

Hidden Voices: How Chinese Immigrant Educators Implement Culturally Inclusive Practices in U.S. Classrooms

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Abstract

In this article, we investigate Chinese immigrant teachers' cross-national education experiences in determining the implementation of culturally inclusive practices in United States classrooms. Based on a critical framework of culturally responsive teaching, findings of our multiple-case study indicated our participants regard teaching in the U.S. as less certain as a vocation and regard Asian teacher educators in the U.S. as critical bridges to teaching language in the U.S. Although all participants had extensive training in second language teaching, they noted gaps in knowledge of American student culture. The participants also indicated that an ideal classroom was a place of cultural harmony where divergent views could be valued and shared. Given that extremely limited published research exists documenting how Chinese immigrant teachers conceptualize and practice culturally responsive teaching, this study is an entry to understanding the experiences of Chinese immigrant educators in the U.S.

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The U.S. educational system is facing a growing diversity of students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Research reviews have evidenced substantial positive outcomes of culturally inclusive practices to promote students' academic outcomes and learning experiences in diverse classrooms (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Larson et al., 2020). A priority for educational research in the U.S. is to recognize intercultural knowledge and acknowledge professional experiences from teachers with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in order to enrich culturally responsive teaching (CRT) for different student populations. While numerous CRT findings and related frameworks have centered on Hispanic and African American populations (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gay, 2018; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011), little has been known about the implementation of CRT practiced by Asian American teachers. A recent report on the U.S. Asian population (Budiman and Ruiz, 2021) projected that by 2055 Asian Americans would become the biggest immigrant group in the country. The Asian American community is incredibly differentiated in terms of cultures and languages. However, the bias of Asian homogeneity has neglected the multiplicity of Asian cultural and sociolinguistic experiences. Asian Americans are often viewed as marginalized groups, perpetual outsiders, or the invisible minority (Li & Nicholson, 2021). The longstanding impact of lacking the understanding of the Asian American experiences is evident in K–12 education policymaking as well as teacher education research as Asian Americans are usually framed as a monolithic group. Additionally, there have been limited culturally responsive resources that target the specific needs of the subpopulations of the Asian American communities (e.g., first-generation Asian immigrants). The misconceptions and overgeneralization of Asian American educational experiences (e.g., Asian American students are

exceptionally high academic achievers and self-sufficient) have largely undermined the imminent needs of educational policy which should ensure that the multiple cultural heritages are sustained and the diversified linguistic and lived experiences of Asian American students are valued.

Over the years, a growing body of scholarship has studied how the internalization of the stereotypes such as model minority impacts Asian Americans' well-being and self-concept (Shih et al., 2019), yet not much has been discussed about how Asian American teachers could optimize their linguistic and cultural resources in classrooms to promote inclusive practices. These teachers' voices have long been hidden in racialized experiences and underrepresented in the predominantly White teaching force in American schooling. It is thus necessary to include more careful examinations of the CRT experiences and beliefs of Asian American teachers in order to demystify the homogeneity of Asian-American groups and dismantle stereotypes.

In our empirical study, we aim to expand the knowledge base of CRT practices through analyzing narratives of Chinese immigrant educators who were educated partially in China and partially in the U.S. Since there is a paucity of research on immigrant teachers' cultural expertise and professional practices in U.S. education (Adair et al., 2012), it is important to include immigrant teachers' funds of knowledge in the development of teaching materials, and this helps educators implement more effective instructional activities for newcomers and students with immigrant experiences (Adair, 2011). Our teacher participants have cross-cultural competence and multiple educational backgrounds attributable to their lived experiences in China and the U.S. Given that their teaching identities are shaped by both Eastern and Western cultures and values, our primary goal is to document how they leverage their unique identities, language expertise, and transnational experiences to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

The study is guided by these four research questions: 1) How do Chinese immigrant teachers who received public education in China navigate CRT pedagogies promoted in U.S. teacher training programs? 2) How do they perceive the concept of CRT? 3) How does their pedagogical thinking facilitate student engagement in cultural topics? and 4) What is their view about the outcomes of practicing CRT?

Theoretical Frameworks for Culturally Inclusive Practices in the Asian American Context

To put culturally responsive concepts into pedagogical practices, Hammond (2015) and other researchers (e.g., Milner, 2017) highlighted the impact of teacher learning and development in teacher education on implementing culturally inclusive teaching to meet students' needs because teachers' cultural knowledge and values significantly shape their practices to promote students' academic and social-emotional learning. In this regard, a focus of our study is how Asian immigrant teachers perceive their teacher training and professional development and how their beliefs about CRT inform their teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Our analysis is grounded in three theoretical aspects pertaining to culturally inclusive practices: 1) CRT, which is defined as "teachers using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performative styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2018, p. 31), 2) culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), which "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20), and 3) culturally relevant education, which fights against the "focus on individualism, privatization, and competition embedded in neoliberal conceptions of education" (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 164).

Culturally responsive educators not only teach academic skills and concepts but also offer the space and time for critical reflection to develop cultural competence across cultures, enabling students to take on discourses of power. CRT should result in preparing students to work together to transform society by naming practices that work against equity and enacting actions that bring about equity. The beliefs and values of the teachers should direct students how to make sense of the inequalities they experience so that social transformation can occur. Our study is designed to inform CRT practices adopted by Chinese immigrant teachers. We also provide implications for future pedagogical approach and teacher development according to the concepts of Asian Critical (AsianCrit) framework proposed by Iftikar and Museus (2018, p. 940–941). The AsianCrit integrates CRT research with the perspectives of Asian American experiences to fill gaps in the analysis and scholarship of CRT within U.S. education. We adapted the seven interrelated tenets of AsianCrit and outlined examples that can be applicable for Asian/Asian American teachers in the U.S. (see Table 1).

Table 1

Adapted AsianCrit Framework for Asian American teachers in the U.S.

Seven Tenets of AsianCrit	Examples Applicable for Asian American Teachers
Asianization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asian American ethnic groups are often shaped by racialized assumptions and stereotypes as “model minorities,” “perpetual foreigners” and “threatening yellow peril.” 	The Asian American narratives and histories have long been missing or misrepresented to reinforce stereotypes (e.g., monolithically hardworking laborers) in school curriculum (Kim & Hsieh, 2021).
Transnational contexts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical analyses of “past and present global economic, political, and social processes” are essential to reflect how racism impacts experiences of Asian Americans. 	There is the lack of attention and key readings for pre-service Asian American teachers to critically reflect on their racial identity and interrogate their positionality and teaching role (Philip, 2012).
(Re)constructive history <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The realities of Asian Americans are typically silenced in U.S. history. 	Asian American teachers often struggle to find models and designs to integrate diverse Asian American experiences and perspectives into social studies lessons (Hsieh, 2021).
Strategic (anti)essentialism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asian Americans can counter the racialization process by confronting White supremacy. 	Suggestions for Asian American teachers include affirming racial/ethnic identities for Asian American students and facilitating cross-cultural discourses through classroom interactions (Chow, 2021).
Intersectionality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racial identities and lived experiences of Asian Americans are intersected with racism and other oppressive systems. 	Asian American female classroom teachers are largely underrepresented in the K–12 teaching profession and more prone to “racialized sexualization” related to their dress and physical appearances (Endo, 2015, p. 615).
Story, theory, and praxis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholarly works that analyze Asian Americans’ “experiential knowledge” can offer authentic perspectives that reflect the realities. 	An AsianCrit study about State U.S. history curriculum standards found that Asian Americans’ stories of civil rights “almost lost in the reviewed standards.” (An, 2016, p. 265)
Commitment to social justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AsianCrit aims to eliminate systemic forms of oppression and exploitation. 	Research is needed to explore how the internalization of model minority might impact Asian American teachers’ perspectives on social justice advocacy for other communities of color (e.g., anti-Blackness) (Iftikar and Museus, 2018).

The exhaustive discussion of the implementation of AsianCrit in American classrooms is beyond the scope of this study; nonetheless, we believe AsianCrit can construct spaces for critical narratives of Asian American educators originated from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to affirm diverse insights on CRT practices and teacher education for future research and policymaking. Our current study draws close attention to the firsthand learning and teaching experiences of Chinese immigrant teachers who work in the U.S. to foster multiple voices and expand the understanding of the diversity of the Asian American communities.

Empirical Literature Review on Immigrant Teachers' CRT Practices

The four research questions of our study build on an empirical literature base that primarily addresses immigrant teachers' U.S. schooling practices. Immigrant teachers from Asian backgrounds may face more complex challenges when they begin their profession in American classrooms because of the potential conflicts arising from the fundamental differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. A qualitative study in California indicated that immigrant teachers from predominantly collectivistic backgrounds are more likely to have conflicts in areas such as classroom management and teacher-student responsibility because of cultural differences, so mentors play a significant role in supporting immigrant teachers' professional development (Mercado and Trumbull, 2018). Another qualitative research discussed the main challenges (e.g., cross-cultural differences in student-teacher expectations and implementation of classroom practices) Arabic and Chinese teachers encountered when they transitioned from teacher-centered classrooms into learner-centered U.S. schools to teach diverse learners (Haley and Ferro, 2011). It is worth noting that immigrant teachers, especially those growing up with educational experiences that differ from American culture, could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how the concept of CRT is perceived by learners who share similar immigrant backgrounds.

In the overview of the published CRT studies regarding Chinese teachers in U.S. schools over the last two decades (e.g., Sheets & Chew, 2002; Wu, 2011; Zhou & Li, 2015), we observed recurring themes that had been examined. Those themes included power dynamics in the classroom, cultural differences in classroom management strategies, and teacher-student expectations. Zhou and Li (2015 p. 26) reported that Chinese language teachers urgently needed to learn management skills and “pedagogical language local teachers employ to manage the class” in the U.S. Wu (2011), in her cross-case analysis of Chinese language teachers in a Chinese school in South Texas, emphasized the importance of sharing power with the students while teaching and integrating Chinese culture into the curriculum.

To enrich the empirical literature on this topic, we explicitly discuss how Chinese immigrant teachers navigated their cross-cultural experiences and how they perceived the relevance of CRT in their practices. Our study highlights the pedagogical methods they adopted to engage students in learning cultural topics across educational settings in the U.S. The findings can allow educators and policymakers to *visualize* the actual implementation of CRT from the perspectives of underrepresented teachers. As mentioned earlier, we hope the discussions in this article can be used for research on Asian American/Asian teachers in mainstream U.S. education in response to the efforts to diversify a teaching force dedicated to culturally inclusive practices.

Research Methodology

This research utilized a multiple case study approach emerging from extended interviews with three Chinese-immigrant teachers who were educated in China, thus experiencing double

“apprenticeship(s) of observation” described by Lortie (2002) as playing a central role in teacher training when teachers reflect on and emulate their own past teachers. The three participants may also have received teacher training or state-run public education in China, a country which emphasizes performance on standardized tests but also might be regarded as a more collectivist culture than the U.S., a country rooted in competition and individualism. A multiple case study design was selected so that three case studies could illustrate how transnationally trained teachers view CRT (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2009, p. 39) observes “the logic of replication” so that one person alone does not need to speak for an entire group and yet three individual voices can be heard. Common themes across the cases were developed based on interviews conducted.

Participants

All three participants are well-known by one or both authors from friendly social and vocational interactions, so trust was established in ongoing relationships with the three immigrant educators. We define immigrant educators as those who are foreign-born (outside the U.S.), first-generation immigrants whose first language is not English. Participant 1 or “Jiang” (a pseudonym) teaches three levels of Chinese at a public middle school in an affluent city in the Pacific Northwest. She received teacher certification in both China and the U.S. About 70 percent of her middle school students are Asian (Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Indian, and Korean), and about 30 percent had other heritages (Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic). Jiang noted her school was a diverse community, so she taught more Asian students than was typical in the state. Jiang studied English since her sixth year in primary school in China. She can also speak some Japanese.

Jiang noted that her transition to teaching in the U.S. required more professional training and switching from teaching adults to teaching adolescents. After she graduated from teacher training in China in 2002, she taught at a university until 2012. She came to the U.S. on a H4 visa that did not approve her to work. However, she could attend university, so she obtained her teacher certification in the U.S. After receiving a green card (permanent residency), she started working. Jiang observed her international teaching trajectory as follows:

I think teaching is a very meaningful job because it helps so many people. Teachers are able to support students and students’ families...It was a natural transition for me to be a teacher in [the] U.S. Getting a teacher certification is of utmost importance if you want to be a teacher. I decided to be a teacher when I first came to the U.S. in 2012...After the completion of testing, I attended a teacher certification program. Overall, my career was pretty smooth. My child was born while I was in the program, so I took a gap for a while. As it turned out, I became a teacher pretty quickly, so I was lucky.

Participant 2 was given the pseudonym “June” since she uses an American name for her public identity. She teaches elementary school, third and fourth grades, at a religious preparatory school. The subjects she teaches include mathematics, language arts, history, science, and Bible as an elective course. June graduated from high school in China then came to the U.S. after she took the college entrance exam. She obtained a Bachelor’s degree in anthropology and minored in theatre as an undergraduate and earned a Master’s degree in teaching in the U.S. Her students are mostly European-American, but she has only eight students because her school is a private school. June started learning English in fourth grade but also studied French at college for about two years. She can understand Cantonese as well. June explained how she became a teacher, observing that she felt a theological calling to do so, “In my youth, I enjoyed being around children so much. I’m always so happy when I’m with them. I sense that this is God’s calling for me.”

Participant 3, “Xi,” is a university professor of Chinese in an undergraduate linguistics program at a four-year university. Her duties include teaching language classes and Chinese culture classes. Her teaching experience began in 1999 when she finished college and obtained a position at a private three-year college in China. Then she transferred to a four-year public university with a long history in China in 2003. She completed her bachelor’s degree in English Literature and Master’s degree in Language Education in China. Once she came to the U.S., she completed a Master’s degree in Theology and a Ph.D. in Education. Xi described her students as mostly European-American with some Asian-Americans and a few African-American students. A couple of her students were Asian students from Asia.

Like Jiang and June, Xi had studied English for several years. “So English [was] a required class in China in the past. In China, my English education started from middle school to high school, and then in college my major was English. Actually, it was kind of pretty long.” During college in China, she also studied German and later studied Hebrew as part of her theology degree in the U.S. Like June, Xi felt that teaching was a religious calling.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The first author, who is Chinese, speaks English, Mandarin, and Cantonese fluently. She offered participants 1 and 2 the opportunity to be interviewed in English, Mandarin, or Cantonese. They chose to be interviewed in Mandarin. The interviews needed to be translated to English so the second author, who is White and does not speak Mandarin or Cantonese, could assist the first author in coding and theming participant utterances. Participant 3 was interviewed in English by the second author because that is the only language that the interviewer and interviewee had in common. Each participant participated in two interviews lasting about half an hour to 45 minutes. The first interview was conducted to discover beliefs about culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally relevant education. The second interview was conducted a week or two later to allow participants to think about their recent teaching practices that were intended to be culturally responsive.

The only source of data came from interviews because of the transcribing time necessary to translate every word of discourse into two languages. Interview questions were developed to draw out themes of how teachers were trained to direct students to use cultural referents so that their classrooms could collectively build content knowledge through critical investigations of power relationships embedded in curriculum based on students’ existing cultural knowledge. The data was collected by transcribing questions (30 in total) and participant responses in both Mandarin and English. Interviews were conducted on Zoom, transcribed in both languages, and then coded multiple times until we agreed on an existing framework for thematic analysis that responded to research questions, albeit the themes were not used in a research study but presented as a theoretical framework for culturally responsive teaching.

As we developed our interview protocol, we arranged questions 1-4 to understand the participants’ present teaching contexts as explained above. Questions 5-10 asked about the participants’ education and teacher training. Questions 11 and 12 attempted to address mentoring in teacher training in both countries. Questions 13 to 16 attempted to clarify prior knowledge of and comparative education’s role in understanding culturally inclusive teaching. Questions 17 and 18 addressed bilingual language instruction in culturally inclusive teaching. Questions 19 through 28 were included for description of specific culturally inclusive practices that teachers may have used. Questions 29 and 30 were reserved for a second interview a few weeks later so that teachers could specifically name the culturally inclusive practices they had utilized in the past few weeks.

After translating our interviews in two cases from Mandarin to English, we coded six transcripts according to themes from our theoretical framework on culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally relevant education (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). The coding system of Aronson & Laughter (2016) was based on CRT and CRP with the lenses of both teachers and students, so we chose to replicate this existing system. Three broad categories existed in Aronson & Laughter (2016)'s coding scheme.

The first category emphasized teacher actions resulting in culturally responsive teaching in which the purpose of teaching was revealed as social and academic empowerment for students. Statements were coded based on if the described teacher action showed the multidimensionality of teaching in a context of cultural variety, the importance of culturally validating students while teaching, the importance of social, emotional, and political comprehensiveness when talking about culture with students, teaching for school and societal transformation through language development, and emancipation or liberation from oppressive educational practices and ideologies. When teacher statements about their goals or practices did not fit into these categories, new categories were created so that we felt better encapsulated their responses.

A second major category for teacher statements was culturally relevant pedagogy, which counted statements on the beliefs and values of teachers. Two themes by Aronson and Laughter (2016) were used to capture teacher responses: the teacher's value of cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness when teaching. Other categories were constructed when these themes did not seem to capture a teacher's statement.

A third broad category was culturally relevant education in which teachers discussed student histories and the learning activities they enacted with a student lens. This category focused on students rather than teachers. Themes that emerged were the academic skills and concepts taught to students centering on culture, the importance of having students critically reflect on culture, cultural competency as an important goal for students to learn, and having students critique discourses of power in class.

We added additional themes that our borrowed coding system did not map well onto existing themes. Categories are represented in Table 2 with the original themes in bold print and our added themes not bolded. We used the coding results in Table 2 to decide on the themes we wished to emphasize as most important. Every uninterrupted participant response after each question asked by the interviewer was counted separately. Responses that emphasized the teacher's role or actions in culturally responsive action were considered "teacher action" and coded as "culturally responsive teaching". Responses that emphasized the teacher's beliefs or values behind their action were coded as "culturally relevant pedagogy". Responses that emphasized what students did do or should do in classrooms were considered "student activities" and were coded as "culturally relevant education."

Table 2

Coding System of Participant Responses

Culturally Responsive Teaching Teacher Actions	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Beliefs and Values of Teachers	Culturally Relevant Education Student Histories & Learning Activities
Social and academic empowerment Multidimensionality Cultural validation Social, emotional, and political comprehensiveness School and societal transformation Language development Emancipation or liberation from oppressive educational practices and ideologies *Teacher training *Teacher experience *Mentoring *Multilingualism *Comparing settings and students *Educational setting(s) *Literacy Activity *Assessment *Teacher fund of knowledge *Cultural knowledge *Knowledge of student(s) *Pedagogical knowledge *Critical reflection	Academic achievement Cultural competence Sociopolitical consciousness Cultural competence Sociopolitical consciousness *Critical reflection *Knowledge of language theory *Theological/vocational calling	Academic skills and concepts Critical reflection Cultural competence Critique discourses of power *Interdisciplinary connections *Student profiles *Class bonding

Note. This table is based on the synthesis of categories of culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally relevant education.

Findings

Theme 1: Marked Differences in Teacher Training and Mentoring across Countries

Our first question is how Chinese immigrant teachers who received public education in China navigate CRT pedagogies promoted in U.S. teacher training programs. Teacher training and mentoring was a prevalent theme for incorporating culturally responsive teaching into curriculum and instruction. All three participants had spent significant time in teacher education including achieving graduate degrees outside of their home country of China. This meant the primary language of instruction was English. The cultural values they learned were different than those of their youth.

Jiang was certified to teach in both China and the U.S. She had participated in a transnational teacher training program while being trained to teach in China. She reported,

While I had my first teaching job in 2002, I felt I was very lucky because my senior teachers at the department were very nice. My school created a new program called E-commerce. The school invited a university in Australia to jointly run the program. Those teachers from the Australian university introduced many innovative pedagogies. I learned a lot from the foreign specialists. They focused on interactive classroom over traditional classrooms.

Jiang's experience with teacher training in China had been what she considered progressive in that it emphasized more than exam results and included much observation of students. This required learning new pedagogies where students were to be more participative in their own learning. Jiang also noted that becoming a teacher (and staying a teacher) was less competitive in China. She said,

I think the teaching training system in the U.S. is a knockout system. In China, people go to "Normal School" (teacher training school) and receive some training. Knockouts do not exist. Or people like me have received a teaching offer. They receive training after they have got the offer. So, a knockout is not possible. In China, there is an "all-pass" system. People are invited to join and get a pass...In contrast, the U.S. has an "elimination/knock-out system."

June had not taught in China. Her teacher training in the U.S. required much reading and did not seem well-connected in content, although she found practicum experiences and the reading valuable in hindsight. June found significant differences in her mentoring from mentors who grew up in China and mentors who grew up in the U.S. She explained,

The mentor who spoke English was very open, and the way she acted was more gentle. The Chinese teacher (her mentor) was very strict. But I knew she particularly favored me and cared about me so much. We (the Chinese teacher and June) remain in good contact.

June's teacher training in the U.S. seemed less coherent and more theoretical than she would have liked, however her Chinese teacher mentor in the U.S. had been particularly substantive in teaching her language pedagogy. She recalled,

...the Chinese teacher [her mentor] taught in an immersion classroom, so she told me that I had to forget how to speak English when I step in the class to teach Chinese. She said I need to implement total immersion. I should be able to give explanation in Chinese all the time. She recommended that I should forget English and change into the Chinese mindset when I talk with students.

June respected her mentor's advice. She noted that when she taught Mandarin in the U.S., she learned to offer her students opportunities to examine Chinese culture and how it affected and was affected by language.

Xi observed significant differences in her teacher training in both countries. She said,

I feel that at [name of American university] the professors in the doctoral programs served students a lot. For example, in the doctoral classes, our professors often brought food and hosted some things for students. But in China, this was reversed. I feel that [in China] the students actually needed to show respect to the professors, and we actually needed to [bring] gifts to the professors. If we hung out with the professors, [if] we had dinner or lunch with the professors, the professors would not pay. Actually, all the students paid the cost. [If] students and professors hung out [performing] karaoke together, students actually paid all the costs.

Xi, who now worked at the university where she received her doctorate in an untenured professor position, regarded her college training in China as more hierarchical than was the case in the U.S.

The three interviews yielded differences in teacher training in the U.S. and China. Jiang was familiar with culturally responsive teaching from her education in China that welcomed Australian critique of how schooling should be done to be more inclusive of Chinese students. June recognized she received the most straightforward advice from her Chinese mentor in the U.S. compared to her American mentor. Xi noted that mentors in the U.S. thought about their economic status differently than Chinese professors/mentors who expected more honor as intellectual elders.

Theme 2: Cultural Knowledge and Critical Reflection of Compared Educational Systems

Our second question was how transnationally trained teachers perceive the concept of CRT. The three participants in this research had a great deal of cultural knowledge of both China and the U.S. as demonstrated in the critical reflection that occurred when they compared their teaching experiences cross-nationally, especially when they discussed U.S. curriculum. Understanding cultural differences was emphasized as significant learning targets. Jiang noted,

Teaching culture is quite important. Sometimes I include culture as a supplementary topic in my lessons. Sometimes I plan a lesson specifically, to teach my students about culture. It is not just Chinese culture. I also talk about cultures in other countries. Cultural comparison is often seen. For instance, when I talk about eating habits, I will compare Thanksgiving and Mid-Autumn festival. Is there anything people eat and drink that they have in common? What about the differences? What are the cultural beliefs and values?

June reflected how teaching in the U.S. allowed her to better understand teaching in China, especially that it tended to emphasize the role of the teacher as transmitting knowledge to large audiences of students. She explained,

As there are too many people in China, you may not be able to give each student the same attention in class. Nevertheless, I would try to implement some of the skills I practice in the U.S. and see if that would help. For example, students' seating in Chinese classrooms are in rows, but I would prefer to have them sitting in groups so that their interactions and discussions would be more effective. They wouldn't just sit alone to do worksheets or drills. I would use some learner-centered skills or hands-on activities.

June expressed that U.S. students tended to have more individual attention from teachers and teacher-student dialogues about what was being learned and why it was important.

Xi learned that individualism was very present in student mindsets and that her first goal as a university professor needed to understand the world of her students. She said,

...I feel that I can actually understand [how to teach] after I understand the students' mindset and the culture. I feel that I can actually change my expectations. So [I] just find an approach that is working for these students. I should teach from students' perspectives. Initially maybe I was a little shocked at this mindset. I know this is their culture, they [grew] up in this culture. I shouldn't expect they can change overnight and just accept my cultural standards. On the contrary, I should do something to make them progress...

Xi had come to understand that teaching successfully at a U.S. university required her to understand that her students were consumers and that she had to be hospitable to the student culture. In all three occurrences, "understand" was the operative verb when it came to successfully teaching students in the U.S. All three participants also emphasized the idea of teachers "serving students" and the need to develop a sense of community in their classrooms, especially by critically reflecting on culture with their students and after teaching.

However, the three educators also had varying notions of what they understood about student culture which manifested in how they arranged cultural knowledge taught to students. Jiang arranged curriculum around essential questions so that students could compare cultures. June indicated she wanted students to be immersed in "hands on" activities and "group" work, a focus on activities rather than cultural curriculum. Xi noted that knowing students' cultural mindsets was critical to assessing their progression of knowledge.

Theme 3: Culturally Responsive Teaching Means Knowing Your Student Profiles

Our third question inquired about the pedagogical thinking that precipitated students engaging in cultural topics. All three participants believed the more they knew about their students' cultures, the better teachers they would be. Jiang had a high percentage of Asian students, but she desired

to understand cultural nuances, both similarities and dissimilarities in cultural backgrounds as differences in identities were important to teaching U.S. students. She noted,

There are students from other races. The Asian students are Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, and Koreans. There are also Indians. Other ethnic groups include Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics...In China, people tend to recognize a group more than an individual. For example, if other people are capable of doing that, why can't you? You need to do the same thing. In the U.S., teachers focus more in individual students' strengths and weaknesses, give them some accommodations, and make some adjustments or changes according to every student's situation.

For Jiang, culturally responsive teaching in the U.S. meant first knowing the learning needs of her students.

June valued cultural dialogue with all students, both those with Chinese heritage and those who understood they too had a culture and were eager to discuss how it contributed to their identities. June described a special bond with a Chinese boy in her class. She said,

There is a kid in my class. The student's parents speak Cantonese, but they are very Westernized. They speak English at our parent-teacher Conference...The kid still had two pieces of mooncakes in the lunchbox yesterday. I asked him, "You're still eating mooncake?" He wished me a happy Chinese New Year in Cantonese last year. I felt so good. His mom also messaged me that he wrote a Chinese couplet on the red banner at home. His Chinese calligraphy looked pretty good.

But she also described bonds with other students in her class as well who were not Chinese or Chinese-American. She noted,

Also, there is a kid whose mom is from England. His mom got married when she came to the U.S. on a short-term mission trip. His mom is British. He often tells me about his family members in Britain and [about their] British accent...

Xi wanted all students to speak and learn about culture in all her classes because she believed that language and culture was inextricably linked. She said,

When I know the students' backgrounds, I want students from different backgrounds to share. The class is about Chinese and the different cultures, but I do want to hear about the different cultures. In my language class, I have a Korean-American, and I also ask her to share something...I really ask them to share in my language class.

Xi's idea of a successful classroom was dialogic classroom discussion where students of all cultures could compare and contrast knowledge of culture and the "whys" of language usage. This was reflected in Jiang and June's responses as well. However, Jiang thought about student learning differences before thinking about cultural content. June thought about the family stories of students before addressing cultural content. Xi thought about equality of voices in class discussions when people shared about their cultures in class discussions.

Theme 4: The Goal of Culturally Responsive Teaching is Classroom Harmony Created through Bonding

Our last question inquired about the outcomes through CRT practices. All three teachers emphasized that sharing of diverse cultures should ultimately lead to harmonious student interactions and deeper understanding of similarities and differences across cultures.

Jiang emphasized her storytelling role as a teacher and how engaging cultural knowledge can be if students were offered opportunities to learn about the culture of teachers and perhaps other students. She said,

I shared with them the differences between schools in China and schools in the U.S. For example, how different the classes and the bell schedules [are]. Also, American students need to go to teachers' classrooms, while in China students stay in their home rooms. Also, Chinese students wear school uniforms, but American students don't have school uniforms. Some said I [seem to] prefer American schools. They explained why they preferred American schools. Some said Chinese schools are quite good.

June used many creative literacy texts and activities to create a harmonious classroom environment where students could talk about a particular culture, including their own. She used the motif of camping to inspire an atmosphere to talk about historical cultures. In her second interview, she explained that students were currently camping in Egypt. June observed,

I think things that are different from my own [culture] give me a sense of excitement. When we live in our own countries, we are in our comfort zone to discuss other people's cultures. In fact, you won't have the cultural shock, and you don't have to take a risk as you won't actually move to that country.

Xi used food preparation and holiday crafts and decorating to bond with her students. She recalled,

I invited my Colloquium students (since they are freshmen) to some hot pot events and the students can then come and eat hot pot together since it's part of the Chinese cuisine. So, they can have this cultural experience and get to know each other better.

The end goal for all three teachers was to create a safe, respectful environment to learn about people throughout history, their motivations, their concerns, their interests. However, the critical reflection about their culturally responsive practices revealed that their main purpose of implementing CRT was to build classroom harmony. The goal was not to question authority as is the case in the theory building of Geneva Gay (2018) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), but to allow students to become cultural authorities in finding their own cultural identities in comparing and contrasting identities with others in the class.

Discussions

This study is limited by the small research sample of three Chinese immigrant teachers who were interviewed and their various and divergent teaching contexts, and therefore the results cannot be generalized to other teaching populations. Another limitation is that the teachers were not observed in attempting to implement culturally responsive teaching practices, so the researchers had to rely on their descriptions of their pedagogy and teaching. Future studies with data analysis from both interviews and class observations will be more beneficial.

Participant responses indicated that teacher training and education is still immensely different in China than in the U.S. Teacher training was much more competitive in the U.S. Mentoring techniques in the U.S. varied by the nationalities of teacher mentors (with Chinese mentors being the most explicit in pedagogical advice) and teacher educators (with Chinese professors acting more hierarchical). All three teachers understood from experiences that the transition from teaching or being trained in a collectivist society to an individualist society meant vast differences in thinking about teaching and communicating information to students. Teaching effectively in the U.S. could not be done without knowing every individual student's profile. However, knowing these individual profiles, including the cultural heritages and stories of students could form bonds of harmony with students across varieties of cultures because transnationally trained teachers were vigilant about teaching about culture and motivated to be co-learners with students about cultures.

Our study found that when Chinese immigrant teachers were assigned to mentor teachers during student teaching and their first year of teaching in American public schools, they developed close relationships with mentors who shared their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The teacher

participants highly valued the direct and specific feedback provided by their mentors such as instructional strategies and lesson designs. They also developed a deeper-level connection (e.g., values, beliefs, and coping strategies) rather than surface-level similarities (e.g., age, race, and gender). In view that the teaching force and student populations in the U.S. are both becoming more diverse, it is necessary to provide mentoring support that can promote cross-cultural competence in professional development in order to effectively engage students in learning experiences (Mercado and Trumbull, 2018). One implication from this finding is to further investigate how the demographic and cultural alignment with a mentor teacher could impact the pedagogical practices of Asian American teachers, their sense of identity in teaching, and their self-efficacy in countering racialized assumptions.

When comparing the classroom settings in China and the U.S., teacher participants in our study noticed a stark contrast in Chinese and American student profiles, and they all stated that the racial backgrounds, family cultures, and learning needs among U.S. students are far more varied in public education. Since immigrant teachers are educated partially in their home countries and partially in the U.S., they have substantial cross-cultural experiences and cultural assets to deliver culturally inclusive content for students of their culture and are adaptive to learn about other cultures as well. Nevertheless, integrating intercultural topics in classroom instruction to dismantle stereotypical views requires critical consciousness. Another implication from this study is to extend the current AsianCrit literature by exploring how the model minority myth impacts Asian immigrant teachers' attitudes toward culturally inclusive practices and other social justice topics (e.g., racial discrimination and gender equality) regarding other communities of color. It is also worth observing the actual classroom practices of Asian immigrant teachers and analyzing how they employ culturally responsive strategies to facilitate cross-cultural discourses and engage students in classroom interactions.

All three Chinese immigrant teachers in our interviews conceptualized that the goal of culturally inclusive teaching was to cultivate harmony and contrive congeniality among students. They shared the belief that teaching culture is important as students with cultural competence and multilingual skills are likely to broaden their worldviews, strengthen intercultural understanding, and promote harmonious bonding. Their literacy instruction focused on comparative analysis of culture and interdisciplinary learning (e.g., combining history and science content knowledge) rather than explicitly addressing racism and systems of oppression. From their perspectives, the goal of culturally relevant pedagogy is to help students from diverse backgrounds develop a sense of interdependence and achieve harmony in diversity. However, the effectiveness of U.S. classroom management skills and instructional strategies specifically shaped by collectivistic values and implemented by Asian American teachers has been rarely studied in prior CRT literature. Still, more empirical work must be done to investigate how the cultural beliefs of educators of color shape their teaching practices and promote an inclusive learning environment for all students.

Conclusion and Implications

Responses from the teacher participants indicated three potential areas of critical conversations on the pedagogical knowledge that immigrant teachers in the U.S. could harness to promote culturally inclusive school practices. Responses also unpacked that those teachers who are trained in two cultures think about culture as an important variable in both planning to teach and as the learning targets of teaching. It is worthwhile for U.S. educational policymakers to consider integrating cross-cultural educational topics and critical frameworks (e.g., AsianCrit) of CRT into teacher education to deepen understandings of cultural diversity. We believe that the specific

priority for research on culturally inclusive practices is to examine the variety of historical narratives, sociocultural values, and cultural experiences that teachers utilize to shape their instructional practices supporting students from various backgrounds.

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