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## Cross-Culture Research: Comparison between Chinese and American Art Education

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Cross-Culture Research: Comparison Between  
Chinese and American Art Education

Ye Liang

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Mark Graham, Chair  
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## ABSTRACT

### Cross-Culture Research: Comparison Between Chinese and American Art Education

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Education systems in China and the United States are very different. Chinese educator Hong Wang compared the two education systems and came to a conclusion: Chinese education wins in the starting point, while American education wins in the end point (Cheng, 2014). Chinese students learn more things, take challenging courses, and do well in academic accomplishment. However, examination-oriented methods in the Chinese education system may kill students' interest in learning. Even though Chinese students learned fast in the starting points, they failed in the terminal points as they lost their interest in learning (Chen, 2014). Many educators and scholars think of Chinese education as important for developing a foundation of skills and American education is viewed as more helpful in cultivating students' creativity (Liu, 2014). This study will explore some of the differences between Chinese and American art education. The methodology for this study is qualitative case study research using data collected from both American and Chinese publications, from national and governmental organizations, and information gathered from surveys and interviews of Chinese art educators who have both education experiences in the United States and China. This research includes comparison and evaluation of the differences between curriculum, assessment, and class management in both Chinese and American art education systems. The result will contribute to providing valuable reference data for both Chinese and American art education systems, for art students and art educators.

Keywords: cross-culture, comparison, Chinese, American, art education

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so grateful to all of my friends, cohort classmates, caring mentors, and family members who supported me during this thesis. Without their help and encouragement, I wouldn't have been able to overcome my own weakness and have the confidence to finish this thesis project.

I am so grateful that I could be accepted as a part of art education program at BYU. I thank Dr. Graham for the help in this research project. I would also like to thank Dr. Barney for his kindness and support. I also thank Tara Carpenter and Chris Lynn who taught me so much in developing art teaching skills and art theory knowledge.

Thanks to my cohort classmates. I appreciated the time we spent together in this program. We laughed together and cried together. We are like a family. I learned from each of them. I especially want to thank my friend Sally who constantly gave me support, encouragement, and advice. Without her help, I would not be able to walk this far.

I would like to thank my professors Robert Barrett and Mike Richardson. Both of them have given me great help and encouragement when I felt frustration and struggled during my research and thesis writing process. Brother Richardson told me that the secret of finishing a thesis is working a little bit every day.

Lastly, I want to thank my family members, especially my husband who has been very understanding and supportive all the time during this program. He did his best to help me so that I can finish my thesis and achieve my master degree.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

As a girl growing up in a mountain village in China, I remember roaming around the golden rice fields, running back and forth with my dog in the green grass valley, and herding goats in the mountain from early morning until the dark of the day. I listened to birds singing and insects crooning. The wild flowers were blooming everywhere. All of my childhood experiences in the mountains helped me develop a love of the beauty of nature.

Like everybody around me, I obeyed my parents and followed the guidance they gave at home. My parents made the decisions and plans for me about what I should study in my future schools and what work I should do in my future career. In school, I respected my teachers and observed to do whatever they taught to their students. The direction and goal of my life was clear because I just needed to follow the steps of the elders, but it was also blurred because I did not really know what I wanted, and I did not have many choices for my education or career.

I believed whatever goals my parents gave to me were the best and were right for me. Of course, all parents love their children, however, do they really know what their children want? Do parents and teachers know what children are really interested in?

I have loved drawing since I was in elementary school. At the end of every semester, I saved the extra papers from my math exercise books and used them to draw figures. When I had time on the weekend, I stayed home and copied the posters of the Chinese ancient prints of landscape and beautiful figures. There was no art class in my elementary school, as most of the teachers were full-time farmers and part-time teachers. None of them had formal training in art.

The Chinese education system is exam oriented, so that the percentage of students entering colleges becomes the standard to assess the quality of the teachers and schools. Art was not one of the required subjects that students needed to pass and get good grades for entering

high school. For this reason, art classes were considered less important than other tested subjects such as math and language courses. Art was only taught once or twice a semester in the first year of my middle school education. I still remember how excited I was when my classmates and I shared color pencils and drew beautiful butterflies in our art class. However, after the first year, we no longer had the opportunity to take art classes.

Going to good high schools is a closer step to getting into good colleges. Students are restricted to applying to limited university subjects based on their choice of science or liberal arts in high school. According to the thinking of most teachers and parents, if students are not going to major in art, it is not necessary to take art classes in high school. Chemistry, English, or Math replaced all of my high school music, PE, and Art classes since the final goal of my education was to get into college. I was jealous, looking at the art major students carrying their drawing boards around campus.

I never thought that there would be an intersection with art in my life path or that art could be a part of my life. In the Chinese education system, students who do not select a specialization for study at a very young age will find it very difficult to enter many other majors or pass the competency exams required to be accepted by a field of study. Usually, students need to take additional classes outside of the school curriculum or study with tutors to help them develop a professional skill. Even though my parents saw that I loved drawing, they were not able to pay for it. Like most people, my parents, considered art to be an unstable career. How could their children find a job in art? How many people could become artists in China? Studying art was a luxury only for the rich people.



### **Studying Art at BYU-Hawaii**

My life changed dramatically after I came to United States. Before I came to the U.S., I never had an opportunity to study art or get any professional art skills training. I could not imagine that someday I could take art classes and major in art in the United States. Students like me who had no professional art skills training would never be allowed to major in art in Chinese colleges. In China, art skills development is considered the same as gymnastics or dance, which are necessary for children to cultivate when they are young in order for them to go into that profession. I was not chosen to develop my artistic skills as a child.

Chinese students who do not select a specialization at a very young age will fail to pass the competency college entrance exams and will not be accepted in an art major. Also, once they have been accepted, students cannot change their major in college. In America, young students are taught a wide variety of subjects in order to later choose the major that they want to pursue. It is common that college students change their major in school.

I came to Brigham Young University-Hawaii and majored in TESOL - Teaching English as a Second Language. One day, on campus, I saw some students painting outside. I immediately stopped in my steps and was attracted by what I saw. All of my memories of how much I love drawing flowed back to me, as I always admired people that did art. Thinking that I am in the United States and everything may be possible, I made my own decision. I told myself that if I could take an art class, I would do art for the rest of my life.

It was hard in the beginning, as I did not know anything about the basics of art such as design principles and art elements. I had to work extra hard to catch up to my classmates. But, I really enjoyed the drawing class, as the assignments my professor gave me were full of choices; I chose the subjects I love to draw. At the end of the semester, I got an A. Looking at my grade, I

knew all of my effort was worthwhile. Yes, I loved art and I wanted to become an artist. It was the first time that I found out what I really liked and who I was.

I changed my major to art. I came from a background without any art skills, but I was able to graduate with a BFA in Painting at BYU-Hawaii. My experiences of studying art in the United States greatly benefited me. I would never have known how much I love art, the joy it brought to my life, and that I could be an artist if I had never studied in the United States. My art professors gave every student freedom in choosing their art creation. They were guides and friends to me. The autonomy I obtained in school motivated my passion and confidence in art. Because of this experience, I came to believe that American art education has many beneficial characteristics.

### **Chinese Art Teachers in the United States**

American and Chinese education is very different. During my graduate studies, I discovered some Chinese art teachers who successfully teach in the United States. For example, my BYU-Hawaii art professor's mentor is Chinese. The BYU illustration department invited several Chinese artists to give demonstrations to students. As I have pondered their instruction and considered their background, I wondered how the differing backgrounds of these teachers have helped or hindered my learning and how these Chinese art teachers can be accepted and successful in the United States. It aroused my curiosity to find out the strengths and limitations that exist in both systems of art education.

How can art students benefit from both American and Chinese styles of art education? As a person who grew up in China and was trained by the American education system in art, I am interested in exploring the differences, similarities, strengths, and weaknesses of both systems of art education. My own experience with both educational systems gives me unique perspective

with which to investigate questions about the content and pedagogy of these very different approaches. In order to find these answers and utilize the benefits of these styles to help art students both now and in the future, I researched aspects of both Chinese and American art education through interviews with Chinese American artists. An important component of my thesis research is my personal experience as an art student as I moved from a Chinese to an American system.

### **Why This Research is Important**

Much of my research revolves around the inter-cultural differences between Chinese and American art education. Of particular interest to me is how Chinese art educators might bridge the learning of inter-cultural art skills. From their experiences with both Chinese and American art education, what do they see as the advantages in each of these teaching approaches? How can artists and teachers successfully balance the differences between Chinese and American art education, both personally and culturally? What are the challenges of Chinese artists, living in the United States, regarding their art and teaching, and how have they adjusted to these challenges? How do Chinese artists/teachers approach teaching art? How do these artists/teachers differ from their American counterparts in their pedagogy?

These questions are important because this research will contribute to both American and Chinese educators as a reference for studying about cultural difference in art education. Also, it will help Chinese art teachers and students adapt to the school environments of the United States and be able to apply their own culture and identity in this new environment. Additionally, it will help me understand more about my identity as an art teacher, my own personal art making, and my future teaching career.

**The Research Project**

For my research, I surveyed nine Chinese-American art educators. The methodology for this study is a qualitative case study based on survey research, using a combination of written survey interviews and personal interviews. In addition to the interviews of Chinese artist/teachers living in America, I collected background data and theories from both American and Chinese publications using national and governmental organizations, academic journals, books, and information gathered from surveys and interviews of Chinese art educators who have education experiences both in the United States and China.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The Chinese and American art educational systems are different as are their cultures, histories, politics and economic situations. These differences are based on contrasting artistic traditions, histories, and philosophies about creating art. With globalization, communication and research on educational techniques, art education is becoming more international as knowledge about other approaches become more easily available. Academic exchanges facilitate mutual understanding in education between East and West. Through communication and conversations between American and Chinese scholars, there are some research studies that explore the best way of enhancing their own education systems and benefiting each other. Many Chinese students study abroad, and a number of Chinese artists and art teachers are successful in teaching art in the United States.

This chapter is an exploration of the scholarly literature in the following areas: culture and cultural backgrounds, Chinese art curriculum, college entrance examinations, student and teacher relationships, teaching methods, and parental engagement.

### **Culture and Cultural Backgrounds**

Culture includes the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties, especially by education (definition from Merriam-Webster). Culture is the soil and foundation of society. Culture greatly influences how people see, understand, and communicate with each other in the world (Mora-Bourgeois, 2000, p.1). Li (2012) states, “individual culture’s way of learning (and teaching) as formed in their long histories are unlikely to disappear even for cultures that have incorporated other culture’s bodies of knowledge and pedagogy. Instead, these culturally formed ways of learning may continue to shape how learners actually engage in their learning” (p.107).

How students learn in the Western or in the Confucian Heritage Cultures of China is very different. As a consequence, “there is a danger of stereotype, prejudice, and barriers to learning” (Radcliffe-Thomas, 2005, p.41). Cultures of learning exist in all educational institutions, encompassing views of the role of schools within society, expectations of classroom structure and behavior (Gudykunst, 1998).

Confucian culture deeply affects the Chinese way of education. Scholar Jin Li (2012) points out that Confucian values affect Chinese educational purposes, which regard learning as something that should be promoted by families, communities, schools, and society at large. However, these same values are not as strongly expressed in American culture (p.91). Lambert (2015) points out how different cultural contexts affect education systems:

In the American cultural context, the educational system is expected to prepare young people for, and offer them opportunities to maximally benefit from, the social role of the child. Children are encouraged to go out and play, use their imaginations to construct meaning for themselves. Within the Chinese culture context, the educational system is expected to prepare young people for, and offer them opportunities to maximally benefit from, the social role of *student*. Students are encouraged to prove themselves worthy of a meaningful role in society by using their self-regulation to demonstrate compliance. The overarching goal of the American education system is to prepare children for the adult social role of *citizen in a democratic society*. In contrast, the overarching goal of the Chinese education system is to prepare student for the adult social role of *compliant and contributing member of group*. (p.96)

Culture also affects art aesthetic theory and philosophy. Ming Dong Gu (2016) explains how Confucius influenced Chinese aesthetic theory, while Plato influenced Western aesthetic

theory. Each of these philosophies has different values. “While classical Western aesthetic theory emphasizes the unity of beauty and truth, classical Chinese aesthetic theory focuses on the unity of beauty and goodness” (p. 95). Ancient Chinese schools concentrated on cultivating beauty and using art to elevate human sensibility (Chang, 2005, p.228).

### **Chinese Art Curriculum**

Chang (2005) describes four historical art curriculum reforms in China. During the 1960’s, the Chinese art education system was strongly influenced by the Soviet model of art education, which concentrated on Western realism, and curriculum content included sketching and art application. Between 1980 and 1985, Western culture flowed into China which affected the guidelines and teaching material in multicultural education. The Bureau of Chinese Education trained the teachers to meet these changes within an information society. In 1999, the curriculum focused on education for “all-round development.” In 2005, the content of the fine art course curriculum covered design, art appreciation, and exploration (p.233).

In China, curriculum is centralized and standardized. The central Chinese government provides schools with policy directives, curriculum guidelines, and materials. Most Chinese students receive the same textbooks and classes (Prieto, 2015, p.23). The structure of arts education, policy, and materials emanate from Beijing (Lowry & Wolf, 1988, p. 89).

Leong notes that curriculum reform has recently had some points of decentralization, “Arts teachers were allowed considerable flexibility ... to exercise their own professional skills in choosing curriculum content, although there [were] some constraints imposed by the examination system in the upper secondary school” (2010. p.76). Chuang points out that a teacher can choose one set of textbooks as the standard art material for their students. There are five sets of textbooks for senior schools, and six for both primary and junior schools (2005,

p.234). However, flexibility is limited within the constraints of these texts. Feng (2006) notes that curriculum standards are still not flexible enough. Presently the allowance for change is held to about 16% (Feng, p. 137).

### **College Entrance Examination**

The Chinese college entrance examination is a crucial test for Chinese students. The system of college entrance examination is regarded as the guide to the teaching and curriculum reform of schools (Ting Hua, 2017). Art students need to take the college entrance examination. In addition, they need to pass art practical exams. Both tests are a part of a competitive and selective process for college and university admission. According to the report by Daxue Consulting in Hong Kong,

The China Academy of Art receives around 80,000 applicants per year and enrolls just 1,600. The Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing averages over 40,000 applicants per year, 13,000 of whom are invited to sit for their exam; the school only accepts between 700 and 800 national students each year. (Forman, 2018)

Every year, thousands of Chinese art students travel to the nearest major city for the practical exams. It is the first part of the application process to get into university art programs. Sarah Forman describes the art practical exam as follows:

In a given exam, for instance, all students will draw the same still life, from a photograph or a setup that sits in the front of the room. In another, students may be given the description of a rare animal and are then asked to draw it, based on the information they received. While some prompts ask that you showcase your technical skills, others are looking for creative expression and individuality—but a lot of the actual scoring depends on the judge. (2018)



The tests do not cater to any individual styles, nor do they necessarily work in favor of students who want to pursue unconventional approaches to art making (Forma, 2018).

After students pass the art practical exam, they take the college entrance exam. Many students experience a great deal of pressure taking this test. Students study for years in order to prepare for the two-day college entrance exam, which decides their future. The exams evaluate both their aptitude and achievement. If students fail the test, it is a shame not only for them, but also for their family (Lambert, 2015, p. 90). Ting Hua (2017) indicates that the system of college entrance examination plays as an irreplaceable role in students' educational trajectories. Lambert (2015) argues that the testing system is used to judge not only the college placement of students but is a measure for job performance of teachers and administrators and the overall quality of schools (p. 94).

R.G. Lambert (2015) discusses differences between Chinese and American college selection exams and how the central government constructs tests that provide information that is trustworthy enough to justify high-stakes decisions. By contrast, in the United States, college admissions, selection of a major or course of study, and employment selection decisions are often based on a holistic synthesis of a variety of factors. Test scores are only one of a range of indicators of the potential success of individuals (p. 97).

### **Student and Teacher Relationships**

Cheng (2012) states that in China, "the relationship between the teacher and students is somewhat hierarchical" as the teacher is the exemplary model for all students and an erudite person endowed with knowledge, which he is supposed to disseminate and impart while clarifying the doubts of the students in Chinese tradition. The teacher is the public figure

burdened with authority in class. To keep this authority, the teacher has to maintain careful and endless examinations of the quiet students (p.10).

By contrast, models of good teaching in Western schools emphasize the teacher as facilitator who encourages students to take ownership of their own creativity. Teachers seek to inculcate independent learning in a non-authoritarian environment, which utilizes workshops, demonstrations, group work, and peer critiques to share best practice and promote supportive feedback (Dillon & Howe 2003, p. 290). Cheng (2012) points out that American students feel comfortable in expressing their opinion and admit when they do not know (p.11). They have autonomy in learning and ideally are motivated, happy, energetic, and excited in anticipation of success and enjoyment (Li, 2012, p.158).

### **Teaching Methods**

Radclyffe-Thomas 2007 states experimentation and innovation are valued in Western schools while technical mastery is more appreciated in China (p. 47). Tang and Biggs (1996) point out that in Chinese art education, repetitive exercises are used to develop skills (p. 159). Ellen Winner (1989) describes the Chinese way or context of art teaching as, “placid, controllable, with unquestioning children expecting to be led step by step. The desire to meet the teacher's expectations so that one can receive a high evaluation or even win an art competition leads to quiet, ordered, teacher-centered classrooms” (p.47).

Scholars Kathryn Lowry and Constance Wolf (1988) describe the differences between American and Chinese art education; “United States arts education aims to educate a well-rounded, knowledge-able individual, whereas the focus of Chinese arts training is on technical proficiency” (p.91). Biggy John (1996) notes that the Chinese have been described as rote learners, and the Chinese way of learning has been condemned by Western teachers.

Scholar Li (2012) explains that Westerners who visit Chinese schools often interpret or misinterpret the Chinese learning process, “Behaviorally, it is nothing more than repeating, reciting, and copying things-that is, acts of committing the material to memory. On the surface, such learning behaviors do not show any breakthrough in thinking and discovery. If the observer does not know that there is still a very long list of learning virtues and steps to follow, they are likely to conclude that Chinese learning is all rote learning” (p.136). Radclyffe-Thomas (2007) pointed out, “Using a Western lens to analyze practices in Chinese art education it is tempting to oversimplify both systems and the superiorization of Western contemporary arts education as a process-led pedagogy, and to view non-Western students’ often superior technical skills in a patronizing way” (p.48). The result raises the following question: What does art education mean from the perspective of Chinese art teachers who have art teaching experience in the United States?

### **Parental Engagement**

Having children perform the best they can in education seems to be the guidepost for Asians regardless of where they live (Li, 2012, p.65). With the one-child policy in China, parents were even more inclined to be involved in their child’s education. With only one child, the parent’s entire attention can be placed on ensuring that that child is successful (Wang, Ma, & Martin, 2015, p.111). Chinese parents are highly involved in their children’s education; they want to give their children the best and expect their children to be successful. Winner states that parents want their only child to excel in all classroom subjects (1989, p.47).

E. A. Ward and L. Q. Kolano point out that parents are involved inside the classrooms in the early years as well as seeking ways to assist in learning outside the classroom (Wang, Ma, Martin, 2015, p.112). By contrast, the Western child’s ‘will’ or volition is purely based on his or

her personal curiosity, interest, and sentiment; the family may have very little to do with what he might pursue for life (Li, 2012, p.164).

### **My Bias**

My research is influenced by my own experiences and biases toward art and education. For example, I appreciate the freedom of learning art in the United States. Also, I have developed the habit that my parents taught me of persistence and hard work. My personal experience and biases may influence how I interpret my research.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I will introduce my process of selecting a suitable methodology and describe the details of the research methodologies and methods I used. I used a qualitative approach for gathering, compiling, and analyzing data in my research. A case study methodology was used, with survey and potential interviews as the method to collect data to explore differences between American and Chinese art education. Doing so makes the research progress manageable and allows the findings of early data analysis to influence the development of subsequent research. I will discuss how and why I selected this specific methodology and how I applied it during the research process.

#### **Qualitative Research Methodologies**

Qualitative methods of inquiry are ways of seeking to understand “a situation or phenomenon in-depth” and situated in a “specific context” (Buffington. & McKay, 2013, p.40). The qualitative approach is frequently identified as suitable in the education field (Given, 2016). Katie Metzler (2014) argues that, “unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods take the researcher’s communication with the field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge instead of deeming it an intervening variable. The subject of the researcher and of those being studied becomes part of the research process” (Flick, p.17).

As an international art student and teacher, I have both art learning and teaching experiences in China and the United States. I encountered various problems in both learning environments and also received benefits through each of the education systems. Robert Stake (1995) points out, “qualitative data require aggregation and sorting in order for meanings to become clear. Qualitative or interpretive data have meanings directly recognized by the observer” (p.60). Qualitative methodology helped me to unpack my culture, background, and

identity in this new learning and teaching environment. Also, it may help other international educators to see the differences between these two education systems. Robert Stake argues that qualitative research is not only a researcher interpreting the field record but also interpreting the deeper meanings of what is happening (2010).

### **Case Study Methodology**

According to Lawrence Stenhouse (1979), “all events or existences may be regarded as unique or as recurrent. All study is the study of cases” (p. 9). Robert Yin (2014) points out that case studies allow researchers to focus on a ‘case’ and maintain a whole and real-world viewpoint (p.4). My case study research was designed to explore and describe the challenges that Chinese artists and teachers face in the United States as well as how artists and teachers of Chinese origin have adjusted to these challenges and how they approach teaching art.

Karin Tollefson-Hall (2013), an art education graduate program director from James Madison University points out that, “the purpose of the case study is to present a detailed description of the case and the researcher’s interpretation of its significance to the field of study” (p.204). Because of my own Chinese heritage and training in both China and the United States, I have personal insights and experience with these topics, which provide both an experiential foundation for my inquiry and subjective insights and perspectives on my topic. In qualitative research, the researcher’s subjective responses, observations, and insights are valued.

Sigrún Kristín Jónasdóttir, Carri Hand, Laura Misener, and Jan Polgar (2008) state that, “Case study methodology offers a creative and flexible way to gain a comprehensive understanding of human complexities in context, using various means to collect data” (p.393). The case study allows the researcher to get first-hand knowledge about the education comparison or inquiry in question. It can help the researchers discover and document particular issues or

challenges. In addition, Michael Crossley and Vulliamy (1984) state that comparative case-studies can be applied to “enhance the potential generalizability of research findings” (p.204).

The case study research result can be given context and meaning by reference to another specific issue within other specific research projects.

### **Pilot Study and Survey Methods**

According to Karin Tollefson-Hall (2013), “A case study centers on research questions. There may be one general question encompassing the idea of the study and the researcher often has a series of sub-questions to help guide the research” (p.205). Therefore, research questions should be “broad enough to allow for investigation” and simultaneously “narrow enough to make the project manageable” (p.205). Jeffrey Broome (2013) argues, “survey research continues to represent one of the most frequently used strategies for getting such real-world answers from living participants” (p.73).

A pilot case study can help the researcher refine the data collection plans (Yin, 2014, p.96). I conducted a pilot study in order to have a better understanding of the challenges faced by Chinese artists, living in the United States, regarding their art and teaching, and how they have adjusted to these challenges. That study helped me design relevant research questions for my final study.

My pilot research was designed to investigate how a small group of Chinese teachers adopted new teaching skills and adjusted them to fit into the new teaching environment. I explored, from their perspective, the difference between Chinese and American education systems, pedagogy, and the roles of teachers and students. For the pilot study, I sent out a survey through email to a select group of Chinese teachers who were involved in teaching Chinese in public schools of the United States.

For my pilot study, I designed a survey titled “Teaching Chinese in The United States Survey.” It includes multiple choice, closed-ended, and open-ended questions. It had some similarities with my research proposal, but it was broader than my final case study. Questions and data from the pilot study are included below.

- “What are the biggest challenges you have teaching in the United States?”

50% of teachers responded that their biggest challenge is class management.

- “Is the experience of teaching in the United States easier or harder than you expected? In what way?”

Most of the teachers considered teaching in the United States as more difficult than teaching in China as there is less time for preparation, more challenging students, and long working hours.

- “What are some strengths of the United States education system?”

The responses included the idea that student-centered learning strategies, engaged learning activities, independent and high-level thinking skills, creativity, and freedom are more common in the United States.

- “What are some strengths of the Chinese education system?”

The responses included the idea that students demonstrate more self-control in the classroom and towards the materials in China. Students also demonstrate persistence and patience, and classroom management is easier because of the respect students show to their teachers. Instruction is better organized and taught in sequences.

By collecting and analyzing data through my pilot study, I got a general idea of the comparison between the Chinese and American education systems. In addition, I found that a survey is easy to develop, quick to carry out, and cost effective. Surveys allow participants to



take as much time as they wanted to finish the survey. They also can respond whenever they want. It is easier for me as I do not have the means to travel to the different places. However, it has the limitation of not getting a full picture of context from the participants.

### **Pilot Study Interview**

Robert Stake (1995) discusses the interview method, which can provide others “multiple views of cases”, therefore, it requires the researcher to “have a strong advance plan” (p.64). Because of the result of the survey, I designed more specific questions on art education comparisons between Chinese and American education systems. Samantha Nolte (2013) notes that the interview is a direct way to collect the data in a study (p.56). According to Yin (2014), “pilot reports might even contain subsections on these topics” (p.98). I conducted two face-to-face interviews with Chinese art professors who teach at the Academy of Art University. I used a semi-structured question interview protocol and recorded the conversation. These are my interview questions:

- What are the teaching challenges you have experienced in the United States?
- What are the differences between Chinese and American students?
- What are the differences between Chinese and American art education?
- What are the differences in Chinese and American art education teaching strategies?

Samantha Nolte explains the advantages of semi-structured interview including, “its combination of flexibility and consistency” (p.56). Both of the Chinese art teachers that I interviewed shared their teaching experiences and opinions, and comparisons between American and Chinese art education. The face-to-face interview allowed me to collect more art-specific information.

I identified the similarity of challenges Chinese art teachers have when they teach in the United States. I also noticed that interviewees may bring more information than I expected. However, the limited time and finding the appropriate participants to interview can be a challenge. Even though I found some similar challenges between the two Chinese art teachers, I could not identify a pattern from the limited evidence. I decided to conduct survey interviews with more participants.

### **Research Question**

According to Karin Tollefson-Hall (2013), there is no limitation about the number of subjects in a case study: “a case can be small as a child, one family, or group of students--or large as one classroom or one school” (p.204). I used nine subjects so that I would have enough participants to obtain sufficient information that was both detailed and included different perspectives. Because I was seeking in-depth responses, I limited the number of participants to nine.

The subject population consisted of adults, male and female, over the age of 21, who are Chinese art teachers in public and private K-12 schools, colleges, and universities (both public and private) who are currently working in the United States. These subjects were Chinese artists who also teach in one of the educational environments listed above, and art teachers/artists who have taught and were educated in both China and the United States.

According to Yin, “defining your research questions is probably the most important step to be taken in a research study” (2014, p.11). Both the survey and interviews during the pilot study helped me collect first-hand documentation and develop my final question design. In all of the research, discussion of research questions and ideas with my classmates and professors helped me to define and refine my interests into formal research questions. David Burton (2013)

talked about making the survey question design, “simple, clear, objective, and short” (p.76). My survey consists of six open-ended main questions and one sub-question.

1. What are the differences you see between Chinese and American art students?
2. What are the differences you see between Chinese and American art education?
3. What Chinese teaching methods have you kept when you are teaching in the United States?
4. What American teaching methods have you adopted when you are teaching in the United States?
5. What challenges do you have while you are teaching in the United States?
6. How have you adjusted to these challenges?
6. Are you willing to do a follow up interview?

### **Data Collection**

According David Burton (2013), “Surveys conducted through the Internet may be appealing to researchers, especially as more online survey providers are including built-in database programs that can store responses in ways that assist in the early stages of data analyses” (p.77). Karin Tollefson-Hall (2013), points out, “case study researchers may choose to include surveys or focus groups conducted with the participants” (p.205). Essentially, I sent a question survey to the subjects by email. In addition, I interviewed participants by phone conversation, in person, or via an online interview program such as Skype. I obtained permission from interviewees in order to audio record the conversation.

### **Interview and Adjustment**

After I sent out my survey, I examined the responses I received and adjusted my research methods as necessary. Because of the limited number of potential survey participants and the

possibility that they may provide short responses, I decided to have an interview instead of survey when it was necessary. Also, after I interviewed a Chinese artist, I found it would be easier and more comfortable if we spoke in Chinese. All of these experiences have helped me improve the quality of my research. Additionally, I kept a personal journal of my progress in conducting this research.

### **Data Analysis**

I looked at all of the comments from surveys and interviews and organized them according to recurring themes. I also organized participants' responses by the grade level they taught. I color coded each theme as they appeared. The themes I found included concerns about finding enough Chinese-American educators, approaches to creativity, cultural diversity differences, product as opposed to process, teacher-centered or student-centered classrooms, teachers' use of a demonstration, and personal expression as opposed to a skill-based approach.

### Chapter 4: Thesis Data and Analysis

In this chapter, I am going to analyze the responses of the surveys from Chinese art teachers in the United States. Then, I will present the five themes that I found through these participants' responses. Note that five of the responses are collected from written data survey feedback, and four of the responses are collected from survey interviews. Participants' comments are directly quoted with my notations added in brackets.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Survey or Interview</b>	<b>Teaching Level</b>
Teacher #1: Lily	F	Survey response	Elementary
Teacher #2: Susan	F	Survey response	K-12
Teacher #3: Megan	F	Survey response	Elementary
Teacher #4: Logan	M	Survey response	Secondary
Teacher #5: Yoyo	F	Interview and response in Chinese and translated by author*	Elementary
Teacher #6: Tom	M	Survey response	College Level & community workshops
Teacher# 7: John	M	Interview and response in English	College Level
Teacher #8: Jack	M	Survey response	College Level
Teacher# 9: Michel	F	Interview and response in English	K-12 & College Level

### Part I: Collated Responses to Questions

Data was collected from the responses of nine Chinese art teachers who are teaching in the United States. Five of these art teachers are K-12 art teachers, and four of them are college-level art professors. Both genders are represented. In the following tables, I have listed responses from the different participants. These lists display the diversity of different responses and do not reflect the frequency of any particular response.

#### 1. What are the differences you see between Chinese and American art students?

Chinese Art Students	American Art Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Follow teaching instructions closely</li> <li>· Afraid to make mistakes</li> <li>· Lack of confidence</li> <li>· Limited creativity level</li> <li>· Hold back expression</li> <li>· Strong foundation skill</li> <li>· Self-discipline</li> <li>· Complete task without interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Communicate with teachers</li> <li>· Try different things</li> <li>· Self-centered</li> <li>· More Creative</li> <li>· Freely express themselves</li> <li>· More imaginative</li> <li>· Emotional</li> <li>· Have a need “to be heard”</li> </ul>

## 2. What are the differences you see between Chinese and American art education?

<b>Chinese Art Education</b>	<b>American Art Education</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Elite education</li> <li>· Unified curriculum</li> <li>· Teachers have limited way to expand from pre-determined curriculum</li> <li>· Fundamental skill training</li> <li>· Follow teacher with step by step</li> <li>· Experimenting with different medias and technics</li> <li>· Visual result is important</li> <li>· Military /authoritarian education style</li> <li>· Teacher-centered</li> <li>· Art serves politics</li> <li>· Everybody does the same thing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Care about every child's success</li> <li>· Flexible curriculum</li> <li>· Teachers have more freedom with flexible curriculum</li> <li>· Teaching for creativity</li> <li>· Art is research and investigation</li> <li>· Encourages experimentation and imagination</li> <li>· Final result is less important</li> <li>· Fun and communication based</li> <li>· Child-centered</li> <li>· Open / freedom of expressing feelings</li> <li>· Personal connecting/ experience/ idea</li> </ul>

## 3. What Chinese teaching methods have you kept when you are teaching in the United States?

- Step-by-step demo
- Chinese ink painting
- Punishment and rewards
- Expecting students to have the highest quality of work

- Local culture connection
- Daoist philosophy: open or expansive thinking

**4. What American teaching methods have you adopted when you are teaching in the United States?**

- Letting students ask questions and having discussions with students
- Giving students freedom in making choices
- Creating story based projects
- Emphasizing creativity
- Encouraging students to be self-motivated and self-guided
- Connecting art with different activities

**5. What challenges do you have while you are teaching in the United States?**

- Class management skills
- Motivating students to learn and helping students at different art levels
- Finding projects that match students' personal interests as well as teach them craftsmanship
- Limited time to prepare and teach art to all the students in a school.
- Teaching large numbers of students, as many as 500 students across multiple classes
- Language and culture barriers
- Combining art learning with students' personal experience

**6. How have you adjusted to these challenges?**

- By getting support from school teachers and administration for developing class management skills
- Spending more time in developing and improving my English



- Being bold and willing to learn and acknowledge my short comings
- Communicating with students to make sure they understand instructions
- Thinking positively and believing that international educators can bring new elements into American culture

## **Part II: Themes**

From the survey and interviews of nine art teachers in the United States, several themes emerged. They include: heterogeneous vs. homogeneous class demographics; student-centered vs. teacher-centered; standard curriculum vs. flexible curriculum; demonstration vs. no demonstration; developing creativity vs. skills; expression/ investigation/ research process vs. accuracy or realistic results. I will address each of these themes and provide evidence in corresponding subsections.

**Heterogeneous vs Homogeneous Class Demographics.** Some participants commented that Chinese art education and students are homogeneous or unified, while American art education and students are heterogeneous; very diverse and varied in culture, ethnicity, and religious background. Teacher #5 pointed out that it is great to have more culture from different parts of the world as well as it being a greater challenge for teachers. The minority ethnic (African American) and religious concerns in the cross-cultural teaching context are hard issues to address. For example, Teacher #5 talked about the importance of understanding cultural diversity and paying attention to different religions in her art teaching content in America. She said:

One of the biggest differences between Chinese and American art education is the diversity of the race and culture in American Schools. Teachers are more careful and sensitive to the art content they teach. Some parents may complain about religion issues

in art lessons. For example, teachers should not only talk about Christmas before a holiday project, as some of students may not celebrate Christmas in their religions. They must also talk about other religious and non-religious celebrations.

Teacher #4 pointed out that art teachers need to consider race as they teach content such as when they introduce artists to their students, “they cannot only show white artists; they need to introduce black artists as well. If not, it may be considered as race discrimination”.

Teacher #9 compared one single culture in Taiwan to the multicultural environment in the United States:

Back in Taiwan, we do not have much diversity of background. When I teach [in the United States], I purposely would encourage students to look at other cultures differently, and discuss what they think about race, and try to have us authentically think about cultural diversity and multi-cultural situations. And the way we talk about culture and the way we teach about culture has become important to me.

Participants’ responses reflect the important role that diversity of culture plays in education in the United States. This has a strong effect on the teaching methods and content used in art classes.

**Student-Centered vs Teacher-Centered Teaching.** In talking about the approach of teacher’s method of instruction, three participants acknowledged the divergent methods of Chinese and American art education. Teacher #8 said, “Art education in China is teacher-centered and art education in the United States is student-centered and often focuses on the personality of students.”

Teacher #9 pointed out one of the most distinguishing differences between Chinese and American art education is “teaching for children-centered or teacher-centered.” She stated

“Through my years of art education in the United States, I am departing more from teacher-centered towards more child-centered way of teaching.”

Teacher #7 compared Chinese education to military training and pointed out that “Chinese teachers hold lots of power.” Therefore, the teacher is an authority which no student dares to doubt or question. In contrast, “United States [teachers and students] are more equal”. John said that he wanted to be a teacher that could be more tolerant in teaching,

I think after year and years we experienced Confucius training and military training. So, we think that whatever the teacher says and whatever the teacher is doing is always absolutely correct. But in the United States, when I came here, I found the teacher are quite relaxed. They treat you not necessarily as absolutely equal, but at least you have sense of peace in the classroom environment. I adopted that for sure...I think the teacher functions as a parent and servant.

Three of the responses indicated that the student-centered approach is an important feature in the United States. It has been recognized and adopted by Chinese art teachers who have the desire to learn and apply this approach in their teaching in the United States.

**Flexible Curriculum vs Standardized Curriculum.** Approaches to curriculum also differ. Teacher #5 said, “In China, teachers have unified teaching materials. In the United States, there are no unified teaching materials...There are no requirements for what teachers are supposed to teach in each unit.” Teacher #5 pointed out that flexible curriculum has a mixed result; teachers can have more freedom to design their own lesson plan; however, it causes other problems such as it can be more difficult to supervise and evaluate according to the different standard in each school district. As a result, Teacher #5 said that some art teachers are unqualified and the art class could be “very boring and dogmatic.”

Teacher #9 suggested that teachers in the United States have a lot more freedom to incorporate student interests into some of the learning experiences, “the curriculum is changeable and flexible, and depend on student’s capability.... In China, even though they are now going toward educational reform, the teachers have limited space or ways to expand from pre-determined curriculum.” As was described in Chapter 2, teachers have limitations in choosing textbooks for their students.

**Demonstration vs No Demonstration.** Three of the participants talked about teaching methods in both China and the United States. Chinese art teachers tend to give demonstrations of techniques and methods. In contrast, their Chinese-American counterparts give little or no demonstration during the art teaching process. For example, Teacher #5 commented, “I usually do not give students demonstrations. Instead, I give them a prototype and ask them to think aloud.”

Additionally, teacher #9 pointed out that Chinese students are “waiting for the teacher’s order” or “teacher’s demonstration”. However, she learned not to demonstrate to her students in the United States while she teaches art and explained the reason why she does not give a demonstration:

More and more, I lean toward not demonstrating. I really do not give a demonstration, especially for younger kids. The reason for that is I know that many times, if I model, then the kids, no matter what culture they are from, automatically think that’s the correct answer to follow. And therefore, it limits many possibilities that I may not think of...I do not model, but I encourage them to find and seek relevant references.

The approach of K-12 teachers sometimes varies greatly from post-secondary teachers. Teacher #6, who teaches in college, talked about the Chinese way of teaching art, “I provide

details step by step of a painting demo with student practices in between to measure how closely students are following the lesson. I want them to learn the basic skills and techniques.”

**Developing Creativity vs Skills.** The differing focus on creativity versus skill is evident between the two art education systems in my interviews. Unsurprisingly, eight participants acknowledged that American art education is encouraging students to develop their creative ability while Chinese art education focuses on helping student develop different art skills. For example, teacher #6 said, “Chinese students are more careful in observing and serious about learning the techniques...they follow my instruction closely. In contrast, American students are more into creating.” Teacher #2 said, “I found that Chinese students often thought that there was only one way to do good art. On the other hand, American students liked to try different things.”

Teacher #7 shared his own college art learning experience in China. He pointed out that it may be easy for students if the teacher provides a clear direction, but that it may also cause the students to miss the opportunity to figure out what they really want in art creation. He said:

As far as my experience, I was in Beijing Art Institution for four years and was going to central academy of China, but I did not go because I did not like the art system of China... Some people like it. Think about this; it is easier for people to walk once they have a support. It is similar for artists and art students. If you give them a clear goal that defines this is right and this is wrong. It’s easier, but at the same time, the support could be, or become a prison that did not allow you to be able to be seeking exactly what you are seeking...

Teacher #7 argued that art should be open to different possibility and more personally related. Therefore, he decided to create a flexible environment for his students so that they can think outside of the box,

Your excitement should be about the uniqueness of your own artistic passion and your own personality, not about how you are going to fit into a particular job or particular aesthetics. But in China, for a long time, art was influenced by the social realism from Russia...I feel this became a prison for all of the creativity...I want to create a safe environment for my students, whether in China or United States.

Teacher #3 said, “when I was learning art in Taiwan, the students were mainly focusing on copying the teacher’s work. They focus on the technique and accuracies. The students in America are more about expressing their creativities under certain guidance.”

Some participants discussed that, although Chinese creativity in art is not obvious, students do show more creativity in some after school classes or trainings. Teacher #9, shared her experiences of teaching and observing K-12 Chinese students in both America and China: “Chinese students’ creativity is not obvious compared to American students. However, when they are in a private setting, or after school program, the students appear to have a stronger creativity level.”

Participants’ responses indicate that Chinese art education generally emphasizes teaching for skill and American art education emphasizes teaching for creativity. Teacher #9 talked about the “the challenge the teacher gives to students and the lesson plan that the teachers created play a big role in students’ creativity.” She also pointed out that the reason that Chinese art education is skill based is because, “The Chinese student still has to take the college entrance exams, and it is great to receive the scores that students get. Therefore, the skill driven environment is understandable.”

**Expression/Investigation/Research Process vs Product/Result Accuracy.** Some participants stated that the final visual result is vital in Chinese art education. Contrast this with

American art education, which focuses more on art investigation and the research process instead of the final product. For example, teacher #5 said, “When Chinese students draw, they care more about the visual result, while for American students it is more about the illustration and expression. It is much more important to them to experience the research process and express themselves.” Teacher #4 expressed that American art education is “fun-based”, which encourages students to explore the process while Chinese teachers are motivated by having students do well on exams and are more product focused. Therefore, there is more need to demonstrate skills. He said: “American art education encourages students to experiment and use their imagination. How the artwork turns out is not a priority. Chinese art education leans toward technique and the appearance of the art is the main focus.”

Teacher #2 noted, “I found Chinese students often thought that there is only one way to do good art. On the other hand, American students liked to try different things.” Teacher #7 talked about art teachers telling students the “correct way to do [art]” and “incorrect way to do [art]”. He said: “Art teaching in China is about giving students the true answer for everything. The American art classroom is like a ‘laboratory’, in which everyone is engaging with research and engaging with finding new possibilities.”

Teacher #9 indicated that teaching art should be like a little research project to the kids. She explained that:

Teaching art in my way become a mini investigation on certain topics... art is expression of a meaningful idea. If students get a meaningful idea, they have become a researcher, and need to understand the critical thinking process, and how to reduce and combine the idea tighter, and that is probably really different from traditional Chinese ways of teaching.

In summary, participant comments showed Chinese art education is more focused on the final result while American art education leans toward working process, which reflects the two different learning designs in each of the art education systems.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The present study is an investigation of Chinese art teachers who have teaching experiences in the United States. They provided their opinions on the differences between American and Chinese art education from their cross-culture perspectives. As someone who was raised in China, then came to the United States for college and teaching, I realize my personal experience and bias may inform my research. As such, this may influence or interfere with my interpretation of the data. On the other hand, my experiences also give me valuable insights into the experiences of the participants in the study. My investigation used surveys and interviews to ask specific questions about the differences between Chinese and American approaches to art education. Even though this is a small sample, the responses do reveal important themes about how these two different cultures approach education in the arts. This is not a study that actually observes teaching and learning across these two cultures. Instead, it is a survey of how these differences are perceived and described by Chinese American art teachers.

### **Chinese Art Education Does Not Change**

I found five themes that appeared through the research process that sought identifying differences between Chinese and American art education. Chinese art education is almost entirely based on a pre-determined curriculum. It is also teacher-centered and skill-based. In contrast, American art education is more often based on a flexible curriculum. It is more child-centered and exploratory-based. This data matches other studies of cross-culture art education such as Winner's 1989 study. That study found that Chinese teach for skill proficiency while American art teachers teach for creativity and imagination. It also found that Chinese art teaching is more teacher-centered in class as Chinese culture usually teaches young children "who is in control" (Winner, 1989 p. 44). Kathryn Lowry and Constance Wolf (1989) pointed

out two characteristics of Chinese art education: first, “the structure of arts education is centralized.” Second, “there is a strong agenda of moral, spiritual, and political goals for art education in China” (p. 89). My study shows many of the same themes as these earlier studies.

### **Elements that Affect Chinese Students’ Creativity**

An interesting point that came from my research data was that Chinese art students’ creativity may be hampered because of their cultural environment. Teacher #7 explained four elements that influence Chinese students’ creativity: political, historical art education background, culture, and teaching style. For instance, he pointed out that the Chinese art education system is too serious. He compares Chinese art education to Confucius training and military training: “I think art education is influenced by years and years of Confucius training and military training. So, we think that whatever the teacher says and whatever the teacher is doing is always correctly absolute.” He argued that Chinese art education uses a skill-driven style because China was strongly influenced by the social realism style from Russia:

But in China, for a long time, they were influenced by the social realism from Russia. I mean it definitely helps a lot for the Chinese art history, but at the same time, I feel this became a prison for all of the creativity.

Traditional Chinese painting is very creative. Chinese history and culture has a large influence on Chinese thinking about fine art. Many Chinese consider fine art as a way that “reflects the deepest spiritual meanings and is informed by philosophical ideas” (Chang, 2005, p.228). According to Chang, “Human emotion is refined through the study of poetry and art, therefore, ancient Chinese schools concentrated on cultivating beauty and using art to elevate human sensibility” (p.228). Chinese traditional fine art is painted flat, with no perspective, and is expressive.

Chinese early childhood art education emerged in 1902. Art education includes both Chinese traditional painting and Western painting, for which Japan was an example to China. The primary educational method was copying references (Pan, 2002, p.19). One of most important art educators was Xu Beihong, who studied realism in France. After Xu came back to China, he advocated French realism in Chinese art education. Xu had a great influence on Chinese contemporary art education development and history (Pan, 2002, p.53).

Teacher #7 argued that creativity was also influenced by the political system in China and because of the censorship from the Chinese government. He states that “even Impressionism was censored for quite a long time.” The content control from the Chinese government can become a barrier for Chinese art creation. It affects the students’ creativity in art education in China because students are only allowed to explore the approved art style.

Teacher #9 talked about how Chinese students’ creative ability was affected by college entrance exams. Chinese students still have to get through the college entrance exam, which is skill based, and it is very important for them to obtain a good grade. She said, “Therefore, the skill driven environment is understandable versus in America, I think lots of art teachers, as well as lots of educators, believe the art is one of many types of languages that help kids to express themselves.”

Creativity for students requires a comfortable and safe environment in which students can try different things and are not afraid of failing. However, college entrance exams can be a big barrier to overcome. Teacher #9 pointed out that the after-school curriculum did help children to develop better creativity skills. She said, “Chinese students’ creativity level appear stronger when they participate in a private setting or after school program.” Even though China has

advocated various education reforms, the college exam is one of the primary obstacles that stops reform.

### ***Personal Is a Very Important Word in the United States***

When I asked participants about the differences between Chinese and American art education, the word “personal” was repeated many times. There are: personal ideas, personal experiences, personal connection, personal meaning, personal interests, personal emotions, personal expression, and personal passions. Teacher #5 talked about American art education, “American art education cares about every child’s success, and every student has a unique plan for them.” She also talked about American students who “have a strong sense of themselves”, and are “self-centered.” Li (2012) argues one of the main purposes of study in the United States is to “reach personal goals.” In contrast, the purpose of Chinese education is to “contribute to society” (p.85). This finding indicates that the value in American art education is about the individual’s success and happiness. Chinese art instruction rarely focuses on the personal but instead focuses more on society.

### **Challenges and Overcoming the Challenges**

Teachers have different challenges while teaching in the United States. Teacher #5 and Teacher #1 commented that they were challenged by class management. China and America have different student demographics. Students in China are more self-disciplined in class. Therefore, most of the teachers now teaching in the United States felt that class management is a big challenge for them. Teacher #5 pointed out that she received much support from her mentor teachers, colleagues, and administration. She also expressed that there are different roles for Chinese and American administrators. In U.S. schools, a principal usually walks around each of the classrooms, and they know every students’ name. The principal has a good relationship with

students. But in China, “the principal and students are two parallel lines, which never cross each other.” She found that the students in the United States have more empathy and a greater sense of justice. Students are brave to speak out when they see students who are continually disruptive in class.

Teacher #3 said, it was hard to have 30-minute classes with a short prep-time in the United States. Teacher #2 talked about the challenges of, “teaching 500 students at once across multiple classes, so it was difficult to remember their names.” She tries to have lunch with her students so that she can know more about them.

Chinese and American art education were very different, especially in the elementary school. Teachers teach more students and have short prep-time compared to teaching in China. Another finding is that the challenges between K-12 teachers and professors are dissimilar. Teacher #6, who is teaching in a college and workshop, talked about his challenges in teaching both university students and workshops, “When I taught in UC Berkeley, the challenge was that some students were not motivated to learn. In my other workshops, the challenge is that in the same class students are in different levels, from beginners to advance.” All of the responses reflected that the teachers who teach younger students need more class management skills. The college teachers have the challenge of helping their students develop good habits and improve specific art skills.

One of the common challenges for most of the participants was language and culture barriers. Teacher #5 said, she was not confident in her English and did not fully understand when her elementary students talked about specific characters from a movie or story. Teacher #9 said that she refused many working opportunities because she was not confident in her English.

When I checked with them about their solutions, Teacher #7 said that he asked his students to correct his English and gave them extra points. He noticed it is a good way to help his students to know he is approachable:

I can make fun of myself a little bit. Therefore, they do not feel nervous in front of me. Or sometimes giving them extra points if they correct my English, I think this creates a much stronger [connection], because they know you are approachable.

Teacher #9 shared her experience of walking away from many initial opportunities for teaching. Her comments about how she works to overcome language barriers encouraged me. This was good advice for myself as well as other internationals in the United States who have similar concerns about their language weakness,

For us, we probably work double time or triple time. Sometimes, it takes a toll from our personal life. And it gives us a lot of pressure for us as to what kind of bar we set for ourselves here. Why do we need to set up the bar for ourselves? Yes, the truth is that I do have a language barrier. And I am not shy to tell all my students at the beginning of the semester that I may have a language barrier. And I also carry some culture bias. But what I can tell you is that we are all learners here. And we can learn from each other, and then we can all grow together. Usually I tell everyone about it.

As internationals who teach in the United States, most of the teachers work extra hard and put in more effort to achieve the same level as local people. These people humble themselves to learn continually. They have to be brave to overcome challenges around them and find the self-confidence to contribute to the new environment.

### **Culture Shapes and Reshapes**

People come to a new environment and adopt the new culture so that they can adjust themselves to the new environment. The new culture changes them and shapes them into a new identity. Teacher #7 compared himself to a hamburger, “I do not think I am more Chinese or American, I am in between I guess, Hamburger.” He said that he adopted some American teaching methods and brought Chinese Daoism philosophy into his art teaching. Daoism is a way of invoking the philosophy of “giving teaching”, “open”, and “encouraging students to think outside of the box.” He combined both of the cultures into his teaching style.

Teacher #3 said she taught her students Chinese no perspective ink painting and calligraphy. Teacher #4 talked about how he works on developing a curriculum that includes more choices, “finding a project that would match their personal interests, projects that connect to their emotion as well as teaching them craftsmanship.”

All of the responses suggest that the Chinese artists learn American teaching methods while they also carry their own unique skills, ideas, and thinking into this new environment. They are shaped by the new culture and they contribute their own ethnicity and characters into this new culture.

### **Chinese Art Teachers Are Disconnected from Each Other**

During my conversation with teacher #9, she told me that when she heard that my research method is interviewing and sending surveys to Chinese art teachers in the United States, she was worried about my research and how it could be carried out successfully as it may be difficult to find enough participants to complete because most of the Chinese art teachers are disconnected from each other. Before I started my research, I knew I was the only Chinese art teacher in our state. Teacher #5 had a similar situation. She told me that she is the only Chinese

art teacher in her area, and she does not have any connection with other art teachers in the United States.

There are no connections between the Chinese art teachers. We are very isolated. Most of the participants I found through friends, classmates, or professors. None of the art teachers I contacted know each other. I found several contacts on-line but none of them responded to my survey.

### **Limitations**

In this research, I received responses from nine Chinese art teachers. I have interviewed three of them, and six of them sent me written feedback on the survey. I collected data from these comments and built connections between them. However, I feel that this research still needs more data to provide more accurate information, such as how many years the teachers taught in the United States. I do not have actual observations of classrooms, instead, I am using my surveys and interviews to gather the experiences of my participants as teachers adapting to new cultural norms. Also, I found that when I interviewed the teachers in English, the Chinese teachers did not feel as comfortable. They would have preferred to be interviewed in Chinese.

In the future, I would like to use Chinese to ask them questions so they feel more comfortable and so they may give me more complete and accurate information. Moreover, I collected data from the perspective of Chinese art teachers in the United States. I would like to talk to some American art teachers who have teaching experiences in China. These teachers might offer a different perspective on my research questions.

### **Reflection**

I have had this research idea since the beginning of my master program in art education at BYU. As an international student without any skill in art before getting into college, I greatly



benefited and appreciated having the opportunity to major in art and graduated with my BFA in the United States which would have been impossible for me in China since students need to pass art skill tests before they are accepted into colleges and major in art. I see the advantages of the flexibility and openness in the United States' education system, which allows students to have opportunities to pursue what they really like and be successful in what they choose.

My research idea became stronger when I started to teach art in the United States. Even though I took many art education classes and accomplished my student teaching, I was shocked when I taught art for the first time in a Category 1 middle school in Utah Valley. Most of the students come from low-income families, and seemed to have short attention spans and have little help from their parents. They face a lot of family and life issues. I was surprised to see these kids were struggling in school and life. As there was a big population of Hispanic students, they talked a lot about skin color and race. All of this was very different from what I was expecting from American students and schools.

Like many other Chinese, I believed that the United States had the best education system in the world and students have a very healthy learning experience in the education system. I could not believe that so many students are homeless and starving in the United States. To some of them, school is a safe place to be, and provides free food; therefore, they came to school even though they do not like school as they do not have another choice.

I struggled with class management and looked for a balance between my own cultural background and the new American education environment. In China, most of the students in school are prepared and ready for learning in class. There are limited class management skills required of Chinese teachers. In the United States, teachers need to build a good relationship

with students and have their trust. In class, students need to be entertained to learn instead of being forced to learn. All of this can be a big challenge to a Chinese teacher.

I obtained help and took advice from other teachers and instructional coaches in my school. Since it was so difficult for me to adjust myself to teaching in the United States, I was looking to find out how other Chinese art teachers in the United States adjusted to teaching. Do they have challenges similar to mine? How do they adapt to this new education environment? These questions helped me understand both education systems and myself in the role of art teacher.

I had one major concern about this research. I was not confident in finding enough Chinese art teachers in the United States. I recognized there was only a small number of Chinese art teachers in the United States, and I did not have any connections with them. Therefore, I was worried that I might not be able to find anyone to participate in my survey. Another worry came from my own cultural background. The awareness of hierarchy culture made me hesitant to reach out to potential participants. I am a college student. Compared to some Chinese artists who are successful in their art career, I feel that I was on a lower level in Chinese cultural hierarchy and was not confident that they would accept my request for an interview or complete my survey. Because we are not equal in social position, I was very hesitant in some cases to request an interview.

In this research, the biggest benefit was to myself. Through my interviews and reflections, I understand better both education systems and my identity as a Chinese art educator in the United States. I have the opportunity to build networks with other art teachers in the country. I added some participants as friends in WeChat (Chinese social network) and Instagram.

We share our lesson plans. I discovered an Asian culture social network through NAEA. All of these made me feel that we are not isolated.

I developed more confidence in myself and completed my research and interviews of the Chinese art educators. I overcame the concerns about the power of hierarchy. Most importantly, this research helped me see the diligence these Chinese art teachers have put into their careers so that they can overcome challenges and become successful in this new culture. I hope this research can benefit other international students or educators to better understand the differences between cross-culture education. We can each find our own value, confidence, and contributions to this new environment.

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