bioecological model, which articulates the diverse, interactive contextual factors that can influence Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting beliefs and practices over time. The macrosystem, including social, cultural, political, economic, educational and legal systems, influences the nature of interactions within all other levels of the ecological system (Lerner).

Applying the bioecological model to the current study, at the center of the model is the individual parent whose parenting approaches are influenced not only by his/her personal characteristics (*the person*), but also by his/her social reciprocal interactions with different contextual factors (*the process* and *the context*), and the differences in time experienced by individual parents and families when they live between the two (or even multiple) cultures (*the time*).

**The Person**

*Personal growth history.* Harkness, Super & Keefer (1992) point out that parents reconstruct the personal past in light of the present, which “includes reconsidering one’s own childhood and sifting through the positive and negative elements of one’s upbringing, all of this being part of the process of redefining the self as a parent” (p.122). These researchers’ findings were manifested in the current study too. In most participants’ narrative stories, they unanimously mentioned the influences of their early lives, especially their childhood family environment, on their establishment of parenthood, parental beliefs and practices. For example, taking on family responsibilities at an early age helped to prepare some individuals for transition to the role of parent smoothly. Have an ignored childhood made the parents care and sacrifice more for their
own children. In contrast, it appeared much harder for the participants to establish the parent identity when their parents took most of the home responsibilities during their childhood.

Influenced by their own parents’ parenting approaches, some parents continued using the same strategies they received as children, while others started to adapt their methods when they realized that the initial approach was not effective or appropriate. For example, all the sixteen participants had their childhood filled with academic studies, with very limited extracurricular activities. After they took the parents’ roles, some parents still held the same educational expectations and emphasis with their own children, other parents chose to give their children freedom for play, to make up what they missed when they were young. Some participants even said that they decided to come to the U.S. because they did not want their children to have a happy childhood. They purposefully avoided too much focus on grades, but encourage their children to develop more interests outside the schoolwork. It was a struggling process for most parents though, because they still could not escape the long-term influence from their own families and educational environment in China. Although they started to give their children more choices about what they do, they still tended to hold high expectations on what they do no matter it was swimming, soccer, piano playing, and so on.

Of the sixteen participants in the current study, ten parents had used or were still using physical punishment as a way to discipline their children. All of these ten parents mentioned that their own parents spanked or hit them and their siblings when they were young. Although some parents still punished their children physically when the children
did something wrong or did not obey their order, most parents chose to use it in a light way, and some abandoned it completely. This change was due to their exposure to new cultural contexts or their being influenced by other factors such as other parents, books, and pediatricians. As is shown, the experience of physical punishment during childhood does not necessarily lead to an individual’s later parenting approach of adopting the same practice.

*Gender.* In the current study, exclusively all the mothers in all the families took the main responsibility as parents, no matter they had a job or not. Among fifteen families, nine wives were homemakers. These findings illustrate that the process of immigration did not have a strong influence on the Chinese immigrant parents’ understanding of gender roles. China has had a long history of male being dominant at home. It did not change much after immigration, especially for the participants from Mainland China. Several mothers felt overwhelmed with child rearing, and also faced the demands of employment. Role of gender on the immigrants’ parenting life in the U.S. will be discussed more in the section about “mother’s stress” under the macrosystem.

*Religion.* Another factor within the characteristics of parents is religion. As a result of immigration, several participants became Christians. Being Christian created a hybrid parenting practice, influenced by both Christian and Confusian principles. A couple of parents who became Christians upon immigrating said that they enjoyed better marital and parent-child relationships because everyone in the family has reached agreement to obey God’s words. Some parents became more humble in their parenting
role and were willing to admit that parenting is a learning process and that adults can make mistakes.

*English competency.* Another theme that was mentioned by several participants is that English fluency greatly influenced their parenting upon immigration. Language plays a critical role when one immigrates to a new country with a totally different language from his/her home language. Without a strong knowledge of the English language, some participants experienced discrimination within the U.S. educational system. They had difficulty understanding the structure of U.S. schools and/or communicating with school officials. Several participants with children in middle school or high school indicated that they had never been to their children’s school or met their child(ren)’s teacher(s). Therefore, language barriers could severely limit a parent’s ability to communicate with their child(ren)’s school and get involved with school activities. For the parents in the study who speak fluent English, acculturation was a much easier process and their parenting was also seemingly more efficient and productive than parents who had to cope with language barriers.

Poor English competency is also a barrier for finding jobs in the U.S. Many female participants used to have professional jobs back in their homeland, but once they moved to the U.S., it became hard for them to find a job due to limited English level and increasing family demands. Thus, many of the immigrants became homemakers upon immigrating.

The participants’ social networks were also limited as a result of language barrier. A dwindling social network, coupled with the loss of a job upon immigrating, lead to
some mothers’ depression and marital discord. For male participants, limited English skills placed them at a disadvantaged position and often experienced high levels of stress at work. The parents who experienced such problems also reported harsh or neglectful parenting, which may then negatively influence their child(ren)’s development.

The Process and the Context

The environment surrounding an individual parent can play a significant and interactive role in the participant’s parenting experience. As is shown in figure 6.1, Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model structures the contextual factors into a set of nested systems, ranging outwards from the microsystem to the macrosystem. Several themes have emerged from the interview data on the changes of Chinese immigrant parents’ beliefs and practices that result from immigration in interaction with ecological components at the four levels. Because of the complex nature of the contextual systems, none of the themes discussed at each level are mutually exclusive, but are instead determined by several factors across different systems.

The microsystem. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), the context closest to the individual parent is called the microsystem. For a Chinese immigrant parent, the microsystem includes the family members, friends, school, the community and religious institutions. Immigration causes an immigrant family’s social context and location to change dramatically. The changes that were widely addressed by the participants of the current study include: loss of extended family and reduced social network, loss of employment among mothers with limited English ability and increasing family demands,
minority disadvantage and religion change, all of which directly or indirectly influenced their parenting approaches.

Extended family members, especially grandparents, play a very important role in China. In most families in Mainland China, the only child (due to China’s Population Control Policy) is always depicted as a little emperor who is being taken care of by at least six adults in his/her family: parents, maternal grandparents and paternal grandparents. As a result of loss of extended family after immigration, some families actively rebuilt the kinship by having the grandparents join them in the U.S.. This phenomenon is another part of the Chinese immigrant parent’s microsystem. The presence of grandparents makes the parenting and parent-child relationship more complicated due to the generational gaps and the acculturation gaps across the three generations.

Another factor that some participants mentioned within the microsystem is child’s role. For example, Ms. Chan used to use physical punishment on her first two children frequently. Upon her third child’s birth, who experienced a lot of complications, Ms. Chan started to realize that every child is different, and she should not judge them based on one single criteria. Consequently, she changed her parenting approach.

The mesosystem. When events that occur within the microsystem interact and affect each other, it becomes what Bronfenbrenner calls the mesosystem. One example is from Ms. Wang’s narrative. Ms. Wang’s role as a parent was influenced by the interrelations between different or even conflicting ideas from her husband, her son, her Chinese friend, her US friend, the church group and the school counselor. (see Ms.
Wang’s complete story in Chapter Four.) Figure 6.2 presents the diverse factors that inform Ms. Wang’s understanding of family abuse.

Figure 6.2. The mesosystem that influences Ms. Wang’s understanding of family violence

In regards to the conflict that occurred between her husband and her son, the comments and advice that Ms. Wang received from her Chinese friends, U.S. friends and her church group were not in an agreement. Also, the visit to the school counselor had different effects on Ms. Wang and her son. Ms. Wang felt the need to seek professional family counseling, while her son felt very uncomfortable doing so. Such a dynamic interactions of the factors from Ms. Wang’s microsystem provided Ms. Wang more critical view to understanding her husband’s behavior and her role as a mother. The experience of immigration changed Ms. Wang’s microsystem by expanding her social network with U.S. population, which made it possible for her to be exposed to different opinions about family violence. Reversely, by sharing her story and dilemma, elements within Ms. Wang’s microsystem, such as her Chinese and American friends, school
counselor and attorney in the U.S. were also better informed of the cultural differences and complexity behind child abuse in Chinese immigrant families.

The exosystem. “An exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem,” referring to other social structures that do not contain the individual but “impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.515, emphasis added in original). For Chinese immigrant parents, these systems include schools, the media, communication, government policies and social welfare services (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In the current study, two exosystems were widely addressed by the participants: the U.S. school system and the informal social network among Chinese immigrants.

Due to the changes in the educational system experienced upon immigrating, some Chinese immigrants in the current study felt significant pressure in regard to their child(ren)’s academic study. They expressed concerns about the American school’s emphasis on play as well as focus on under-achieving students. Therefore, they believed it is necessary to work more with their children at home to keep them at least at the same level with children of the same age in China. Several parents from Mainland China bought the whole set of K-12 Chinese and Math textbooks from China, and helped their children grasp the knowledge contained within these books as well as the information presented by schools in the U.S.

As a result of the rapid growth of the field of information technology, it has become much easier for Chinese immigrants nowadays to read Chinese news daily, communicate with friends in China through free online chatting tools, and make frequent
phone calls back to China. In addition, increasing Chinese Baptist churches have appeared due to Chinese immigrants’ needs for religion and social networks. Online forums have also become a major resource for many parents to discuss their parenting experiences. Twelve out of sixteen participants have been active visitors and contributors on three major online forums set up for the Chinese immigrant community in the North America (www.huaren.us; www.mitbbs.com; www.wenxuecity.com).

The macrosystem. “A macrosystem refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exo- systems are the concrete manifestations” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.515, emphasis added in original). As an immigrant parent, her/his macrosystem appears most salient, consisting of all the cultural influences and societal dictates which are reflected in her/his micro-, meso- and exo-systems (Menon, 2006). As is shown in the current study, all of the factors in the other three systems can be traced to the overarching social and cultural ideologies in China and the U.S.

Among many aspects related to the influences of the factors at macrosystem level, the influences of traditional Chinese values, places of origin, and contemporary sociocultural factors in China and U.S. were reflected in the stresses that some mothers from Mainland China were experiencing. The ideology that mother serves as a family’s primary caregiver is rooted in Chinese cultural traditions. According to Confucian values, the mother is responsible for the well-being of the family (Huang, Ying, & Arganza,
2003). However, despite coming from the same cultural root, mothers from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia varied in their social status.

In Taiwan, it is still popular for women to be homemakers, which is quite acceptable for the husband, her extended family members and the Taiwan society, although more women have started to work nowadays. In contrast, women who grow up in Hong Kong get less influenced by the Confucian values because Hong Kong was under British administration from 1841 to 1997. Thus, women from Hong Kong have been influenced by western culture and are more independent. Things are different for women from Mainland China. Before the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, most women were homemakers, which were considered as an inferior position to men. After women’s equality was guaranteed in the Constitution of 1950 in China, women were encouraged to work outside the home. Since then, women in Mainland China have started to work, but their duties at home have not been altered and then have been “exhorted to shoulder cheerfully the burdens of the double duty (work and family)” (Chen, 2008).

Most participants from Mainland China for the current study watched their mothers taking the “double duty” all their life and were greatly and unconsciously influenced by that impression. In Mainland China, women who have professional work represent having higher abilities and social status. Homemakers are typically looked down upon in contemporary Chinese society. However, immigrating to the U.S. often necessitates that many Chinese women become homemakers for several reasons, such as: lack of support from extended family, language barriers for job, and family needs.
Immigrant families are mostly nuclear families (a heterosexual couple and their dependent children) that do not have extended family members nearby for support. In Chinese culture, only family or extended family members are supposed or trusted to take good care of babies and young children. Therefore, traditional Chinese families seldom hire babysitters. Some families also had financial reasons. At the same time, Chinese immigrants tend to have two or more children without the restriction of China’s “family planning policy,” that is, the one-child limitation in the population control policy of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which increases the workload at home. In addition, the school hours of U.S. public schools also makes it hard for some mothers to work full-time. The U.S. public schools run from 8am to 2pm or 9am to 3pm, which makes it necessary for some families to have at least one parent to be available after school. Therefore, if both parents go to work, especially when children are young, it creates a challenge to find appropriate child care.

Several homemaker participants from Mainland China expressed experiencing stresses from a variety of sources. First, many of the participants felt pressure from their extended family members and friends in China. Ms. Zhou told me that when she went back to China for a visit, the question she was afraid to hear was “what is your job?” She felt like she would be judged and despised because of not having a job in the U.S. In mainland China, women that do not have jobs are regarded as being incompetent or as fully dependent on their husband. This situation has been changing though due to socioeconomic changes in contemporary Chinese society. Ms. Wang and Ms. Han noted that their parents felt embarrassed when people asked about their daughters’ status in the
U.S. Their parents kept urging Ms. Wang and Ms. Han to find jobs so that they could talk about their daughters confidently. Second, some participants experienced stress as a result of their own life situations. They felt overwhelmed, depressed, and lonely due to the hard work of childcare and housework and exclusion of social networks. Third, the stress could also come from their husbands. Due to minority status at work, stress from economic insecurity and lacking in social network, some Chinese immigrant husbands always brought tensions home. These various stressors experienced by immigrant mothers undoubtedly all have a negative influence on their parenting.

Another example that shows the change of family structure due to the factors at macrosystem level, the phenomenon of some fathers going back to advance their careers was due to China’s economic progress during the past several years and the economic recession that happened in the U.S. in 2008. At the same time, the changing educational system in China is a factor that motivated mothers and children to remain in the U.S. Therefore, a new family model (with father working in China, and wife and children staying in the U.S.) among some Chinese immigrant families has appeared as a result of contemporary socioeconomic and educational context in both countries.

The fact that some participants sent their children back to China to be taken care of by their grandparents can also be traced to traditional Chinese culture as well as contemporary economic and educational reasons. With a more collectivist cultural orientation, “family” denotes different meanings in the U.S. and China. In the U.S., the concept of “family” represents a more individualistic orientation. With individualistic cultural values, a U.S. “family” typically consist of only parents and children. They rely
less on extended family with regard to day-to-day childrearing. In contrast, the concept of “family” in China originated from collectivist cultural values, where families live together (especially with grandparents) or in close proximity and share responsibilities like childrearing. Many participants believe that it is both expensive and educationally unimportant to send their child(ren) to preschool in the U.S. Therefore, many believe it is a better choice to send their children back to China, under the care of the closest people – their grandparents. Several participants also applauded China’s early childhood education, which emphasizes academic education, as opposed to social education.

Some participants expressed hesitance to participate in school activities or join the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) for three primary reasons: English competency, cultural difference and the difference in the communication styles between China and the U.S. Researchers find that most people from eastern countries tend to communicate in a high-context culture, “in which communication relies less on words and more on contextual cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, or other physical clues, to convey meaning” (Bredekamp, 2011, P.176). In contrast, people from western countries tend to communicate in a low-context culture that “focuses on direct, logical, precise verbal communication” (Bredekamp, p.176). Some male participants also discussed their strong feelings of minority disadvantage at work, which is mainly due to their oral communication skills.

The Time

Cross-cultural migration experiences that are unique to immigrant parents make the chronosystem extremely important in that both “past orientation” (the parent’
traditional values from their culture of origin) and “future orientation” (the parents’ perceptions of the future desired and envisioned for the host country) are merged to influence their parenting beliefs and practices (Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001). The most important indicator of the chronosystem with the process of acculturation is change. As indicated by the findings, all the parents showed certain degree of changes in their parental beliefs and practices as a result of changes at personal or contextual levels as indicated by the bioecological model. For example, after interacting with U.S. parents and teachers, some participants changed their parenting style from controlling to respecting their children’s choices. Some parents’ returning to China for a job opportunity is an example of change as a result of changes in the economic and political changes in both China and the U.S.

Interactions of Multiple Factors

As is shown from the discussion above, although different factors that influenced Chinese immigrants’ parenting are structured into different categories guided by the bioecological model, most of these factors are not mutually exclusive, but “interrelated” and “interdependent” (Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001, p.221). The process of immigration further complicates the interactions of these factors. Researchers on parenting have reached a consensus that parental functioning is multiply determined (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Luster & Okagaki, 1993). Luster and Okagaki argue that “our understanding of parenting behavior will be enhanced if we consider the combined influence of several factors rather than thinking about each factor singly” (p.227).
Almost every phenomenon discussed previously related to the participants’ family dynamics and parenting in the U.S. was influenced by multiple factors. For example, in some families, the fact that grandparents were main caregivers was shaped by the cumulative effects of Chinese traditional kinship values, the immigrants’ close connection with extended family in their home of origin, family demands and loss of support network in the new country. Another example is the phenomenon of marital discord. Based on the findings, the direct factor that caused distressful marriage was stress from both the wife and the husband. Tracing back to the changes as a result of immigration, language barrier and cultural differences make it hard for some female immigrants to find job. The change of family structure (such as the loss of support from extended family and birth of more children) made the responsibility of the mother’s more demanding. At the same time, some male immigrants were stressful at work due to their minority status. When parents are stressful and frustrated, they easily transfer the stress to their children or easily cause parent-child conflict (Brazelton, 2001; Belsky & Jeffee, 2006). Parents in a distressed marriage “tend to act with their children in negative, inattentive, and nonresponsive ways” (Borstein, 2001, p.8). On the other hand, for the husband who well adapted to the U.S. society and had a stable job, he had less stress and positively reduced the wife’s stress and family tension, and led to positive parenting.

Many parents talked about the influence their childhood experiences on their later parenting approaches. Although these parents entered their own family, their childhood experiences of physical punishment may predispose them to treat their children in the same way, their final choices were moderated by multiple factors. For example, west
culture, Christian religion, smooth adaptation to the U.S. society and good marriage relationship discouraged some parents from physically punishing their children, but acculturations stress, children’s mischief behaviors and competition from other Chinese parents aggravated other parents’ use of harsh parenting approach and physical punishment.

Another way that different factors interact is that characteristics of a context at Time 1 can make subsequent events more or less likely to occur (Luster & Okagaki, 1993). For example, the characteristics of the immigrants prior to immigration greatly influence their acculturation process (Berry, 1997). In the current study, Ms. Kwan’s experience showed such a way of interactions among factors. Ms. Kwan grew up in Hong Kong and later pursued an Education degree in a college in England, all of which well prepared her for life in the U.S. Thus, the context she experienced at Time 1 (personal history) has positively influenced the context in which parenting occurred at Time 2 (job satisfaction and financial resources of the family). Therefore, to understand parenting, we need to consider the life course of the parent, and the way in which the life course of the parent is related to the parent’s characteristics as well as the current circumstances in which the parent-child relationship is developing.

As the discussion in this section indicates, immigrants’ parenting is influenced by multiple factors across the individual parent’s bioecological systems. Each factor can not take effect on its own, but through its interrelation with other factors. It is evident that there are many interactions and mediating or moderating effects among different personal
and contextual factors, which even more complicates an immigrant parent’s trajectory of parenting journey.

*Chinese Immigrants: A Diverse Group*

Chinese immigrants are usually studied as a monolithic group; however, there are in fact great differences within this large ethnic group. For example, there are diverse ethnic subgroups within the Chinese immigrant community. While sharing an Asian cultural origin, these subgroups have very distinct subcultural identities and histories that have shaped the nature and dynamics of different family life. Compared to the former research that mainly studies Chinese immigrants as one homogeneous cultural group, one important finding in the current study is that “differences within a cultural group may be as great as, or greater than, differences between cultural groups” (Bredekamp, 2011, p.170). This section focuses on the differences among sub groups such as immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China. It starts with introducing the sociocultural background of these areas, followed by a discussion of some examples from the participants’ narratives.

*Home of Origin*

Great differences exist among the parents from different home of origin such as Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. These subgroups come from areas with different historical, economic and political contexts, which result in the differences in cultural and language proficiency and greatly impact immigrants’ adjustment to the host country. Due to over 50 years of political and economic separation of Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China, Confucian values are manifested at different levels in
different places of origin of Chinese immigrants. Research shows that, during the past five decades, Confucianism has weakened in Mainland China and Hong Kong (Lin & Ho, 2009). Hong Kong was a colony of the United Kingdom (U.K.) from the 1840s to 1997, when China resumed sovereignty. The culture of Hong Kong has been greatly influenced by western culture. Thus, “occidentalized” Hong Kong has “environment unfavorable for maintaining Chinese traditions” (Lin & Ho, p.2411). In Mainland China, owing to rapid economic and political transformations and globalization of recent decades, the Confucian traditions are becoming increasingly “diluted” and “westernized” (Lin & Ho; Huang, Ying & Arganza, 2003, p.192). Taiwan is one place that has not demonstrated weakening Chinese cultural traditions (Lin & Ho).

As is shown in the current findings, immigrants from Hong Kong are in a better position to become acculturated into the U.S. culture because of the similar culture background and fluency in English. In contrast, immigrants from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Malaysia experience increased language and culture barriers. Women also have different social roles in these subcultural groups. Because Taiwan has had a long tradition of women as homemakers, it becomes reasonable for the women immigrants from Taiwan to stay at home in the U.S. However, since 1949, women in Mainland China have been encouraged to take on the “double duty” of being a mother and having a career. Such a sociohistorical context in mainland China leaves some women immigrants from China a disadvantaged position at home if they can not find a job.

*Individual Differences*
Besides subgroup differences, individual differences can never be overlooked among Chinese immigrant families. Every individual is different, even with the same race and ethnicity, considering the factors that make up his or her identity such as language, personality, income, gender, family environment, religion, and so on. For example, among the seven participants who became Christians after immigration, we can not assume that they share the same parental beliefs. In fact, they presented different levels of maintaining Chinese traditional educational values and following God’s words. To one extreme, one parent ended up home-schooling her four children using a Bible-based curriculum and all her children are determined to serve God; in another case, one parent still held traditional educational values and pushed her children to reach academic excellence.

In summary, there is no way to generalize characteristics of parenting for Chinese immigrant parents because of the extensive individual differences, as is shown by the participants’ narrative stories. According to the bioecological perspective, many interrelated and interdependent factors related to the changes generated by the immigration process, the ecological components of the host culture and of the culture of origin, and individual factors all affect the immigrant parents’ parenting journey.

*Continuum of Common Cultural Values, and Continuum of Enculturation and Acculturation*

To an immigrant parent, the cultural influences and societal dictates appear most salient factors shaping his/her parenting beliefs and practices, which are linked to all other factors. As indicated by the findings from the current study, Chinese immigrant
parents’ extensive interactions with both home and host cultures have made the boundaries between the cultures blurred. Recently, researchers have criticized the dichotomy of the two broad cultural orientations, individualism and collectivism, because the boundaries between these two orientations are fluid and dynamic (Tamis-LeMonda, Way, Hughes, Yoshikawa, Kalman, & Niwa, 2008). Instead, they contend that different cultural values and developmental goals may be viewed as coexisting, changing across situations, developmental time, and in response to social, political, and economic contexts (Tamis-LeMonda et al.). Agreeing with these researchers, Bredekamp (2011) advocates an understanding of cultural differences by thinking of “values that are common across all cultural groups as varying along a continuum” instead of either-or dichotomy (p.172). Based on such a conceptualization, cultures may tend towards one end of the continuum or the other, but the values of most people fall somewhere in between (Bredekamp). Such a view of former cultural differences as variation of common values along a continuum helps reduce the tendency to stereotype groups, and potentially increase the understanding and communication among school personnel and families who may differ in their perspectives (Lynch, 2004).

In the current study, the Chinese immigrant parents had different degrees of attachment to their traditional cultural values as well as different levels of acculturation to the new culture, reflecting “an amalgamation or synthesis of Chinese and U.S. parenting principles that has evolved in the process of acculturation” (Russell, Crockett and Chao, 2010b, p.124). Therefore, Chinese immigrant parents’ parenting is influenced by the cultural values that vary on a continuum of Chinese culture and U.S. culture. It has
become impossible to measure a Chinese immigrant parent’s Chineseness or Americanness. On several places in my draft, two of my readers commented that the participants’ parenting experiences sounded just like typical American parents, which is exactly what He (1998) describes: “when people live between cultures, familiarity and strangeness merge and shift” (p.212).

The former acculturation theories focused on the changes of the immigrants, especially their assimilation levels, influenced by social and personal variables in the home country, host country and some phenomena that both exist prior to, and arise during, the course of acculturation (Berry, 1997). Given the fact that both home and host cultures keep changing in response to social, political, and economic contexts, He (1998) further proposes that acculturation (learning of the second culture) involves enculturation (learning and re-evaluation of the first culture). Before a Chinese immigrant came to the U.S., he/she had learned about western culture through media, friends and other resources, which was his/her first experience of acculturation. With a pre-assumption of the western world, the immigrant arrived in the U.S. and started his/her first-hand contact with the western culture. Linguistic, cultural and educational differences created tensions in his/her acculturation process, while at the same time he/she started to question what he/she had long believed normal in first culture. Such a re-evaluation of the first culture expands the meaning of enculturation.

Taking Ms. Wang’s experience for example, when she was caught in the tangle of two conflicting views of family violence, she started to question the long understanding she had held regarding hierarchy family relationship shaped by Chinese traditional
culture. For some participants, exposure to a new educational system provided them an opportunity to re-evaluate their understanding of good parenting (controlling and harsh parenting) informed by Confucian values. He (1998) argues that “one can never thoroughly learn about one’s first culture until one is exposed to a second culture” (p.221). The experiences of living in a new culture and close connection with home culture provide Chinese immigrants an opportunity to observe both cultures “from inside out and the outside in” (He, p.216). Exposure to the new culture equips the immigrants a critical lens to re-evaluate their home culture, which, in turn, also enlarges the immigrants’ perceptions about the second culture. The fact that the foundation of all cultures is shifting even more complicates the acculturation process (Ahmed & Shore, 1995).

Based on the previous discussion, immigrants’ experiences with enculturation (re-evaluating traditions of first culture and learning of new aspects of first culture) and acculturation (learning of new aspects of second culture and re-evaluating of changing second culture) exist on a continuum. Sometimes, acculturation is more heavily emphasized (e.g., high level of assimilation); other times, enculturation is more emphasized (e.g., sojourner heading back to China). In addition, any particular immigrant’s place on this continuum is constantly in-flux and evolving; in one day there might be a profound shift on the continuum given a social, cultural, familial, educational, and/or political factor that causes this shift. It is impossible for an immigrant to escape this continuum because he/she is always battling the complex issues that arise from having an intimate relationship with more than one culture. Consequently, Chinese
immigrants’ cultural values “were constantly shifting between the flux of change in both [cultural] landscapes” (He, 1998, p.208).

Conclusions

The narrative stories of the sixteen Chinese immigrant parents’ have revealed substantive information regarding their cross-cultural parenting experiences. The main conclusions informed by the findings are captured here.

First, Chinese immigrants are not a homogenous group, but a diverse group. Not all Chinese immigrant children like to study and are high achievers; not all Chinese parents are authoritarian; not all Chinese immigrants believe in Confucius values; not all Chinese parents are indifferent with school involvement. Great diversity exists among this large cultural group. Just among the sixteen participants in the current study, they are different in their home of origin, socioeconomic status, educational expectations, parenting approaches, attitudes for U.S. schools, etc. On the family level, some raised their children on their own, some had grandparents to help, and others experienced marital discord that negatively influenced their parenting. Influenced by multiple factors, each Chinese immigrant parent developed his or her own unique identity and accompanying world view. Several participants’ narratives showed immigration challenges, family tension, intergeneration gaps, and minority disadvantages; therefore, stereotyping the whole Chinese immigrant community as “model minority” can be misleading.

Second, every immigrant parent’s parenting beliefs and experiences should be understood at the individual level, considering the personal and contextual factors
throughout the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005). In addition, all the factors need to be considered simultaneously, due to the linkages that exist among the factors. Guided by the bioecological model and acculturation framework, a good understanding of immigrant parents’ parenting experience must take into consideration of all the factors including the characteristics of individual parent (i.e., personal growth history, religion, language, etc.), the contexts (i.e., family, friends, Chinese traditional culture, contemporary sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts in both China and U.S., etc.), and the changes of the interaction between the individual parent and these factors over time.

Third, Chinese immigrants’ cultural beliefs vary along a continuum of common cultural values, and their acculturation experiences vary along a continuum of enculturation and acculturation. Former cultural theorists mainly focus on immigrants’ acculturation process in the host country. Current Chinese immigrants have extensive connections with their homeland. Living in between the two cultures, the changing home culture reshapes parents’ parental values, together with the influence of the new culture. Enculturation, that is, re-evaluating and learning of first culture, has become part of acculturation process. This is especially true in the context of globalization, whereby “cultural difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness” (Clifford, 1988, p.14). The way globalization has intricately and intimately connected cultures makes the continuum of acculturation and enculturation even more real.

Although culture and ethnicity are important component of the individual immigrant’s identity, overstating the role of culture and understanding the immigrant
group as a homogeneous group can be misleading. At the same time, Confucian values, Christian values and western ideologies are manifested at different levels in their parenting. Furthermore, every Chinese immigrant parent’s parenting beliefs and practices are individualistic, shaped and influenced by their given historical and sociocultural contexts. Consequently, no conclusion should be made with any certainty that the factors addressed in the study on the determinants of parenting “truly operate in a classically causal fashion” (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006, p.104).

Several issues were exposed from the parents’ narratives which have not been well researched previously, including: variations among Chinese immigrants from different home of origin, marital discord as a result of immigration that may negatively influence child development, the role of religion on parenting, and grandparents as major childcare providers. The phenomenon of some fathers going back to China may also produce more new satellite families. At the theoretical level, the conceptualization of the continuum of common cultural values and the continuum of enculturation and acculturation provide a more fluid and dynamic theoretical lens learning about immigrants in general and contribute to the deconstruction of stereotypes of any cultural group.

Expanding the findings from current study to the larger immigrant groups, it is of significance to provide opportunity for their voices and parenting stories heard, to examine the multiple factors that shape their parenting approach at individual level structured by the bioecological model, and to be aware of their within-group differences. The conceptualization of viewing diverse cultural values on a continuum of enculturation
and acculturation provides a meaningful model for understanding all other immigrants’
acculturation process.

Implications

The current study helps to illuminate the differences within the traditionally
assumed homogeneous Chinese immigrant group and shows an effort to explore the
variability within any cultural group and the uniqueness of people. It is critical for those
working with Chinese immigrant parents to know that Chinese immigrant parents are not
a monolithic group, and while some parents like Ms. Kwan might immigrate to the U.S.
with certain privileges, many immigrants do not have the luxuries of speaking the
language, and/or having insider knowledge of U.S. educational systems.

Although this paper is mainly concerned with Chinese immigrants, many of the
findings and conclusions can contribute to the understanding of other immigrant groups
in general. For researchers and educators dealing with immigrant children and families,
instead of automatically holding preset cultural stereotypes for any racial group, we need
to focus on immigrants at individual level, looking at all the aspects that make up his or
her identity, and also look at the sum of these parts – the Gestalt (Wardle, 2011). To
ensure the success of all students at key development points, it is important to build on
each student’ personal and cultural assets, and design effective programs based upon this
knowledge.

Cultural Awareness

The individual parenting experiences of the participants of the current study offer
educators, researchers and social workers rich concrete examples of Chinese immigrant
families living in the U.S. With the knowledge generated from the current study, practitioners can validate the positive aspects of parenting considering the indigenous constructs of childrearing within Chinese culture, while helping immigrant families identify the challenges that are present when raising children in a different culture.

With the increasing diversity of school populations, and the growing number of biracial and multiracial children, it is essential that teachers not make assumptions about children and families’ racial and cultural identities (Wardle, 2008). Because culture is dynamic and constantly changing as a result of social events and other contextual changes, teachers need to be careful not to hold bias or stereotypes about students. Furthermore, it is important that teachers support children’s development and maintenance of their home language while helping children acquire proficiency in English.

*Individual Awareness*

Overstating the role of culture in addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children can be “divisive” (Wardle, 1996, p.153) and perpetuate stereotype of the cultural groups, separating minority groups from the mainstream population. Viewing the cultural differences on a continuum also helps reduces the tendency to stereotype cultural groups when the boundaries between the two cultures become blurred (Lynch, 2004). To better meet the immigrant children’s needs, a shift of focus from cultural characteristics to individual differences should be made.

To better meet a child’s needs, Wardle (2011) asserts that we must always start with the individual child, and not a racial, ethnic, cultural, or other group. Further, we
cannot automatically assign a child with the characteristics assumed to be stereotypical of a group, be it racial, disability, gender, household income, and so on (Wardle). What we should do is learn about individual children, their families, communities, and the other important ecological contexts of the child and his family (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). We need to extend our observations and insights of the child and family to inform us about the values, behaviors, and beliefs important to them.

**Establishing Reciprocal Partnerships between the School and the Home**

There has been a stereotype that Asian-American parents are inactive and unconcerned with school involvement. The findings from the study showed several possible reasons that prevent Chinese immigrant parents participating in school activities such as language barrier and cultural strangeness. There is also a pre-impression among Chinese parents that children in U.S. schools lack discipline and respect. While most Asian parents still show great respect for teachers and schools as influenced by Confucius value, teachers and social workers should first not to assume these parents as inactive, but actively build productive and reciprocal partnerships between school and families.

How to forge a meaningful partnership with parents from diverse cultures by creating a variety of roles and redefining parent involvement to include involvement at home remains a challenge for school administrators and teachers (Siu, 1992). One way to achieve this important goal is for school personnel to reach out to parents to learn about their background and their educational values, as well as all other possible factors that influence parenting and parent-child relationship. At the same time, it is important for teachers to inform the immigrant parents about the U.S. educational system and what is
going on at school. Takanishi (2004) points out that if more outreach and services are made to immigrant families, it is likely to result in increased services to immigrant and minority children who have the right to services under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act.

Some policy implications also arise from the findings. School policies that support greater teacher–parent contact might promote greater mutual understanding by teachers and parents of role expectations in the American educational system, and may reduce barriers to parents’ active participation in their children’s education. Bilingual-friendly policies may also benefit immigrant monolingual parents.

*Empowering Minority Parents*

An increased knowledge of parenting among immigrant families may help practitioners empower parents to advocate for themselves, and to navigate the systems in the new context in which these families live. Social workers can also guide immigrant parents in finding the support they need in order to put into practice what they already know about raising healthy children and in reaching out to the community for parenting help, since many parents are unaware of available resources. For parents and parenting education programs, it is important to let the minority parents’ voices heard, a way for them to create knowledge in their own community and make differences.

*Implication for Research on Immigrants*

The current study presents an example for research on immigrant families, by retelling their parenting stories within the sociocultural context in which the parenting took place. Creating conversations with immigrant parents can help foster an
understanding of the immigrant experience more generally. First, the study draws attention to the implicit and complicated acculturation and enculturation experiences of immigrant parents. Second, by giving such a marginalized cultural group a voice, the study helps disrupt the inequitable and unjust power relations among the dominant white population and the racialized immigrants and their children (Ali, 2008). Third, by framing the research within the given context for their parenting, it allows the reader to form a more accurate picture of parenting and family relationships. Therefore, the study can serve as an example for studies on immigrant parents of understanding parenting and family dynamics within their indigenous context, rather than using western psychological theories as the framework.

Recommendations for Future Research

Overall, to interrupt the unfair treatment of minority immigrant groups, more research initiatives are needed to have the immigrants’ voices heard, and to help bring the narratives of their experiences and feelings into the consciousness of the “mainstream” population (Ali, 2008). Given the important role of the diversity in the home of origin and within group differences, comparative studies are needed to explore the differences in parenting beliefs and practices among sub-cultural groups in the broad cultural groups designated by the U.S. government such as Asian, Hispanic, and African American groups. Most of these ethnic groups are currently represented in the literature as a homogenous group.

Within the immigrant communities, the experiences of the under-researched grandparents (or extended family member but acting as main child guardian) need to be
explored given their important role in Asian and some Hispanic or African American immigrant children’s education. Extended family and friends in their home countries, representing the agents for the immigrants to maintain connection with their home culture, also warrant study.

As mentioned earlier in this study, research is very limited on immigrant parents, especially at individual level. There is even less longitudinal research on the same topic documenting immigrant parents’ development of their beliefs and strategies. Given the important role of parents and family in minority children’s development, more studies, longitudinal, if possible, along the same line are needed. Research on family dynamics and different family structures that influence children’s development is also needed.

Limitations

With the methodology, the samples are not representative and the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to the wider population. In regard to the gender of the participants, there are only three male participants in the current study, which limited the scope of findings. In regard to the place of origin of the participants, twelve out of sixteen participants are from mainland China. Studies with higher levels of diversity will help contribute to the research on subgroup differences in Chinese immigrants. Only two participants did not attend college and belonged to lower-class; more research on working class Chinese immigrants should be conducted.

About the data collection, I tended to let the participants talk freely and unfold their narratives. However, the problem is that the data collected covered a multitude of aspects in regard to Chinese immigrants’ parenting, but lack depth on any specific aspect.
The presentation of the data was also a bit controversial. How to present narrative stories in a holistic and concise way without losing contexts still needs more exploring.

This study has mainly presented the voice from one parent in each family. All the issues about children are from the interviewed parents’ narratives, which might be changed by the parents during their retrospective narrative or for their own preference. All the issues about marital relationship were from one parent, which might have only shown part of the story. Among immigrant families, different family members have different levels of enculturation and acculturation; therefore, it is important to capture perspectives from a wide array of family members.
References


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Appendix A: Interview guide

Demographic information:
Gender, age, country of origin (be specific), length of time in the U.S., occupation, education, years of current marriage (when applicable), religion, preferred language use at home, number of family members (extended families) living in the same household, number of children, gender, age, grade, and school of child(ren).

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<tr>
<th>Topic Areas</th>
<th>Examples of Interview Prompts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>Why do you immigrate to the U.S.?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Have you encountered any challenges during immigration?</td>
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<td>Pre-immigration conditions and</td>
<td>Could you tell me a bit about your own experience of growing up in China?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences</td>
<td>How have your experiences growing up in China affected your beliefs and behavior as a parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel about Chinese educational culture and the Chinese educational system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese cultural heritage on your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>child’s development and school achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do your expectations for your child’s development relate to your personal beliefs and life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experience in China? Who or which incident do you think had the most influence in shaping your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>current parental behaviors and beliefs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>What do you feel is most important in raising/educating your child(ren)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What aspects of parenting provide satisfaction/disappointment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you do when your child(ren) makes mistakes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When your children have conflicts among siblings, what do you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you define “success” for your child(ren)? (expectations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your criteria for being a good parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are major resources for you to refer to during your parenting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your spouse’s role in your child(ren)’s education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schooling</strong></td>
<td>When you have disagreement with your husband about your child(ren)’s education, what do you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you help your child(ren) establish self-confidence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What role do you think school plays in your child(ren)’s growth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you think are most important in school achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you add extra academic work for your child(ren)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you think of peer pressure?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you communicate with your child(ren)’s teachers and schools?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How would you compare American schools and Chinese schools? What do you like or dislike?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you tell me your feelings and opinions about the American educational system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you satisfied with your child’s performance in school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Post-immigration characteristics</strong></th>
<th>Do you teach Chinese at home or send your child(ren) to Chinese schools? Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you emphasize maintaining a Chinese identity or being acculturated to the mainstream culture, or both? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What impact did you think moving to the U.S. had on your child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have any of your personal beliefs about parenting changed since you have migrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you tell me your feelings and opinions about American culture and parenting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do your expectations for your child’s development relate to your personal beliefs and life experience in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of U.S. culture on your child’s development? (Direct comparison between their perceived advantages and disadvantages of Chinese and American culture on their children’s development.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Consent form for parents (Chinese)

Boston College Consent Form (Chinese)

波士顿学院教育学院
参加研究同意书
中国移民父母在美国的育儿经历
研究者: 陈晓霞
同意书类型: 成人同意书

亲爱的先生/女士:

您好! 我叫陈晓霞, 是波士顿学院教育学院的研究生。我现在在做博士论文，主题是研究中国移民父母的教育理念和教育方式以及移民前后的个人生活经历与环境对父母观的影响。我诚恳地请求您参加我的论文研究。这份研究同意书主要提供您研究的简介和您的参与所涉及的内容。请仔细阅读并随时提问。您也会得到一份同意书的复印件。

目的
通过这一研究，我希望探求第一代中国移民父母是如何形成和改变他们的教育观和教育行为的。通过倾听他们跨国和跨文化的个人经历与家庭生活，希望产生对教育者，社会服务者和家庭问题研究人员的有价值的信息，同时使社会更理解和关注移民家庭和孩子们的健康成长。总共有来自十二到十五个家庭的15-20个父母亲参加这一研究。

研究过程
如果您同意参加此项研究，在具体研究过程中您会参加三到五次访谈，每次大约一到两个小时。由您选择地点和时间。访谈是很轻松的聊天方式，不需要任何准备。经您同意，访谈会被录音，但是您可以随时要求终止录音。所有访谈由我和您进行并由我整理成文字后与您分享。希望您提出宝贵意见或纠正可能出现的错误。

风险
参与此项研究不会给您带来任何风险，但也不避免会有暂时无法预测的情况出现。无论如何，保护您的权益将是研究者最优先考虑的。
利益
参与此项研究不会给您带来直接的利益，但我会很高兴和您分享研究发现。

花费和补偿
参与此项研究会花费您一些时间，而且不会对您有金钱或物质补偿。

保密性
您的名字，身份和其它私人信息将完全保密。在论文报告中，所有参与者的姓名都将匿名。所有访谈记录将存储在研究者的个人电脑里，只有研究者和她的论文指导老师可以看到，并仅作研究目的之用。论文答辩后一年内所有记录将被删除。需要特殊说明的是波士顿学院研究审核委员会有可能接触研究记录，出于保护人类研究参与者安全的目的。

参与和退出
您对这项研究的参与完全是自愿的。您可以拒绝回答任何您不想回答的问题或中途退出研究。您的这些决定将不会对您有任何负面影响。

撤销参与
出于对您有利的考虑，研究者可能决定请您退出这项研究。

联系与问题
如果您对这项研究有任何问题，请随时和研究者陈晓霞联系，电话是（585）3470429，电子邮箱是 chenxn@bc.edu。您也可以随时联系她的论文导师 Dr. Maria E. Brisk，电话是（617）5524216，电子邮箱是 brisk@bc.edu。如果您对自己作为研究参与者的受保护权益有疑问，请随时联系波士顿学院人文研究参与者保护办公室，电话是（617）5524778，电子邮箱是 irb@bc.edu。

同意声明书
我已经阅读这份参加研究同意书或有人口述以上资料给我。我有机会提出问题并得到满意的回答。我同意参加这项研究。我将得到一份同意书的复印件。

参与者名字: ________________

参与者签名: ________________  日期: ________________

研究者签名: ________________  日期: ________________

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Dear Sir/Madam,

You are being invited to take part in a doctoral dissertation research study. The research is to learn about Chinese immigrant parents’ childrearing experiences. You are selected as a possible participant because you are a first generation Chinese immigrant with school-aged child(ren). The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Purpose:
- The purpose of this study is to make the silenced voice heard by providing an opportunity for Chinese immigrant parents to tell their life stories before and after immigration, which have shaped and are shaping their childrearing beliefs and behaviors.
- It’s hoped that the study will generate information for educators, social service providers, and all family-related professionals to be more knowledgeable and sensitive to immigrant families, adults’ and their children’s well-being.
- The total number of participants is expected to be up to 20 individuals from 12-15 families.

Study Procedures:
- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in three to five face-to-face interviews, with each lasting approximately one hour or two. The interview will occur at a place most convenient for you. No special preparation for the interview is required.
- The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission, but you may request to stop recording at any time if you do not feel comfortable.
The interview will be transcribed by the researcher soon after the interview and the narrated transcripts will be shared with you and you may check accuracy or make any comments or reflections.

Risk/Discomforts of Being in the Study:
- To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing in this study have no more risk to you than what you would experience in your daily life. Your decision whether or not to participate will have no effect on your regular daily life.
- The study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:
- You will not receive any direct benefits from being a part of this research project, but I will be more than happy to share my findings with you.

Payments:
- You will not be monetarily paid for participating in the study.

Costs:
- The only cost for you to participate in this study will be your time.

Confidentiality:
- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file.
- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Only the researcher herself will have access to the recorded files, and the recording will be erased from the digital recording device after interview and deleted from the researcher’s personal computer after the dissertation is defended.
- Access to the records will be limited to the researcher herself and the dissertation committee members (mainly the faculty advisor, Dr. Maria E. Brisk); however, please note that the Institutional Review Board and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.
- The results of this research may be presented at meetings or in published articles.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with Boston College.
- You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation.

Dismissal from the Study:
• The investigator may withdraw you from the study when withdrawal is in your best interest.

Contacts and Questions:
• The researchers conducting this study are Xiaoxia Chen. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at (585) 347-0429, or chenxn@bc.edu.

If you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Maria E. Brisk at (617)552-4216, or brisk@bc.edu, who will give you further instructions.
• If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu.

Copy of Consent Form:
• You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:
I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name): ________________________

Participant or Legal Representative Signature: ____________ Date: _______

Principal Investigator Signature: ________________________ Date: _______
### Appendix D. Table A1 Profile of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Last name</th>
<th>Age range (years)</th>
<th>Home of origin</th>
<th>Length of Stay in the U.S. (years)</th>
<th>Highest level of education and occupation</th>
<th>Spouse’s education and occupation</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Grade level of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chan</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>College, Homemaker</td>
<td>M.D., Doctor</td>
<td>2 boys, 1 girl</td>
<td>11th, 9th, 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chang</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Master, Librarian</td>
<td>Ph.D., Engineer</td>
<td>2 girls, 1 boy</td>
<td>Grown up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chen</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>College, Technician</td>
<td>M.D., Doctor in China</td>
<td>1 girl</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chiu</td>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Master, Homemaker</td>
<td>Ph.D., Director in Taiwan</td>
<td>3 girls, 1 boy</td>
<td>All grown up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chu</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Middle school, Nail salon</td>
<td>High school, Waitress</td>
<td>2 girls</td>
<td>6th &amp; 8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Feng</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ph.D., Researcher</td>
<td>Ph.D., Home business</td>
<td>1 girl</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Han</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>College, Homemaker</td>
<td>Ph.D., Manager in China</td>
<td>1 girl, 3 boys</td>
<td>11th, 8th, 6th, 1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kwan</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Master, Pediatric therapist</td>
<td>College, CEO</td>
<td>2 boys</td>
<td>Grown up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Qian</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>High school, Chef</td>
<td>High school, Homemaker</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Shen</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ph.D., Researcher</td>
<td>Master, IT staff</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wang</td>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>College, Homemaker</td>
<td>Ph.D., Researcher</td>
<td>1 girl, 1 boy</td>
<td>2nd &amp; 6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wei</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Master, Homemaker</td>
<td>Ph.D., Engineer</td>
<td>2 girls</td>
<td>Preschool, 2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wu</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ph.D., Researcher</td>
<td>Ph.D., CEO in China</td>
<td>2 boys, 1 girl</td>
<td>2nd (2) &amp; 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Gender of Children</td>
<td>Grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Zheng</td>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>College Homemaker</td>
<td>Ph.D. Engineer</td>
<td>2 girls</td>
<td>8th &amp; 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Zhou</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>College, Homemaker</td>
<td>Ph.D., Researcher</td>
<td>1 boy, 1 girl</td>
<td>11th &amp; 1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Zhou</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ph.D., Researcher</td>
<td>College, Homemaker</td>
<td>1 boy, 1 girl</td>
<td>11th &amp; 1st</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. All the names are pseudonyms.
2. Although Hong Kong has returned to China, due to their specific political, historical and economic background, here I will still list is separately from “mainland China”. Also, I always believe “Tai Wan” is part of China. I list it separately here too for the same reasons.
3. Due to Mr. Feng’s privacy concern, the information about his job and number of children is fictionalized. All other information is true.
4. Due to Ms. Wang’s privacy concern, the information about her husband’s job and her children’s gender is fictionalized. All other information is true.
Appendix E. Table A2 Reasons the participants immigrated to the U.S. and their current family situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Last name</th>
<th>Reason for immigration</th>
<th>Current situation of the family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chan</td>
<td>Pursuit of graduate studies</td>
<td>Ms. Chan is a homemaker; Mr. Chan is a doctor in a hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chang</td>
<td>Better money-making opportunities</td>
<td>Ms. and Mr. Chang have both retired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chen</td>
<td>Daughter’s education</td>
<td>Daughter is in college, and Mr. Chen just went back to China to take the job of director at a city hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chiu</td>
<td>Pursuit of graduate studies</td>
<td>Mr. and Ms. Chiu, now live in Taiwan with one of their daughters and their one son, working on their training center; two of their daughters reside in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Chu</td>
<td>Better money-making opportunities and children’s education</td>
<td>Ms. Chu works at a Nail Salon and Mr. Chu works at a local factory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Feng</td>
<td>Wife’s pursuit of a better career</td>
<td>Mr. Feng went back to China while his wife and two children stayed in the U.S. They are preparing for a divorce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Han</td>
<td>Husband’s pursuit of graduate studies</td>
<td>Mr. Han went back to China two years ago due to his job loss in the U.S. Now he is a manager in a local company in a big city in China. Ms. Han stays in the U.S. with her four children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kwan</td>
<td>Political reasons</td>
<td>Ms. Kwan has retired from her school work, working with Mr. Kwan and their older son on their home business, with Mr. Kwan as the CEO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Qian</td>
<td>Better money-making opportunities and children’s education</td>
<td>Mr. Qian works as a head chef at a Chinese restaurant; Ms. Qian helps in the restaurant; their son is in 11th grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Shen</td>
<td>Pursuit of graduate studies</td>
<td>Ms. Shen works as a researcher at a medical research institute; Mr. Shen is a statistician at an insurance company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wang</td>
<td>Husband’s pursuit of graduate studies</td>
<td>Ms. Wang is a homemaker; Mr. Wang is a researcher at a university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wei</td>
<td>Pursuit of graduate studies</td>
<td>Ms. Chiu is a homemaker, raising their two daughters. Mr. Li works at a big U.S. company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Wu</td>
<td>Pursuit of graduate studies</td>
<td>Mr. Wu went back to China last year and is the CEO of a local company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Zheng</td>
<td>Husband’s pursuit of graduate</td>
<td>Ms. Zheng is a homemaker; Mr. Zheng is a doctor at local hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Zhou</td>
<td>children’s education</td>
<td>Ms. Zhou is a homemaker, and Mr. Zhou is a researcher at a medical research center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Zhou</td>
<td>children’s education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix F. Table A3 Matrix of the themes of the findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ms. Chan</th>
<th>Ms. Chang</th>
<th>Ms. Chen</th>
<th>Ms. Chiu</th>
<th>Mr. Feng</th>
<th>Ms. Han</th>
<th>Ms. Kwan</th>
<th>Ms. Qian</th>
<th>Ms. Shen</th>
<th>Ms. Wang</th>
<th>Ms. Wei</th>
<th>Ms. Wu</th>
<th>Ms. Zheng</th>
<th>Ms. Zhou</th>
<th>Mr. Zhou</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place of origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
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Appendix G. Picture of the sculpture: Child’s Chair

The picture was taken at Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY.

Child’s Chair, by Michael McDonough (b. 1951), with the assistance of Tina Aufiero (b. 1959), U.S.A., New York, New York City, 1991  © Michael McDonough
Appendix H. Parent-teacher communication: email exchange between Ms. Shen and her son’s P.E. teacher, Mr. Smith.

1. The email from the parent, Ms. Shen to the P.E. teacher, Mr. Smith.

Dear Mr. Smith,

This is Ms. Shen. I wonder if you have any plan to do Marathon program this year. Zach enjoyed it so much last year and it actually helped a lot to motivate him to keep exercising and eat healthy food during the winter months.

Thank you very much and have a great day,
Ms. Shen

2. The reply email from Mr. Smith.

Ms. Shen,

My apologies for not getting back to you before this. I really like the fact that you would like for Zach to be more active. Parents play a crucial role in limiting screen time, promoting and providing opportunity for their children to be more active.

When you originally sent your email I actually looked at starting up the marathon again this year. There are a few reasons why I didn't do it. First, for me, the marathon is very time consuming. I have extra duties at school right now as I am supervising a student teacher. Secondly, I have been trying to come up with a way to simplify the marathon to make it easier for everyone to follow. Lastly, many students were turning in sheets, even with parents signing off on them, that weren’t an honest account of what the students were actually doing. With being trustworthy one of our school expectations, I want to make sure to come up with a way to have everyone involved in the marathon be more trustworthy.

Finally, since Zach has already been through the marathon, he probably has a good idea of activities he likes. You can set up a reward system with him for activity and good nutrition habits. There are places online like NFL Play 60 (http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/) and America on the Move (http://aom3.americathemove.org/). If you need any further assistance, please let me know.

Jack Smith
Harvey Physical education