A QUESTION OF CULTURE:
NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING TEACHERS TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Xiaohua Liu: A Question of Culture: Native English Speaking Teachers Teaching Young Children in China
(Under the direction of Michael Domínguez)

Tens of thousands native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are employed, in many cases for only being able to speak the language, to teach English in public and private schools in China, and many concentrated in early childhood bilingual programs. However, these schools face the lingering problem of not addressing the cultural and professional needs of the NESTs from foreign lands. There are cultural differences, clashes and misunderstandings between NESTs and the Chinese cultural community they situate. Many Chinese administrators and teachers have been unable to incorporate successful strategies for accommodating cultural differences and addressing conflicts, and sometimes even worsened the situation by engaging in behaviors of white supremacy and institutional racism. Additionally, poor pre-service preparations of NESTs and a lack of in-service professional support, combined with the cultural isolation, negatively impacted their teaching quality. Furthermore, no studies have been found to examine their lived experience of teaching young children in a cross-cultural context and its impact on their teaching practice. To address these issues, this ethnographic study explored a group of NESTs’ cultural ecology at a private preschool and kindergarten in China, and used an acculturation project to facilitate cultural understanding, collegial collaboration and professional growth of NESTs. The design of this research called for cultural participation through NESTs’ involvement in local cultural activities, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, classroom observations, focus groups, and artifacts. Positive impacts have been found on the NESTs’ professionalism, collegial collaboration, teamwork, and teaching practice, but not on their cultural dispositions.
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CHAPTER I. THE BACKGROUND

Introduction

As China’s relations with the world tighten and economic influences grow, the nation has witnessed a dramatically increasing domestic interest in English acquisition. In June 2015, Chinese Vice Premier Liu Yandong stated that more than 300 million Chinese are learning English (Xinhua, 2015). This huge need to learn English has created a great demand for English instructors in China. Fueled by the uninterrogated notion that the ideal English language teacher is a native speaker, the demand for this particular group of English instructors has surged. As a result, China, like many other non-English speaking Asian countries, recruits hundreds of thousands of Native English Speaking Teachers, or NESTs, from around the world. It was reported that in 2006 there were 150,000 NESTs actively working in China (Jeon & Lee, 2006), and that China annually recruits 100,000 new NESTs each year (Qiang & Wolff, 2003).

However, despite this interest in attracting and hiring NESTs from abroad, there has been little effort by Chinese educators and researchers to engage these NESTs in Chinese culture; indeed, it has been observed that the school relations and pedagogy of NESTs suffer as a result (Qiang & Wolff, 2003; 2009). They failed to notice, however, that for NESTs, understanding the background of their students’ and Chinese co-workers, who have had an upbringing vastly different than their own, is not a natural act. Lack of knowledge about their students and community has deprived the NESTs of opportunities to recognize that each person is a cultural being, and it is vital for them to understand their students and colleagues.
in order to provide culturally responsive and meaningful instruction. This is the problem that I will be exploring in this research, documenting a year long ethnographic study and program focused on cultural contact and engagement for NESTs, with a focus on learning how Chinese schools might better prepare and integrate NESTs into their faculty, and how NESTs themselves might better come to know and teach in the unique cultural context of China’s diverse communities.

The aim of this study was to explore approaches to Professional Development for NESTs that would address the research gap around the cultural dissonance experienced by NESTs who teach young children in China. It also intended to work to understand how NESTs respond to the professional development around cultural acclimation, and how these responses were reflected in their teaching practices, if at all.

The first three chapters of the dissertation aimed to provide an extensive introduction of the study’s background, especially the social and historical context of the study in the local community. Chapter four, five and six focused the research methodology through an introduction of the participants, discussion on the theoretical framework, a statement of the research problem, and an elaboration on the research questions, method, data collection and analysis. The next four chapters presented the research findings. Chapter seven discussed the NESTs’ social and cultural isolation from the local community, and what might have triggered the marginalization. Chapter eight explored how Whiteness and structured racism played out in the local Chinese community and their potential impact on the NESTs’ acculturation. Chapter nine and ten focused on the impact of the cultural dissonance discussed in chapter seven and eight on the NESTs’ teaching practice. Specifically, Chapter nine presented the finding of the NESTs’ marginalized teaching practice and low teaching quality, and chapter ten described the acculturation project, and presented its positive impact on the
NESTs’ professional behaviors and teaching practice and its negative influence on their cultural dispositions. The last chapter discussed the implications of the study findings.

Context and Research Problem
The history of English gaining its primary status in Chinese education can be traced back to the 1970s. The death of Mao ended the Ten Years of Domestic Turmoil in 1976. In 1978, the new Communist Leadership under Xiaoping Deng announced the policy of opening the door to foreign business, which started China on the path to becoming the ‘the World's Factory.’ Deng believed that English was a means to attract foreign investment, and thus a way to realize the dream of revitalizing China. Since then, learning English has become a nation-wide movement that has created a dramatic spread and influence of English and Western values within China, and impacted the fate of millions of Chinese people. Since the 1980s, English has been a mandatory course at the middle and high school level, and in many urban areas, courses in English begin as early as third grade. In the strict annual National Higher Education Entrance Examination, which is a prerequisite for entrance into almost all higher education institutions at the undergraduate level, English, as a subject, accounted for up to 150 out of 750 points¹. The requirement of English proficiency and learning continues in college. Students in all majors are required to pass the College English Test 4 (CET4) to be granted a bachelor’s degree, and CET 6, which is considered a high level of the proficiency test, is optional, but is the goal for many college students' goal because of its value on the job market.

English learning does not stop at graduation, and can accompany a Chinese citizen throughout his/her life. Indeed, it is a mandatory subject of graduate school entrance examinations. It is one of the essential qualifications for all Chinese scientists and scholars,

¹Note: Recently English’s weighting in the annual National Higher Education Entrance Examination has been reduced to 100 points, while the subject of Chinese’s has been increased to 180 points. Gao & Rapatahana (2016) believed it was the sign of the Chinese government's awareness of English and Western dominance and resistance to postcolonialism.
even in the field of Chinese literature (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016). These government policies produce a tremendous demand for English learning. Afterschool English learning programs, and private English learning services rapidly grew, and having English classes after school at all ages became a common social phenomenon. For example, New Oriental, the first Chinese educational institution to enter the New York Stock Exchange in the United States, and the largest comprehensive private educational company in China, built its fortune through—and still primarily focuses on—TOEFL and GRE tests and afterschool English learning classes. As a result, English became not only a skill of necessity to ensure a child’s future, but also a symbol of sociocultural capital and power, and a ‘better life’.

However, although this national movement of English learning hardly achieved its goal of equipping every Chinese person with fluent English, it facilitated China stepping toward the international arena and exposed the country to modern Western influences. More and more, Chinese academic elites have mastered the skill of English, and it was reported that peer-reviewed English papers written by Chinese scholars have risen 64 fold over the past 30 years (Yang, 2014). Additionally, an ever-increasing number of Chinese students are studying in universities in America, the UK, Canada, Australia and other English-speaking countries (CCG, 2018). These frequent international exchanges, combined with the Chinese government’s determination to embrace the West, further promoted by the Chinese social elites who studied abroad, brought Western ideologies, educational values, and curriculum models to China. Under such a regime, western ideas of teaching and progressive pedagogies have been introduced to Early Childhood Education (ECE) in China since the 1980s (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). For example, the Chinese government issued a series of policies and regulations to promote Western ideas in early childhood education, which led to curriculum reform movements in preschools and kindergartens that shifted Chinese traditional pedagogy
to westernized models, becoming less didactic and controlling, and more child-centered and personalized (Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009). The Regulations on Work in Kindergartens in 1989, the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education – Trial Version in 2001, and Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years in 2012, are milestone policies that gradually promoted and deepened the reform toward Western educational ideology, such as child-initiated activity, acknowledgement of individual differences, learning through play, and the process of activities model (Zhu, 2009).

The institutionalized benefits of mastering English and the perceived exemplar of Western education and ideology have had unintended consequences. English has become the economic and political myth that equals ‘modernity’ and ‘a better life’. Moving English learning to early ages became a reasonable choice for millions of Chinese parents who anxiously worked to ensure their children’s competitiveness. NESTs, who were born with the perceived privilege of speaking the language, become representatives of the ‘advanced civilization’ of the western English speaking world, and were included as an indispensable component of a high-end international school, and a symbol of an elite school, and thus a valuable commodity in China. However, it is worth noting that the ideal of NESTs in the Chinese imagination only applies to white-skinned, preferably blonde and with blue eyes, foreigners from a narrow category of developed Western countries. This narrow range of countries were called the English Five: the British Isles, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States (Jeon & Lee, 2006). White NESTs from these countries at Ming symbolize an elevated status of the school in the local area. As Susan, the former manager of foreign teachers at Ming, confessed:

Well, at the very beginning, it was like we had to have (white) foreign teachers. A school could not be identified as an international school without them. So it was more of mianzi “a face” to the school. At the beginning we did not high expectations for them, nor did we treat them like professionals. It was like, this should be a common phenomenon (in
China), it was mianzi “face” (prestigious) to have foreign teachers, and it made the school look better, more “Yangqi” (a fancier western and modern style), this kind of feeling.

Like Ming, many 'high-end' private preschools and kindergartens in China were flocking to white NESTs. Unfortunately, as Susan commented, it was more of a ‘face-saving’ project than a real strategy to enhance English language learning. Consequently, the teaching qualifications of NESTs were optional and even unnecessary. At Ming, 10 out of 11 NESTs had not received any sort of systematic teaching training before they became an English language teacher, nor had they received any after being employed. In fact, in many Asian countries and areas, NESTs were most frequently criticized for lack of teaching credentials and preparations (Boyle, 2000; Jeon & Lee, 2006; Kim, 2001). Many NESTs were thrown into Chinese classrooms right after landing, facing the largest group of non-English speaking students they probably had ever seen, and started to teach without any kind of professional support (Stanley, 2013). In-service training was not present, either. Teaching challenges were left to the underqualified NESTs to figure out on their own (Qiang & Wolff, 2009), and many NESTs remained monolingual and monocultural throughout their sojourn teaching in China (Boyle, 2000). Cultural clashes with the local community, and attitudes of white supremacy were presented and reported, which lead to tensions with colleagues, questionable professionalism, and a low quality of teaching (Boyle, 1997; Walker, 2001; Stanley, 2013).

As a result, all of these problems have been shown to isolate NESTs from the local society in an English-speaking enclave, which worsens their ignorance to the local culture, and increases their resistance to ‘fitting in’ (Qiang & Wolff, 2009). However, although the issue of NESTs’ cultural isolation was prevalent in the field of TESOL, few studies have addressed the problem, and most of their results were based on students' perceptions, without in-depth investigation, or any descriptive, ethnographic exploration of precisely what these cultural challenges and dissonance looked like (Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009). An exception to this
was a study by Stanley (2013) who conducted a four-year ethnographic study on a group of NESTs in Shanghai, but her focus was on the impact of the NEST experience at the tertiary level on these individuals’ identity formation, rather than the impact on and consequences for Chinese educational institutions, communities, and children. Further, as the research unfolded, it was imperative to investigate some emerging issues in the field, such as white superiority, NESTs cross-cultural competence, cultural dissonance with their students and colleagues, and how such a dissonance influences their teaching. In addition, even though it was common for childcare centers to hire NESTs in China, no studies have been found related to NESTs teaching young children.

Therefore, this study aimed to fill in the research gap through: 1) focusing exclusively on NESTs’ cultural ecology in an early childhood setting; 2) exploring possible solutions of NESTs’ cultural dissonance with local communities through an acculturation project, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations; and 3) examining potential influences of this project on NESTs’ cultural dispositions, and teaching practice, if any. However, it is worth noting here that although there were many prominent challenges relating to NESTs in the literature, this study focused on exploring the status quo and process of increasing NESTs’ cultural awareness in an early childhood education setting in China. In other words, though some shift in pedagogical practice was found, this was ultimately not a study centered on improvement in learning outcomes at the Ming school. My central interest was in shifts in cultural participation and awareness of NESTs, if any, and what the influences of such shifts would be on their ideas and praxis of teaching young children at Ming.

**Terminology**

There were a few local terms have been interpreted for better understanding for the
English-speaking audience: 1) You'er yuan. In mainland China, You'er Yuan refers to childcare centers that provide services for children from three to six years old, including kindergarteners. Youzhi Yuan is an equivalent idea, except it has only been used in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In fact, Youzhi Yuan was a literal translation from kindergarten when Froebel’s concept of “garden of children” was introduced into China in the Republican Era. When the simplified version of characters came into use in 1949, the year the People’s Republic of China was founded, and Youzhi Yuan 幼稚园 became You’er Yuan 幼儿园 as part of the movement of simplifying characters in mainland China. However, Hong Kong and Taiwan carried on with the original translation of Youzhi Yuan. At our research site, Ming Guoji (international) Youzhi Yuan, the adoption of Youzhi Yuan reflected its admiration towards a more westernized teaching approach of Hong Kong and Taiwan. In addition, Ming GuoJi (international) Youzhi Yuan typically would be translated into English as "Ming International Kindergarten", but I interpreted it as "Ming International Preschool and Kindergarten (MIPK)"，since kindergarten suggests the first year of primary school in America, and Ming was more comprehensive than this.

Sometimes I used the local terms directly to convey the subtle nuances of language. For example, Waijiao, if translated literally, is foreign teachers, teachers with foreign citizenships who teach English. At Ming, Waijiao is called "foreign teacher" in English, and the phrase "foreign teacher" is everywhere at the school, in daily conversations, signs, school magazines, and even official documents. For this reason, I decided to stick to the local term "foreign teachers”, because it conveys a subtle but complicated connotation of foreignness which a blunt translation of English teachers cannot do. NESTs are a subgroup of these foreign teachers whose mother tongue is English.
CHAPTER II. WHO ARE NESTS?

Context of NESTs Teaching

As mentioned, China has recently witnessed a dramatically increased interest in the recruitment of NESTs to meet its huge demand for English instructors. Even though NESTs are a common phenomenon in Asian countries (Nunan, 2003), NESTs were a controversial issue in the literature. In many Asian countries, NESTs were treated as perfect models of the target language, with an innate competence, and positioned as unquestioned judges with regards to questions about what is, and what is not, correct in the English language (Luk & Lin, 2006). However, a native speaker is not necessarily a good teacher, nor a master linguist. Language teaching was not a natural talent, but a form of art, and a set of professional skills that required pedagogical preparation and sufficient field practice (Canagarajah, 1999). In fact, a native speaker who is not professionally prepared can make a less effective teacher regarding developing students' biliteracy and bilingualism (Boyle, 1997; Garcia, 2010). This fallacy of NESTs as linguistic experts has also recently been further challenged by the theory of lingua franca, which argued for a global language model that recognizes the varieties of English, and that based on this position, there should not be such a notion of ‘NEST’ (He & Zhang, 2010; Modiano, 2009).

To become a NEST, one must have a work visa and a foreign expat certificate from the Bureau of Exit and Entry Administration of the Ministry of Public Security, and local Foreign Experts Affairs Bureau. Working as a NEST without such legal documents could result in termination of their employment, a fine of less than 1,000 yuan ($162), and deportation (The State Council of PRC, 2014). Once in the country, NESTs are monitored
and administered by local Foreign Experts Affairs Bureau.

Requirements themselves for NESTs are prescribed by the Administration of Foreign Affairs in *Guidelines of Work Permit for Foreigners* as: “Foreign language teaching staff should, in principle, be engaged in teaching with their first language, hold at least a bachelor’s degree, and have more than two years of language teaching experience. Candidates who graduate with the majors of education, language or teaching or those who have a teaching certificate from their home country or earned an international language teaching certificate may be exempted from the working experience requirement” (AFEA-Shagang, 2016). These prescriptions of expertise and experience, however, were rarely fulfilled or enforced.

Even though a visa usually involves complicated bureaucratic procedures that take months to complete, the qualification requirements for being a legal NEST have traditionally been rather weak. English proficiency level was not specified, and job pertinent degrees were not required; in some circumstances individuals were even hired as professional educators with merely an associate degree, or as little as a U.S. high school diploma (Boyle, 2000; Jeon & Lee, 2006; Qiang & Wolff, 2009). As stated in the national regulations, “TESOL or similar certificates are preferred, but not essential” and professional training on language teaching and prior teaching experience were not prerequisites (SAEFA, 2002). All of this made for a cadre of NESTs who were teaching a foreign language without any sort of formal training in alien territory.

However, last year, several months before my research began, SAEFA released a new policy that non-native English speakers cannot be hired as English teachers without a degree from a native English-speaking country proving their language proficiency. This meant that only people from native English-speaking counties like the English Five and some previous
British colonies with bachelor’s degrees and a TOEFL certificate are qualified. As a result, a seller’ market was created for NESTs, especially white NESTs, in which employers were competing with each other to win over qualified job candidates.

There are various categories of ‘native-English speaking’, including by birth or early childhood exposure, by being an exceptional learner, through using the target-language medium, or by virtue of being a native user through long residence in the adopted country (Davies, 2003). In this study, my original plan was to focus on the NESTs who are citizens by birth or early childhood exposure from the English Five, and in most cases, they are predominantly phenotypically and racially White, and culturally situated in a Western Anglo-American perspective. However, as the research unfolded, the study became a broad cultural and contextual exploration. Many non-NESTs were interested in the project, and their insights about the school life revealed the profound impact that whiteness had on the culture and dynamics of how Ming operated. For this reason, my final list of participants includes a number of non-NESTs English teachers, though the research analysis and interpretation still focused on NESTs, and the cultural dynamics of integrating English Five NESTs into a Chinese school community.

The Literature on NESTs

The advantages of NESTs

One of the major themes which emerges in the literature is the heated debate about the comparisons between NESTs and non-native English speaking teachers, or local Chinese teachers who taught English (non-NESTs). This debate has generated myriad studies on the advantages and disadvantages of these two groups of teachers (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Canagarajah, 1999; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Ma, 2012; Tajino & Tajino, 2000; Timmis, 2002; Tod & Pjanapunya, 2009). In these studies, there were benefits of NESTs that stood
out in terms of their teaching practice compared to non-NESTs. Specifically, it has been found that NESTs: 1) could provide linguistic exemplification of the target language, and their accurate pronunciation and grammar helped them to be more likely to detect and correct students' mistakes (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Luk & Lin, 2006); 2) were able to supply more targeted cultural information related to the language (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Ma, 2012); 3) tended to have a casual, fun, and relaxing teaching style (Ma, 2012); and 4) their monolingual status forced students to communicate in English in classroom settings, even though it was also perceived as a barrier to learning facilitation (Barratt & Kontra, 2000). More importantly, there was a predominant preference to NESTs in English teaching compared to local English teachers, a finding that was consistent across studies in many countries that employed NESTs, such as China, Hungary, France, and Thailand (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Todd & Pojanapunya, 2009).

It should be noted that most of these findings were based on either surveys or interviews, and no similar studies have been done in the field of teaching young children.

The challenges of NESTs

Despite these positive arguments for NESTs, studies also presented undesirable results in regards to their teaching quality. The problems mainly existed in four domains: 1) a lack of teaching qualifications, 2) English monolingualism, 3) isolation from the local cultures and communities, and 4) strained relationships with local teachers and students.

Lack of teaching qualifications. First, NESTs were most frequently criticized for their frequent lack of teaching credentials and preparation in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) instruction. In two survey studies, one in France with 76 respondents and another in Korea with 69, it was found that more than half of the respondents did not have a bachelor’s degree relevant to teaching English (Lasagabaster &
Sierra, 2005; Kim, 2001). In China it was reported that job pertinent degrees were not
required, and in many circumstances, they were hired with an associate degree or as little as a
US high school diploma (Jeon & Lee, 2006; Qiang & Wolff, 2009). In addition, professional
training on language teaching and prior teaching experience were not prerequisites, according
to the national regulation for Foreign Experts (SAEFA, 2002), and it was reported that many
NESTs in China did not receive any pre-service or in-service training on language teaching
(Qiang & Wolff, 2009). Consequently, many of them were characterized as ‘young
adventurers’ without teaching experiences in any field, let alone linguistic practice (Qiang &
Wolff, 2003), and as a result, many of them found teaching frustrating (Kim, 2001).

Monolingualism. Second, unlike visiting international teachers in American schools who are
required to be fluent in English as well as the target-language to be employed, NESTs had
the privilege to be hired as visiting teachers in Asian countries without any knowledge of
local languages, and tended to remain monolingual (Kim, 2001). It was ironic that their work
espouses the idea of bilingualism and biculturalism, but many of them remained monolingual
in host countries, which became an obstacle to cross-cultural communication. Boyle (2000)
reported that many schools at Hong Kong were reluctant to conduct their teacher discussions
and meetings in English in order to include just one or two NESTs.

There were factors that contributed to their monolingualism. For one thing, NESTs knew
that, both officially and privately, they were not expected to acquire the local vernacular.
They were also reluctant to learn it because they were very aware of the temporary nature of
their sojourn in the host countries. In addition, as instructors and citizens from developed
countries, they felt that they needed to be treated as ‘important’ with a sense of cultural
superiority that they assumed whoever asked for foreign teachers
must concede and cater to (Cem & alptekin, 1984; Kim, 2001), an attitude that we can note
reflects a considerable amount of racial and cultural privilege (McIntosh, 1990).

Unsurprisingly then, communication barriers existed in teacher student interactions, as Luk (2001) reported that the biggest problem students in Hong Kong had with NESTs was the difficulty of communicating with their NEST instructors. Studies have also revealed that despite their purported language expertise, NESTs could not explain grammar rules, and they were insensitive to students’ linguistic problems (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). As a result, that they were rarely able to meet students’ language learning needs (Kim, 2001).

*Cultural isolation and insensitivity.* Third, cultural insensitivity and isolation from the local cultures and communities were another major issue found in the literature. Not surprisingly, most of the NESTs were monocultural as well as monolingual (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Kim, 2001; Ma, 2012), and these limitations became a major barrier of cross-cultural communication and engagement. Their relationships with students were described as contractual and calculating, with students complaining that NESTs were impolite, not serious about teaching, not committed to education, exhibiting a sense of cultural superiority, or just too young to be responsible (Jeon & Lee, 2006; Han, 2005), all descriptions which fit in with the stereotype of ‘young adventurers’. In addition, racial issues were involved in the problems of NESTs as well. Todd & Pojanapunya (2009) found that Thai students had an explicit preference to NESTs regardless of experiences of studying with them, and concluded that such a preference reflected a socially acceptable attitude toward the NEST fallacy, and the cultural privileging of whiteness.

In addition, cultural barriers between NESTs and their students and colleagues were another obstacle for cross-cultural teaching and communication (Barret & Kontra, 2000; Boyle, 2000; Kim, 2001). It was reported that many NESTs knew little or nothing of the culture of their students and community, which led to confrontations between them and their
local administrators, and insensitivity to their students’ learning needs (Boyle, 2000; Kim, 2001). This lack of knowledge of local culture prohibited NESTs from providing culturally appropriate and meaningful education for children (Kim, 2001). These limitations are reflective of what we know more generally about teacher education and connection, including the idea of Funds of Knowledge, which has shown that teachers are more effective when they learn about their students’ cultures, and integrate them into the curriculum, and are less effective when there is cultural dissonance between students and teachers (Moll, et. al., 1992; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2006). Studies have shown that teachers were able to provide culturally responsive curriculum when they discarded prejudice and stereotypes against culturally diverse students, and made a shift of cultural dispositions towards cultural understanding, viewing students’ family lives as cultural and intellectual resources to be leveraged and sustained (Paris & Alim, 2014; Domínguez, 2017). For example, Marshall and Toohey (2010) revealed how the Funds of Knowledge from communities and families of Punjabi Sikh students could be used to encourage bilingualism at school, and challenged the school’s normative Western understanding of good and evil. Other studies have shown teachers used Latino students’ cross border experiences to inform studies of other countries, and developed a project about construction based on the knowledge of families of migrant workers (Moll, et. al., 1992; Sandoval-Taylor, 2005).

**Pedagogical struggles & strained teaching relationships.** Finally, in addition to the language and cultural barriers, the mismatch between NESTs and the local patterns of thinking and behaviors specifically around schooling exacerbated the cultural tensions between NESTs and local communities. In Asian countries with Confucian culture, teachers are usually held to a high social and moral standard. Under such a culture, teachers were expected to form a close, warm, and trusting relationship with students (Han, 2005).
However, the poorly prepared NESTs were not equipped with the professional or cultural skills to carry out such a mission. As a result, students and colleagues became skeptical of their motivations for teaching, commenting that the unemployment in their home countries drove them to teach in Asia, and that these visitors true goal was to travel, not to teach (Kim, 2001).

Furthermore, pedagogical conflicts were closely related to philosophical differences. Confucian culture believes that learning is a tough journey, not for fun (Li, 2012; Ng & Rao, 2005; Pearson & Rao, 2004) and teaching pedagogies usually focus on drill-exercise and memorization. In contrast, White, Western, Anglo-American culture appreciated individualism, and had less desire for authority, and its pedagogy tended to be student-focused and fun oriented (Li, 2012). This dichotomy of pedagogical views resulted in misunderstandings of local teaching approaches situated in a culture different from NESTs’.

It was noted in the literature that some NESTs distinguished themselves as new and innovative, in contrast to Chinese teachers who were perceived as traditional and mechanistic with an exam-based and memorization oriented practice (Trend, 2012), and that they presumed that their own teaching styles and preferences were universally applicable in other cultural contexts (Han, 2005). Ironically, NESTs self-perceptions of innovative and fun teaching were in contrast to the uninformed language pedagogy they actually implemented, which is clear in the literature (Han, 2005; Kim, 2001), and in my personal observations. It is worth noting here that the literature findings regarding the NESTs progressive pedagogy and Chinese teacher’s traditional or instructor-centered pedagogy are in fact opposite to the observations my data will reveal, but the NESTs’ isolation and alienation from local communities is consistent, which serves as the evidence of their culture dissonance with the community. This study adds to the research knowledge around this understudied topic of
NESTs pedagogical beliefs in contrast to the pedagogical practices of their Chinese co-workers by offering descriptive data of what these contrasting practices actually looked like.

The NESTs deficit dispositions towards local education philosophies frequently worsened their relationships with colleagues, and increased local teachers’ resentment against NESTs (Boyle, 1997, 2000; Nuan, 2003). This was often because that there was lack of team collaboration between NESTs and their local colleagues (Boyle, 1997). As a result, NESTs have been marginalized in local education communities (Walker, 2001). They were usually placed on an assisting and collaborative low-profile position, because of their powerlessness to effect changes at school. In Mainland China, NESTs usually found themselves in oral English classrooms that were considered less challenging and serious (Árva, & Medgyes, 2000; Stanley, 2013). These research results about the marginalized professional community of NESTs were consistent with our findings in this study.

NESTs in the Context of This Research Study

Foreign teachers at Ming

Among the 22 foreign teachers at Ming, there were 17 on the main campus when I began this study, including 13 NESTs, and four Non-NEST foreign teachers. Six were British (two with Greek-UK dual citizenships), three were Americans, and four were Australians. In addition to these groups, there was a Canadian, an Indian, a New Zealander, a Russian, and a Serbian. In terms of teaching qualifications, one NEST held a bachelor’s degree in education with a graduate certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE), one was a three-year diploma holder in ECE, and 15 had bachelor’s degrees, but in non-education majors. In terms of age, 13 of these individuals were in their 30s, two were in their early 40s, and two were in their 50s. However, as you will see as I introduce the cast of characters in the next chapter, some of the Ming NESTs were consistent with the literature, being young adventurers and
lacking in pedagogical experience, but this wasn’t the case with all of them, and there was much more nuance than the present literature captures. Some NESTs were committed to the job of teaching young children, and had accumulated years of teaching experiences.

At Ming, all foreign teachers share an office. This space is an excluded and tucked-away room, nestled at the corner of the building on the first floor. To reach this space, one walks into the school, and then must meander through a small square surrounded by flowers and bushes, follow the splendid hallway with themed play booths on one side, before finally reaching the end of the hallway, where you make a right turn, and grope your way along an ill-lit corridor. Only then do you arrive at the office, marked by a white door in a gloomy wall. Open the door, and the environment changes: you will see a spacious, brightly lit room filled with cubicles, copy machines, printers, and teaching materials scattered around the room. To the left of the entrance door is a large bulletin board where lesson plans and official notices are posted. There is a big studio work table with paper cutters and recycled paper strewn about on it.

Every day, foreign teachers gathered here around 9:00 in the morning, before heading off to their classes to teach until 11:30 AM. After a three-hour lunch break, they returned to the office, or went directly to their afternoon classes at 2:40 PM, and remained in these classrooms until 5:10 PM, when their contract day ended. If it was Tuesday or Thursday, they came to school 45 minutes early to lead English morning exercises, and were released from work at 4:25 PM. There was a weekly office meeting on Friday from 11:00 to 11:30 AM, and so all English teachers left their classes before 11:00 AM on Fridays. Later in the school year, the meeting time was changed to Monday afternoons, because some foreign teachers did not have children in toddler classes (2-3-year old) after 4:30 PM due to early pick-up.
Most foreign teachers left during the three-hour lunch break, going home to rest, doing private English tutoring classes, going to a gym, or just hanging out with friends. Usually one or two foreign teacher(s) remained in the office to do lesson planning or other teaching preparations, but most of the time, the NESTs among foreign teachers did not stay. None of them drove to school, because they either lived within walking distance to the school, or used other ways to commute to work, such as by taxi or bike, whereas most of their Chinese colleagues drove to school. Many NESTs lived in the high-grade residential area right next the school, with both of the school and the residential complex investment properties developed by Ming Estate Co., Ltd (pseudonym).

**Chinese Teachers’ Schedule at Ming**

Compared with the foreign teachers, their Chinese co-workers’ daily schedule was much longer and tighter. Many Chinese teachers arrived at school around 7:00 AM, ate at school, and started working in their classrooms at 7:30 AM. One Chinese teacher left the classroom for office time at 9:00 AM, when a foreign teacher took the classroom shift, before the Chinese teacher returned to the classroom at 11:30AM when the foreign teacher’s shift was over. This teacher would watch over children having lunch, leaving again at 12:30 PM for a lunch break, before continuing to work in their classrooms from 2:30 to 5:30 PM. In each classroom, another Chinese teacher worked from 7:30 AM to 12:00 PM, took a lunch break from 12:00 PM to 2:30 PM, and then continued to work in the classroom until 5:30 PM. Chinese teachers’ lunch break coincided with the children’s nap time, which was supervised by nursery teachers who were managed by the Department of Logistics. Even though it was scheduled as a break, many Chinese teachers did not get to have a rest because of frequent meetings, teaching preparations, and other tasks.

Therefore, two different lives have been created at Ming, one for foreign teachers and one
for Chinese teachers, and these variances resulted in a situation in which these two cultural
groups of teachers did not get to engage with each other in informal conversations for social
networks, or even for formal meetings around classroom issues. Their separate offices
deprived them of opportunities for collegial conversations, and the mismatched schedules did
not allow them any time to communicate with each other without children present. These
segregated schedules and traffic routes made NESTs’ every participation in the local
community’s in cultural practices challenging. With a review of the literature in general and
in the context of this study complete, we can now turn to a deeper engagement with the
setting of this study, Ming International Preschool and Kindergarten.
CHAPTER III. THE PROGRAM

Ming International in A Changing China

The past decade has witnessed China’s economic ‘miracle,’ with the economy booming. After the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the equal rights women enjoy were written into the Constitution. As women joined the male workers in the task of constructing ‘a new China’, the need for early child care institutions became clear. In 1956, a joint notice, by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, promulgated the financing of childcare services. In the 1950s, the financial support for the ECE institutions came from four main sources: the provinces, the local governments, the collective enterprises, and parents (Wei, 1993). Then came the Ten Years of Turmoil during which the guidance of 1956 was neglected, and almost every advancement in early childhood education was significantly set back.

As was discussed previously, China’s ‘open door’ policy to foreign business policy was issued in 1978 following the Ten Years of Turmoil, and the majority of childcare services were restored in 1979. From the 1980s to the mid-1990s, a high percentage of early childhood education programs in China were partially publicly funded, and some were partially supported by workplaces. In either case, parents shared about 40% percent of the cost (Zhang, 2009). In the 1990s, with the economic reforms progressing, the Law of

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2 Ten Years of Turmoil, also known as the Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 until 1976. Launched by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China, its stated goal was to preserve ‘true’ Communist ideology in the country by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology within the Party. The Revolution marked Mao's return to a position of power after the Great Leap Forward. The movement paralyzed China politically and negatively affected the country's economy and society to a significant degree (Wikipedia, 2018)
Enterprises launched the privatization of state-owned companies. As organizations affiliated with the enterprises (such as factories and mines, enterprises, institutions, social organizations, and the communities), the preschools and kindergartens were either sold out to private organizations or individuals, or combined and dismissed by the enterprises in order to reduce their costs (Zhang, 2009). In 1997, The National Guidelines for Early Childhood Education for the Fifth Nine-Year Plan and The Regulations for Private Educational Organization officially acknowledged the legal status of Min Ban You’er Yuan (private ECE institutions), and encouraged the privatization of preschools and kindergartens (Zhang, 2009), which led to a rapid growth of private childcare services. China saw a rise in the percentage of childcare services provided by private preschools and kindergartens, from these private institutions providing 13.5% of all childcare services in 1997, to 69.18% in 2011 (NSRED, 2011). As Taiwanese and other foreign chains have entered the early childhood education market, many new Chinese companies have emerged to jump into the space created by educational privatization, and to compete with foreign ventures. Ming Estate Co., Ltd. is one of these companies that decided to venture into the business of private education to promote sales of their newly developed housing estates with the establishment of top-notch school districts. The first school this company invested and developed was Ming Elementary School, which achieved great success. The second was our research site, Ming International, and later its branch campuses, and Ming Middle School and High School.

**Ming International and Its Education Philosophy**

Ming International sits along the bank of Dingdong River in Shagang (pseudonym), a small tropical sea-side city in Pearl River Delta in a Southeast Province, which is one of the most developed provinces in China. Shagang has easy and short-distance travel access to world renowned cities of Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong. Even though Shagang was
one of the original Special Economic Zones established in the 1980s like Shanghai, it has not been over-developed and thus remains free from pollution due to its long-term policy of ‘Becoming A Greener City’ and positioning itself as a premier tourist destination. Shagang has been elected as the most livable city in China for the past few years.

Shagang's unique geographic position and quality air have been attracting waves of migrants from cities with hostile climates, and among them, many are affluent families who were able to afford such a migration. Ming International is a private school that caters to the needs of this group of well-off parents who are eager to start a new life in a wealthy housing area with excellent educational resources. Built in 2008, the school was completed at the cost of 200 million yuan (31 million U.S. dollars), which was invested by Shagang Ming Industries Inc., the most significant state-owned estate company in Shagang. It claimed it was the costliest preschool in China at the time. Looking like a five start resort, the school now features 25,000 Square Meters, a three-story building that is home to 702 children in thirty classes, each with an individual nap room; a large garden with an orchard, two sand pits, a fountain, a small farm, a train station, a sports filed, and a few playgrounds. Beyond this, there is an administration area, multiple "function" rooms including a library, and art, science, gym, and kids cooking place, an indoor swimming pool, a large kitchen and staff dining room, and an underground parking lot. The school has rapidly expanded in the past five years, with six branch campuses having been established, and another six under construction. Our research site is the very first, and the largest, Ming school.

Out of all these branches, the main campus is the only one with the word “international” in its name. As a representation of being high-end, the “international” refers to a combined team of 100 Chinese teachers, 75 staff members, and 16 foreign teachers from seven different countries, and local Chinese children with foreign nationalities, and three white children (two
from the UK and one from Germany). In China, schools with an international tag are a segmented educational system with severe restrictions. There are a few categories of these schools: expat schools that provide international education in English only for the expatriate community and Chinese students with a foreign passport; joint schools between a Chinese owner and a foreign education company which typically provides a foreign curriculum delivered by teachers from Western countries in English, targeting both expat children and Chinese locals; and Chinese-owned private schools that provide a bilingual curriculum for mainly Chinese students—Ming school is one of this latter category of schools.

International schools are usually known for an English only policy, superior facilities, high-quality education, western-style curriculum, and shockingly expensive tuitions. For example, CUV International School (pseudonym), which is just 20 minutes’ drive from Ming, charges RMB 120,000 ($19,000) per year for preschool-aged students, whereas a high quality private Chinese childcare center in the same area without the international label charges only RMB 38,000 ($6,000) per year. With an international brand, Ming's tuition that charges RMB 80,000 ($13,000) per year has remained at the top of the most expensive early childhood programs at Shagang that are run by a Chinese administration. The glorious sound of ‘international’ schools attracted many investors who were eager to boast of their newly built school with "international" fame. However, as the bilingual programs rapidly emerged, in 2009 the Shagang Education Bureau canceled the policy of issuing the title of international schools to Chinese owned bilingual schools, which has made Ming one of a kind, and even more prestigious.

The progressive education philosophy of Ming matches its high-end "international" image. The low teacher-child ratio is the representation of one of the advertised western ideologies. Each class is equipped with four teachers; a head teacher, an assistant teacher, a nursery
teacher, and a foreign teacher (half day). There are 15 children in the two-year-old classrooms, and five more children are added in each age group above that. With help from the regular interns the school has from a local university, and the regular teacher-child ratio could be as low as three to one in two-year-old classrooms, and 6 to 1 in six-year-old classrooms. Another representation of the “international” label is the cutting-edge education ideology. Upholding the concept that education is responsible for the trajectory of a child’s whole life, the school aims to create an open, free, and happy education environment, and is dedicated to fostering the three ideals of ”Ming international citizens,”—to be healthy, happy and innovative, and with international perspectives. The school’s education mission states:

Ming International Kindergarten integrates the essence of Chinese and western education. Adhering to the concept of ”Making Childhood Happy”, the school aims to create a high quality international early childhood program through setting up a democratic, equal, open and free education environment, fostering a healthy, happy, creative and international teacher group, and promoting the ideology of ”teaching to individual, respecting differences, and cultivating characters.

“Democratic” “open and free” “individualistic” “respecting differences (value diversity) ” are key words in this statement, which reflects the school’s orientation of ideas associated with Western educational values. These keywords can be seen clearly in their curriculum model, and throughout daily routines of the school.

The Chinese Curriculum

The school runs a half-day Chinese and half-day English program. The Chinese program uses a commercialized American preschool teaching model, HighScope Preschool Approach. Developed in Ann Arbor, Michigan, HighScope is a research-based American early childhood teaching approach that promotes active learning and development in multiple content areas. Like many American curriculum models, HighScope values free-play and small group activities with adults scaffolding, and encourages individualism by offering choices during free play and transitions, and short large-group activities. Even though mildly
adjusted, the approach’s standard daily routine remains intact at Ming, consisting of greeting time (10 minutes), plan-do-review (free play, 1 hour), small group (20 minutes), large group (10 minutes), and outdoor (40 minutes) sessions. The classroom set-up also reflects the school’s HighScope tastes for teaching. The HighScope posters of the steps that address children’s conflicts was posted in every classroom; the HighScope daily routine pictures were posted in sequence on every TV cabinet at the center of each classroom; and the classroom environment set up was divided into four to five basic play areas, filled with materials and toys, neatly organized and properly labeled in two languages. Children are always asked to make a choice before free play; and during small groups, the key is to offer a variety of materials for children to choose from. In classroom set-up, daily routine arrangements and even some aspects of teacher-child interactions, it largely resembles a typical American preschool classroom.

However, there are things unique at Ming that makes it different from a typical American childcare center. Morning ‘check’ and exercise is part of the daily routine. Every morning, nurses examine each child to detect early symptoms of illness with Chinese traditional medical practice of look, listen, and ask. Instead of going to the classroom, children walk to the sports field where they stand in long lines and exercise, accompanied by music coming from loudspeakers, and teachers modeling in front of the lines. Also, before HighScope, Ming’s curriculum was a project-based approach, called AH-HA curriculum, which is developed by a professor from a local university. Elements of AH-HA still remain in place as part of the Ming curriculum. Now, the school claims that AH-HA is their only curriculum, which is based on a combination of AH-HA curriculum, HighScope Preschool Approach, and a school-based English curriculum.

At Ming, English for the three through five-year-old classes are in mornings, and six and
two-year-olds are in afternoons. Two classes share one “foreign teacher.” Mornings are considered as more important learning time in Chinese education because children are less likely to be distracted by tiredness. English, as an important but difficult learning content, needs to be prioritized, and thus is entitled to have the more precious morning hours for three, four, and five year olds. Two and six-year-olds are exceptions, because “twos are too young to comprehend English, and six-year-olds have reached the age of being able to maintain attention for an extended period of time in the afternoon,” according to the principals.

**The English Program**

The English curriculum uses a school-based English teaching model, developed by and at Ming school. It has a collection of themes, such as colors, shapes, transportations, musical instruments, etc.. Under each theme, there is a package of resources of songs, cartoons, flash cards, exercise sheets, and games. English teachers are free to choose whatever topic they think appropriate for their own classes. The half daily routine in English time is the same across age groups, with two large group lessons each lasting from 30-50 minutes. There is a 20 minute snack time in between these lessons, and a 30-40 minutes outdoor time after the second lesson. The exact length of lessons varied to individual preferences and specific situations, but usually even for 2-3-year-old the maximum of these large group instructions could last for about thirty minutes.

**Ming’s Reputation**

With its’ spacious buildings, luxury decorations, second-to-none facilities, and most importantly, its progressive ideas, Ming became an exemplary school not only in Guangdong province, but also in China. It annually attracted more than 10,000 people to visit. The principal was elected to be the president of Shagang Early Childhood Education Association, and a board member of the Early Childhood Research Association of China. The school, as a
pioneer of implementing progressive educational ideas, regularly held conferences centered on various topics featuring western teaching practice, progressive curriculum models such as HighScope, Reggio Emilia, and Project Approach, and professors from prestigious universities who advocate for ideas from John Dewey and Piaget. Ming has become the base of professional development for teachers in Shagang, and holds summer professional development seminars and workshops for new and senior teachers all over the city as a designated training center of Shagang Early Childhood Education Association. Ming’s ideas of teaching, along with its reputation of promoting progressive pedagogy, have been widely disseminated across the country. The dissemination often attracted school investors and administrators to copy the model of the half day English program with employment of NESTs. A school of course, is only as successful as its staff, and the foreign teachers were a diverse group who brought their own sensibilities to this exemplar school that thousands admired.
CHAPTER IV. CAST OF CHARACTERS

Because of my large numbers of participants, the following section introduces the many NESTs and non-NEST foreign teachers you will become acquainted with as you read this study. The purpose of this section, in which I introduce the key participants in alphabetical order, followed by a brief introduction to key Chinese personnel at Ming, is to orient the reader to the different individuals, their voices, relationships, and stories within the context of the research. However, the features and experiences of the participants are intentionally misplaced in order to hide their identities.

Dan, white, male, monolingual, born in an English Five country, married to a Chinese woman. He loves sports and plays on a local American football team. He graduated from a large public research university, and majored in Conflict Resolution. His first job in China was to teach in a preschool in a nearby city. Soon he found the job at Ming, and then moved to Shagang. It was his fifth year of working at Ming as a classroom teacher.

According to Susan, his Chinese colleagues, and himself, Dan used to have quite difficult and tense relationships with Chinese teachers and administrators, but this year was different. He was working with, according to him, "the best Ming teacher," a laurel that he gave his Chinese co-worker. He liked working with her, because "she just gets it" when he needed help managing the classroom. He noted that, "She is different from the other teachers (he used to work with). She follows the rules and sticks to them, but she is not like cold and indifferent to kids. She loves them" (Interview, June 20, 2016). Although he did not like working with the head teacher from the other class because she could be "lazy" when it came to behavior management, he enjoyed the help of the assistant teacher he was now working.
Susan, his previous boss, said Dan was listed as one of those "on the edge to be laid off" (interview, June 25, 2016 ) a couple of times, but every time he was saved either because someone left, or she could not find a teacher to replace him. Dan noted that he, "hated working for a school like this," and called Susan a "rogue."

Eric, white, male, monolingual, born in one of the English Five countries. Eric graduated from a public university with a Master’s degree, majoring in Geography.

He was an electronic engineer, and worked as a project manager for electronic projects, but he had zero teaching experience before he came to China. Facing a challenging job market in the US, his wife and he decided to move to Shagang where his wife had connections. He took a job at Ming because his friends recommended that “the school was the best you could have here.” It was his second year at Ming.

Eric was the very first one Julie recommended for my study, because “he is very nice and sweet. He is a real gentleman. He will say yes to the study.” He was also popular among Chinese teachers because “he is easy to work with”, “he is gentle and nice,” and “he never loses his temper” (Note, June 10, 2016). Many Chinese teachers do not know most of the English teachers, especially their names (because English names are elusive to Chinese speakers), but everyone knows about the "nice gentleman" "the good-looking guy" Eric.

Even the school's chief spoke highly of him, calling him "the foreign teacher with the best manners." His class was the one frequently selected for public observations and access, and he was considered one of the best teachers at Ming, according to Julie and Susan. However, he quit his job and left Ming at the end of the school year and research due to a disputable fine that he received from the Chinese administration.

Eli, white, male, born in a non-English Five country. He and his family immigrated to an English Five country when he was young. He grew up in the country, and he spoke native-
like heritage language and English. He studied and graduated from two universities, one in the U.S., and another in Finland, majoring in French and History. He began his new teaching career at Ming three days after he landed at Shagang in 2013. Before that, he had done a few jobs, such as bartender, sales, receptionist, and team leader in a grocery store.

Eli has a good reputation in the Chinese community. Susan described him as a "hard worker," "a good teacher," and "a nice person" (Interview with Susan, June 25, 2016). His Chinese co-workers felt very lucky to work with him, because "he loves kids and cares about them a lot, and he works so hard." Lora, the vice principal, liked the pictures he took for his kids, and the videos he made for the school. She valued his unique contribution to the school. However, he was not as popular in the office of foreign teachers as he was among the Chinese teachers. He had a several fights with his English-speaking colleagues, and he complained that he was "picked on" and "sometimes excluded" by some of his peers in the office (Interview with Eli, June 27, 2016).

Elsa, white, female, monolingual, born in an English Five country. She graduated from a top-notch university in the country, majoring in International Travel & Tourism Management. After graduation, she had worked as an administrative assistant and bar supervisor in a big city for a few years, but she wanted to go somewhere before settling down. She searched online, and found a job advertisement looking for English teachers in Hong Kong. She got the job, packed her luggage, and moved to Hong Kong, with absolutely no idea what that place was. She even left her bikinis at home because she did not know Hong Kong was a tropical seaside city. It turned out Hong Kong was a crowded and expensive city, which did not offer much joy for an English teacher who earned a modest income. She decided to move to mainland China, and eventually, she ended up teaching at Ming. She initially worked at Qingshan You'er yuan, a small branch school of Ming in an urban-rural conjunction area in
Shagang. She loved working there, because "it was a nice, friendly and cohesive community, with Chinese and English teachers working together" (Interview with Elsa, June 19, 2016).

Unfortunately, she had to leave two years later for personal reasons. After a year-long break at home, she wanted to go back to Qingshan and continue to work there, even if as a new teacher with a lower starting salary. Unfortunately, she flew all the way from her home country to Shagang only to find out that she had been reallocated to the main campus. She was very disappointed at the time. However, she soon found a new life at the main campus, and now she did not want to go back to the branch school.

She was quiet and friendly. Chinese administrators rarely talked about her. Most Chinese teachers did not know who she was except for the ones worked with her, but those who worked with her spoke highly of her work ethic. When asked about her teaching, Chinese administrators said she was doing well, but nothing special, and so did her Chinese co-workers. She never had troubles with anyone, and she got along well with everyone in the office. She has close friends in the office, and she hung out with them a lot.

Grace, female, born and grew up in an Asian non-English Five country. Her family used to run an Singaporean food restaurant, but the business folded last year, and her husband had to go back to their home country. Although she spent most of life in two Asian countries, her first language was English, and she talked with her sons and daughter in English. She also spoke her heritage language, Indonesian, French and mediocre Chinese.

Grace was considered as one of the senior English teachers because she had worked at the school for more than seven years. She was awarded "the Teacher of the Year" a few times by the school and the company. The principals honored her contribution to the school and trusted her teaching quality. Her classes have been selected for public observations and shadowing a few times. Every Chinese teacher knows about Grace because of her amazing
handmade wall decorations, and every classroom where she put a handmade story on the display board had never changed because "it was too beautiful to tear down." Chinese teachers often found her nagging a lot, but they were happy about working with her, because she worked hard, had an almost perfect attendance record, and rarely missed work time. In the English teachers' office, she received attention when she brought her handmade cakes, but other than that, she was not involved much in the after-work social life and office politics of the other foreign teachers.

Joy, white\(^3\), female, born in a southeast European country. She graduated from a privileged university in Serbia with a master's degree, majoring in Language, Culture, and Literature. After graduation, she became a music teacher, teaching guitar to middle school aged students in her home country, and later teaching elementary students. She had traveled to a couple of places before she came to China. She had lived in New York, and explored Japan, and eventually, she landed on a job of an English teacher in Guangdong province, China. She also worked in a hotel for a short period before she became a teacher at Ming.

Joy was passionate about teaching, and she would spend hours preparing materials and lesson plans. She was also a reflective thinker. She would ask questions about education, and when she found ideas she liked, she would not hesitate to implement them in her classes. She had a nice and close relationship with her Chinese assistant teacher. When asked about team collaboration, both her Chinese teacher and she seemed quite happy and content about working with each other. They called each other "more than colleagues" and "great friends."

She was actively involved in the office, seeking leadership roles. When two administrative positions of team leader became available, she was promoted to be a team leader of the four

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\(^3\) Joy is a phenotypically white girl who was born in a southeast European country. Though in the U.S. she may not have been identified as socio-politically ‘White’ due to her Eastern European ethnic background, in China people have a hard time differentiating among different ethnicities of ‘white’ people. They treat all phenotypically white people as White, including Russians, Serbians, etc.
to the six-year-olds class group.

Lola, white, female, monolingual, born in Canada. She graduated from a prestigious university in Canada, majoring in education. She later continued her education with a Graduate Certificate of Education with a concentration in early childhood teaching. Before coming to China, She had worked as a classroom teacher in childcare centers and elementary schools for more than 15 years, and as a deputy principal for five years. She was an experienced teacher and administrator. She came to Shagang because her family moved there from Canada for a job.

Lola was new to the school. She was hired as a classroom teacher just a couple of weeks before I came back. She started the job shadowing selected English teachers and helping in their classes. She was very knowledgeable when it came to teaching and education. You could tell from the professional terms she used in her conversations and the way she interacted with children and co-workers that she was a professional and expert in education. She had been critical, and sometimes even upset, at what she had seen, heard, and gone through at Ming. We clicked from the moment we met each other, primarily because we shared similar educational backgrounds and beliefs. Upon her request, she was later promoted to be the curriculum consultant whose job was to organize and develop curriculum resources, assist the office manager, and help teachers in classes.

She is friendly, amiable, reliable and passionate. Although she had a couple of fights with teachers in the office over professional versus unprofessional behaviors, she got well along with them. She quickly blended in to the social circle of the NESTs, and regularly hung out with a small group of them.

May, Chinese-Australian, female, born in Shagang. She immigrated to Australia in adulthood, and became a naturalized Australian citizen. She has a three-year college degree
in a non-education major. Her first language was Chinese, and she spoke fluent English. She was a certified Australian early childhood teacher, and she had some experiences of teaching in a childcare center in Australia before she came back to China. Both her husband and she are Shagang locals.

May and the Ming school had quite a history. The first time Ming hired her was in 2009, as a Chinese head teacher. She was assigned a new toddler class in September, and she resigned the job in October because there was so much pressure she could not sleep at night. Feeling frustrated and disappointed, she went back to Australia, and did a community college degree in early childhood education. She came back in 2012, but this time she applied for the English teaching position as a foreign teacher.

In the past five years at Ming, she has only taught baby and toddler classes, and she has never looped up with her classes as the other English teachers do. It was because of her Chinese looks and inferiority in speaking English as a second language that the Chinese administrators positioned her in baby and toddler classes in which "parents usually care more about daily care than academic learning” (Interview with May, June 20, 2016). She has only worked with Chinese team leaders of class groups, who were considered "more capable of" handling parents' complaints than "regular" head teachers, because she "always needed a strong Chinese partner for her Chinese looks" according to Susan.

She was another teacher that Julie recommended for my project, because she always wanted to learn more about teaching young children, and she would spend a lot of time on working and learning after work, which made her different from the others. She is diligent and very serious about her job. She was always at her desk over lunch break, preparing for her classes while others were gone for fun or break. However, she was similar to Grace: a hard worker, but rarely involved in the office's social circle and politics. With strong support
from the Chinese administration, she was promoted to be the assistant to the office manager at the end of the research.

Max, white, male, monolingual, born in Australia. He graduated from a prestigious public university with a long history in Australia, majoring in Sociology. After graduation, he came to China and worked at a provincial capital city in his Chinese friend's English learning center, where he worked with young children in small groups. He did not volunteer to join the research project at the beginning, but a couple of weeks after my recruitment presentation, he messaged me to participate. He was quite honest with his motivation to join in the research in the message: he was having such an intensely difficult relationship with his boss that he was afraid that he was going to lose the job, and was hoping the research project, and I, would help him in some way.

According to his boss, he had punctuality issues, always asked for sick leave, refused to collaborate with administrators, and his teaching strategies were "questionable." He was right about his job status. However, "tardiness" and "rebellious" would be the last words you would use to describe him if you had met him. He is quiet, but his humor would crack you up when he says something. He was friendly, and gentle with children. He was polite to colleagues. He seemed very busy every day. He rushed into the office in the morning, sometimes even late, running upstairs with a cup of coffee in hand. He clicked off on time, sometimes a few minutes early. He indeed had the most days of sick leave in the office.

He plays guitar, and he was in a band with a colleague in the office. He hung out with people in the office after work, but no one really knew what was going on in his private life. He rarely voiced his opinions during meetings and public occasions.

Ray, white, male, born in Australia. He speaks English and proficient Chinese. He had taught at Ming for two years before I returned, but he only did only one interview for the
project, because he quit the job right after the research had begun.

Zara, female, born in Russia. Russian is her first language, and she speaks proficient English. She had taught in a childcare center in China for a few years before she came to Ming. She was originally hired for a different school which had a contract with Ming for recruiting and training English teachers, but the school was sold before it opened. One of Ming’s teacher left, and so she stayed to replace him.

She is tall and skinny. She was called “the beautiful one” by Chinese teachers. It was rumored that she was hired because she was pretty. Susan admitted in a conversation with me that “being pretty was one of the reasons that she was considered for the job” (Note, 11.23, 2016). She started the job with teaching two classes, a new three-year-old class, and a kindergarten level class. With two classes at different levels and one big kindergarten class, she struggled a lot with classroom management and teaching strategies. She also had quite a difficult relationship with Chinese teachers in her classes. She dropped out the project in the middle, and by the conclusion of the research study at the end of the school year, Zara had quit her job, because her husband’s project was relocated to Indonesia, and she had to move with him.

In addition, there will other ‘characters’ we will run into in the dissertation, local Chinese administrators: 1. Julie, the principal of Ming and the general principals of all Ming campuses, had been a principal of a local public preschool and kindergarten before she was employed by Ming Estate Co., Ltd. ten years ago. She does not speak English at all. 2. Susan had been the manager of foreign teachers since Ming started. She had worked for Julie as an English teacher for years at the public preschool and kindergarten before she came to Ming. She was later promoted to be the vice principal of Human Resources, which was also the reason that I was appointed to her position. Susan speaks fluent English. 3. Frank, the vice
principal of logistics, was in charge of the school’s logistics, teachers with teaching specialties, and nursery teachers. She was also part of Julie’s administration team at the previous school. She was the most controversial principal among foreign teachers, and you could often hear foreign teachers joking about her and associate her name with “being rude” or “dictator.” 4. Lora, the vice principal of teaching, had been a principal of a private preschool and kindergarten in a different city before she was hired. She was the very first employee of Ming school, even before Julie, and so she was involved in the design of the school’s architecture and curriculum.
CHAPTER V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Definition of Culture

What is culture? How do we engage across and between varying cultures? These questions are at the very heart of this study, and the dynamics it explores. Establishing a working definition of culture for this project is an essential first step in articulating my theoretical framework, given the myriad ways culture has been defined from myriad perspectives, intellectual lineages, and purposes. From categorical summary definitions to critical cultural studies, culture is a fluid concept that evolved along with the history of human society, and thousands of scholars have tried to define it from multiple disciplines. Essentially, “culture is a moving target” (Baldwin, Faulkner & Hecht, 2006, p.3), an elusive concept that has constantly been defined and redefined. In what follows, I will detail an intellectual history of the term, so as to situate the framework in which this study operates.

In the book Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) categorized definitions of culture into six groups, and in each group displayed dozens of citations in detail with comments. Tylor’s (1870) original definition, as quoted numberless times, was collected in the book as well, “culture… is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 81). This sort of definition is wide-spread, and is in line with the sort of superficial definition one finds in, for instance, the Merriam-Webster dictionary, which notes that, "culture is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; and the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time." Though the
elements may vary, all these definitions view and portrait culture as a collection of essentially static social traits that are shared and carried by a certain group of people.

The logic of treating culture as a collection of characteristics leads to an effort of “locating” these characteristics separately in cultures, races, origins, and contexts, which generates the hypothesis of cultural differences (Chua, 2011; Li, 2012). For example, many studies support the notion that cultural differences exist between Westerners and East Asians as if the collection of cultural characteristics exist independently of the people in the culture. It was often believed that the West appreciates analytic thought, the use of formal logic, individualism, and autonomy, while East Asians, heavily influenced by Confucianism, are more dialectical, holistic, and prefer collectivism and harmony. For another example, in the book *Cultural Foundations of Learning, East and West*, Li (2012) argued that the different cultural models of Western and East Asian philosophy shaped fundamentally different cultural orientations and processes of learning. Western cultural learners are expected and encouraged to be curious, playful, active, mind-oriented and expressive, with a strong motivation to inquire into the world. In contrast, Chinese culture sees learning as an industrious process of continuous hard work with an ultimate end of self-perfection and virtue. I am not arguing that these cultural traits that defined by ethnicity, as Rogoff (2003) pointed out, “These categories (of cultural characteristics) have long-standing influences on the cultural practices in which people have the opportunity to participate, often yielding shared circumstances, practices, and beliefs that play important and varied roles for group members” (p. 21). What I am arguing is that the idea of this sort of holistic, static categorization of entire cultural contexts is problematic in a way that it results in a superficial, static, uncomplicated and deterministic understandings of a cultural community and its individuals. Some scholars believed that the danger of treating culture as a category of
collective features and a descriptive definition was that such overgeneralization essentializes people of other cultures based on these categories (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, 2003). Importantly, it also legitimizes the normalization of the dominant cultures, undervalues cultural-historical heritage and dynamism of minority cultural groups, and ignores the variability that exists within groups and individuals (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Rogoff (2003) criticized the approach of teaching based on different, labeled learning styles, noting that “treating cultural differences as individual traits encourages overgeneralization” (p. 20). Further, both Gutierrez and Rogoff have critiqued the assertion that minority students could or should be taught in certain ways based on their cultural identity, noting that as with learning styles, such an approach diminishes students, and wrongly supposes that cultural traits could be associated with individual biological traits. Rather, building on Vygotskyian scholarship (Vygotsky, 1978), Rogoff proposed a shift from the categorical definition/understanding of culture, and to a cultural-historical approach, viewing culture as a dynamic concept of participation, situated in the particular practices of cultural communities. This perspective of understanding culture ceased to see culture as something static, and rather, culture is conceived as a concept that constantly changes and evolves; a participatory process through which individuals contribute to the culture, shaping it, while the practices of that culture shape individuals. Culture thus does not exist independently of individuals, but it is created and maintained by them. Rogoff's definition of culture is categorized as a process definition (Baldwin et al., 2006), with “a focus on change, development, practices, and procedures—how culture operates” (p. 57). Here, practices refer to the “creation of meanings, social relations, products, structures, and functions.” In this way, culture becomes “an active creation of a group of people” (p.40). Therefore, to understand a culture is to examine it longitudinally and historically in context, examining the ways people in that setting have
created and shaped practices meaningful to them based on events in their history, how these practices have shaped them, and how both the practices and the people continue to grow, evolve, and change.

Building from this view of culture, an important historical element to be aware of in examining culture is power and ideology. If we understand culture as produced by groups of individuals, then one must also recognize how it can become a framework for reproducing inequalities. Essentially, existing and historical power relations in culture reproduce themselves, and culture becomes embedded with symbolic forms of privilege that some groups of people hold, while marginalizing others (Baldwin et al., 2006). Significantly, because culture is seen as what surrounds us (Bronfenbrenner, 2009), these patterns of privilege, bias, and marginalization quickly become invisible to most casual observers, thus further reproducing their unequal relations with ease. For example, in a study on immigrant youth, Bejarano (2007) examined youths of Mexican descent and their identity seeking process, and found that the culture of colonialism, which perpetuated American history, was reflected in these youths’ social stratification, with white Anglo students at the top, America-born Mexican-descendant youth in the middle, and first generation, Mexican-born immigrants at the bottom. It revealed that the dominant culture of whiteness became the power that alienized and marginalized subordinate cultures of students of color, normalizing White values and belief systems while neglecting the lived experiences of students of color. Therefore culture, as a reflection of dominant White ideology, saturated the school setting, and was viewed as a symbolic dynamic that forced and oppressed young Latinos to succumb to internal colonialism, an idea Bhabha (2014) refers to as colonial “mimicry”. Similar ideas of a critical view of culture can be found in myriad studies and theoretical articles (Darder, 2015; Dominguez, 2017; Mignolo, 2009; Paris, 2011) and point towards the importance of
power, ideology and the power of coloniality to understand the NESTs’ paradigms that they bring to the context and the paradigms that they were brought into.

In my study, culture is treated both as process and power. First, culture is a dynamic process that operates on “changes, development, practices, and procedures” (Baldwin, et. al., 2006, p. 57). I adopt a fluid view of culture that considers events, changes, and practices historically, over time, in the culture community, and looks at cultural dynamics horizontally, through investigating the relationships between participants and the environment where they live. Based on Bronfenbrenner’s (2009) bioecological system of human development, the cultural exploration will be examined from four layers Macro-system, Exosystem, Meso-system, and Micro-system. It includes overarching institutions of culture or subculture, social structures at the community level, interrelations and interactions among school, groups and community, and immediate settings that participants live at the school. It holds the promise of extending the understanding of the interacting interpersonal, environmental, and sociopolitical factors involved in complicated intercultural communications, and of increasing the depth of exploration of participants’ cultural ecology. Second, culture is conceived as power; the means through which different cultural groups construct power-laden discourses struggling to legitimize themselves as privileged forms of representation (Baldwin, et. al., 2006). Perspectives of post-colonialism, internal colonialism, and whiteness are integrated into the complex of culture to examine structural, social, and racial discriminations, stereotyping, and differentiations at the school. With this in mind, I turn next to elaborating on this idea of coloniality, and its importance to this study.

Coloniality

Drawing from the notion that coloniality survived the political practice of colonialism of national sovereignty (Quijano, 2000; 2007), coloniality was an important part of the
framework I used to analyze why the NESTs were isolated in the cultural community of Ming, and what contributed to the privileged, yet alienated treatment afforded to them, and to interpret their mentality of interacting with the host cultural environment. Maldonado-Torres (2007) defined coloniality:

Coloniality…refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. (p. 243)

In this study, coloniality is viewed as a multifaceted paradigm, which is drawn from several critical studies. Mignolo (2009) questioned the epistemic privilege of the First World through analyzing the geo-politics of knowledge, who, when, where and why knowledges are constructed. First World scholars have the privilege of “being both in the enunciated and enunciator” (Mignolo, 2009, p8). Yet scholars in the Second and Third World provided resources and data for the First World, only to find out they were gaining nothing for their own ideas of “modernity.” Maldonado-Torres raised the question of racism in knowledge construction, calling for decolonializing and de-colonial knowledge and non-colonial societies. Quijano (2000, 2007) argued the creation of race stemmed from Euro-centric colonialism, and posited a race-based system of hierarchies of the world, which revolve around Euro-centrification and enforce a Eurocentric economy and knowledge production. This system is the survivor of the history of European colonialism and capitalism, and in return reinforces the domination of Euro-centrification as the new world power. Even though the political and geographical colonialism has been eliminated, “the relationship between the European-also called ‘Western’ culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination” (Quijano, 2007, p169). Even though nations are independent, they still are limited by Eurocentric standards: “Globalization = Westernization = Americanization =
McDonaldization” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p6). In this way, as European and American colonial domination consolidate themselves, the cultural complex of “Western” that is equated with modernity and development, continues to be constituted all over the world. This applies to culture as well, since the repressive power of coloniality fell over “the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives…over the resources, patterns and instruments of formalized and objectivized expression…” (Quijano, 2007, p. 169). It was followed by imposition of “use of the rulers’ own patterns of expression” (p. 169) and the imperial cultural patterns, “as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243).

In the context of our study, English language teaching carried with it the power of coloniality, and was wrapped up with Western culture, sweeping the world. In their book, *Why English? Confronting the Hydra*, Bunce, et al. (2016) used the Hydra image from ancient Greek mythology to capture the diversity and means by which English infiltrated and exploited other languages and cultures around the world. In Japan, English legitimized linguistic hierarchies of power, and threatened the Japanese language, and promoted a “global language myth” and “the economic benefit myth” through which English and native English speakers were believed to be superior to non-native English speakers (Kubota & Okuda, 2016). In Hungary and Iceland, the expansion of using English in academia and popular culture constituted a potential threat to the survival of national languages (Bunce, et al., 2016). In South Africa, the spread of English created a “sacred imagined community” of English speakers that subverted the traditional discursive practices and created a “cultural other” (Bhatt, 2010). In Hong Kong, English has become such an important element of social and cultural capital that the local government received insurmountable resistance when it tried to switch from English to Chinese medium of instruction in 24 schools that did not
qualify for English instruction (Chan, 2002). Thousands of students and parents signed petitions, held press conferences, launched campaigns, and protested, hoping to prevent their schools from turning to Chinese instruction. One student protested, “I was proud when I wore my school uniform before (changing to Chinese instruction), but now I can’t even hold my head up when I walk in the streets” (Chan, 2002, p278). It became shameful and dishonored to learn through their mother tongue. In mainland China, English, promoted by the Chinese government with the collusion of Chinese elites, became “the servant of imperialism” (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016, p. 243). English was identified with modernity and a better life. Everything Western, from political regime to drinks like Coke and Starbucks Coffee, was attractive and superior. Such an imagined sacred Western ideal was infiltrating and corrupting Chinese culture and “slaughtering Chinese language” (p. 249).

The constitution of Eurocentric colonial power resulted in a violent concentration of the world’s resources under the control and for the benefit of First World countries, which largely marginalized and disempowered the Second and Third World “subaltern”. Their languages and cultures were placed in an inferior and subordinate position, even within their own territories, and among their own people. As a result, they were losing more than simply economic resources to the First world. The epistemic violence of imperialism confiscated the subaltern’s knowledge products for Western purposes. The imagined scared Western values and culture deprived contexts of domestic cultural diversity. English, as the new form of warships and weapons, was ordained by the colonial power, and became a psychic means to dominate through promises of advanced civilization and prosperity. English was worshiped and promoted by national policies issued by governments of non-English speaking countries (Chan, 2002; Gao & Rapatahana, 2016; Kubota & Okuda, 2016). In China, English was set up as a major subject to be tested in college entrance examinations, a mandatory course since
third grade, and an essential qualification for professors, teachers, scientists, and many other professionals (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016). English was also equated with upward mobility. People who “owned” this tool were endowed with social, economic, and cultural capital, and became the “native informant” (Kapoor, 2004, p. 631) to colonial powers, who reinforced colonial power by projecting Western development trajectories onto the ‘subaltern’. This framework of coloniality is ideal for the analysis of NESTs, because it provides a rich matrix for describing the cultural and historical background, and the broad contours of intercultural interaction, that NESTs are situated in. It also helps us understand the nexus of the phenomenon revolving around NESTs teaching English in China, and the reasons for the trajectories their process of acculturation take.

The framework of coloniality is also helpful for understanding how race relations and the social concept of whiteness play out in the discourse of globalization (of which NESTs are a part), specifically in the globalization tool of English language. In Quijano’s structural system of coloniality, “the old ideas of superiority of the dominant, and the inferiority of dominated under European colonialism were mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior” (Quijano, 2007, p. 171). Thus the new world was imposed on a “racial criteria” in which inferiority and superiority were ascribed based on phenotypes and skin colors. Whiteness, like English language, as a privileged signifier has been globalized, as Leonardo (2002) states:

As whiteness becomes globalized, white domination begins to transcend national boundaries. Without suggesting the end of nations or their decreased significance for racial theory, multinational whiteness has developed into a formidable global force in its attempt to control and transform into its own image almost every nook and cranny of the earth (p. 32).

While fundamentally important to understand the close relationship that exists among globalization, racial dynamics, and English language teaching (Motha, 2014), there has not
been a pronounced attempt to integrate the discourse of NESTs teaching with the critical pedagogy of whiteness. Thus, the framework of coloniality serves as an important analytical aperture for us to view how the host cultural environment accommodates NESTs who actively or passively negotiate acculturation, and how this partial dynamic of power influences the process of acculturation.

**The Framework in Practice**

As noted, the problem of this study is the cultural isolation of NESTs that alienates them from the local education community, prohibits them from understanding Chinese culture, and lives of the Chinese children and the other members in the community, and thus deprives them of the capability of providing culturally responsive and meaningful teaching for young children whose culture is different from their own. With this in mind, sociocultural theories can help us to explain how social, cultural, and historical contexts and influences shape human social endeavors and generate praxis, and what it is NESTs need to learn, do, and understand.

Cultural-historical activity theory understands that human activity is always contextually, socially, and historically situated (Wertsch, 1986, 1991; Cole & Engeström, 1993, 2007), and that learning is mediated by the subject’s interaction with different tools, artifacts, rules, community structures, divisions of labor, and other cultural and historical influences as they work towards an object of learning (Engeström, 1987; Rogoff, 2003). As shown in Figure 1, these elements represent specific contributing factors of human activity, and constitute an activity system (Domínguez, 2015).

*Figure 1. Activity System*
In our case, as shown in Table 1, the current activity system of NESTs is situated in an English enclave of NESTs themselves. In this system, the subject, the NESTs, work toward the object of teaching that is traditionally and historically framed as teaching Chinese children to memorize English words in a shallow way. They learn through interactions with the isolated NESTs community, and mediating artifacts of practical knowledge from working at current and previous Chinese schools, and their own personal educational experiences in their home countries. These interactions are guided by the rules of the NESTs community, which is the English enclave, and its deep roots in White, Western Anglo-Saxon culture.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Present Activity System for NESTs (based on literature review &amp; researcher’s personal experience)</th>
<th>Activity System of Proposed PD Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NESTs</td>
<td>Teach as traditionally framed; rote memorization of English words</td>
<td>Changes in cultural dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESTs</td>
<td>Participation in the cultural learning community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Rules</strong></th>
<th>Self-defined rules by NESTs themselves</th>
<th>Deep-seated rules characteristic to the local Chinese community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>The English enclave of NESTs</td>
<td>Chinese teachers, children, parents and administrators, and NESTs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Division of Labor</strong></td>
<td>Teach by themselves</td>
<td>Shared participation; building up a learning community; team collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What I hoped to achieve through the enculturation project (the professional development intervention around which the study was organized) was to establish a new activity system for the NESTs that produces culturally responsive patterns of activity. The subjects in this system were once again the NESTs, and their engagement in the activity focused towards an object of change in cultural dispositions. The tools, such as documents, processes, reflections, team collaboration and participation in the cultural learning community, would allow the NESTs to communicate and share professional knowledge and skills among themselves and with the Chinese educators in order to achieve the goal. The division of labor were the shared participation responsibilities in the activity decided by the cultural learning community, and the rule of the community, including Chinese educators, children, parents and NESTs, would regulate the learning objectives. These interactions, constantly occurring in the activity system, would demonstrate the process of cultural and social factors mediating development and learning embedded in the community.

In engaging this study, I specifically draw most directly on sociocultural and CHAT theory as it is conceptualized by Rogoff (1994, 1997). She believes that learning is a process of transformation through participation, and keen observation of cultural norms, patterns, and expectations. Rogoff emphasizes that human development is “a process of people’s changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 47). From her
perspective, people learn as they participate and involve themselves in local cultural activities. Meanwhile, individuals inherit the historical practices from the others in a learning community (or activity system), and contribute to the activities in the community. She criticizes the ‘assembly line’ learning model that sees learning as a mechanism of information transmission, and proposes to view learning as in the above activity system model: a dynamic, collaborative process of transformation of participation that focuses on peoples’ inherent changes in understanding as they becoming a part of a contextual, cultural, and historical community. Furthermore, Rogoff offers three interdependent “planes of analysis” through which to make sense of human activity and learning, and to understand development, these being, “[1] the role of individuals, [2] interpersonal relations, and [3] community activities” (Rogoff, 1997, p. 267). Through such an analysis, I will be able to examine the NESTs’ engagement in the community, cultural disposition evolution, and the process of cultural acclimation to and against the local and cultural context.

With this in mind, my Professional Development (PD) became a formative intervention (Engeström, 2011) based on these theoretical lenses. In the PD, I encouraged NESTs pedagogical and cultural learning by involving them in the cultural practices of the Chinese educators, and in the cultural learning community of the broader Ming school, as detailed in Table 1 above. In this community, learning was treated as a collaborative activity, with natural engagement shared among the Chinese teachers and the NESTs participants, and learning viewed as a process of ‘transformation through their participation’ in new, culturally embedded activities with Chinese communities and teachers. Additionally, learning was considered an authentic experience that would break the figment of the imagination of race, gain a real understanding of each other, and thus disrupt the power of coloniality.
CHAPTER VI. METHODS & REFINED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Purpose and Refined Research Questions

As stated, the purpose of this study is to understand a cultural group of NESTs at a Chinese preschool and kindergarten and explore the influences of the project of enculturation on their ideas and praxis about teaching young children, in order to provide insights into professional development for NESTs in China. This study aims to answer two questions:

- How does a group of NESTs interact with the host cultural community at a Chinese early childhood education setting?
- In what ways does the project of acculturation influence NESTs ideas and praxis about how they can teach young Chinese children?

This being said, as the research unfolded, my initial goals around the PD were expanded to include a much broader, ethnographic perspective and scope -- understanding and describing the complex cultural and social dynamics around NESTs cultural dissonance in China. This perspective was vital to understand the social group of NESTs which was culturally, contextually and historically defined, as well as the dynamics between them and the Chinese cultural community that they situate in against the background of globalization and power of coloniality. Therefore, it raised an additional question:

- In what ways are cultural dissonance, tension, and coloniality present in the lived experiences of NESTs and their host communities in Chinese educational settings?

My History with Ming and NESTs

Before beginning my doctoral studies, I worked for the Ming school for more than four years, during which time I shared an office with 16 foreign teachers, including a majority of
NESTs. I also served as the curriculum supervisor for the Chinese teachers, but their teaching was separately supervised by the Foreign Teachers’ Office. While I occasionally participated in their teaching discussions, such as teaching demonstrations or training workshops provided by professionals outside of the school, I was more of an outsider who got to closely watch and observe their lives at the school. My relationships with the NESTs had remained personal throughout my career and life at the school, and we were more friends than colleagues. However, it was because of the experience of witnessing the NESTs’ negotiating and struggling with the local culture and educational community that I grew to be passionate about digging more into their beliefs and responses to cultural difference.

When I had just started my job at Ming, I worked as their assistant, helping out with translation, visa paperwork, and running errands for the foreign teachers’ office. I quickly acclimated to the office climate and became a friend to many of them. They were young like me, with most of them in their 20s. Their backgrounds were largely diverse (as is the case with our participants). Most of them held Associate’s, Bachelor’s, or Master’s degrees, but only one of them had a Bachelor’s degree in early childhood education, similar to the status of teaching credentials the participants have four years later. These largely varied educational and cultural backgrounds had adverse effects on work-team performance and collegial collaboration. Not only was everyone different from each other, but all of the NESTs had teaching values and beliefs contradictory to those of the Chinese pedagogy situated in the local context. Professional and cultural training was also an issue, because neither the Chinese administrative team, nor the Chinese professional community, had any experiences working with overseas employees. Conflicts seemed ceaseless. Their relationship with local teachers could be very tense and difficult sometimes. Stories about their fights and quarrels with Chinese educators in public places, and vicious cursing, were flying around the school.
It was because of these problems that I decided to develop a professional development intervention to bridge the cultures between NESTs and the community they work in. I deeply believe that the solution to this cultural dissonance lies in the hands of NESTs themselves, with support and help from the local education community. My connection with the school helped me gain deep insights that an outsider would not even find possible to comprehend in a short time. Four years of studying in the U.S. for a PhD deepened my understanding of cross-cultural communication in a school setting and teacher education, and gave me a new perspective to look at the issues I experienced at the school. Together with my “cultural intuition” as a Chinese educator, and the year of working with them in the same office, I centered the NESTs’ experiences at the forefront of this work through examining their daily life at school, and their interactions with the local community.

**Research Access**

When I proposed the research to her, Julie, the principal, enthusiastically agreed and quickly signed the research consent. However, the difficulties involved in getting access to the office and recruiting participants were unexpected. I was initially assigned to a seat in the Human Resources Office, which was far from the foreign teachers’ office, as I was helping Julie with grant writing and other official documents. It was not clear what my job was, but it was initially agreed I would assist the vice principal of teaching. I explained my research in details to the principals and Susan, the manager of foreign teachers’ office, and asked for suggestions about how to approach NESTs. Susan was disgruntled, complaining that it was not the original plan that she had agreed to which had involved developing curriculum resources through the project. She was very disappointed that the research was about something called acculturation, with the word culture in it, claiming that she did not need anything cultural because most of her teachers were “well acculturated.” She gave me a few
examples, and the very first one was about Jack.

My teachers, many of them are very Chinese. They married Chinese wives, eat Chinese food, and know a lot about Chinese culture. Jack is a great teacher. When he just started, he was not happy about the school at all. He complained a lot and did not like teaching young children, but now Jack is my favorite teacher. I was so touched by what he has done. See, a lot of kids here are scared of tattoos and parents have stereotypes against people who have tattoos, but Jack has tattoos all over his upper body. I asked him to wear a long sleeve T-shirt to cover them, and so he had to put a short sleeve T-shirt on top of the shirt make him look summer enough. I really appreciated Jack’s understanding of my work, and I was touched that Jack was willing to wear two layers of clothes in summer at this hot and humid tropical city to cover something considered inappropriate in Chinese culture. To me, this is acculturation (Interview with Susan, June 25, 2016).

During the meeting, no one believed "something cultural" or anything cultural was necessary for the school. Fortunately, they signed the research consent before I came back, and more importantly, Julie believed in me and my idea of doing such a project. With her support, I proceeded with participant recruitment. I talked with a couple of NESTs recommended by Julie, and collected their feedback on the project. There were a few critical tips they shared about working with NESTs: First, any demands of extra work hours without payment would not be possible, and so completing all activities during work hours or over lunch breaks would be necessary; second, offer translation service because the language barrier was a problem for many foreign teachers; third, making the benefits and drawbacks clear because the Chinese way of being indirect did not work well with foreigners; fourth, make the project enticing by offering to help them with communication, because many of them were experiencing frustrations and stresses because they were usually left in the dark concerning school decisions. Accordingly, I revised my recruitment plan, eliminated after-work hours, reallocated activities, adding translation services and details about benefits with an emphasis on information transparency. Later on, I made an official recruitment announcement at the end of a ritual Friday meeting, and distributed participation consent. Altogether 11 out of 16 foreign teachers signed the permission, which was a great success.
that I did not expect. At the same time, however, I was cognizant that these teachers had been wanting for changes and help for a long time, which was quite contradictory to what the Chinese administrators had perceived and described.

After the recruitment, I requested a few class observations and sat in their classrooms for an hour or two with their permission. I spent time in their office, making small talks with them, and eating with them at the designated “western” area in the faculty/staff dining room. All these efforts made me realize that the office was the center of NESTs’ school life, and having access to the center was essential to my research. I repeatedly asked and implored Susan to allow me to sit in the spare cubicle in their office, but I was denied each time. Feeling frustrated, I tried just to stop by their office more often to hang out. After slowly establishing my presence in the office, I began to ask them to hang out for ice cream or a milkshake at places nearby. When I felt the ice was broken, I would ask for an interview with semi-structured questions. For a couple of participants who did not have time for going out, I did individual interviews with them in private at the school when they were free. I concentrated my efforts on getting to know their traveling experiences, backgrounds, and their thoughts on positives and challenges of working as an English teacher at Ming. It was a successful strategy, and many of them treated me as their friend, complaining about their bosses, venting frustration over the school, and occasionally gossiping about the NESTs community. Once they opened up, they did not hesitate to share their sorrows, joys, and mostly dissatisfactions about working at the school, which made the interviews last more than an hour.

Everything went smoothly until an administration order from Julie that abruptly changed the situation. It all started with a talk with Julie.

In Julie's office. When I was just about to finish my report to her, she asked what my plan would be for the next year, and if I am committed to staying here to work for her. I,
shocked, managed not to show it, and then answered, “for now, there is 90% chance we are going to stay in China.” I added, “the main goal for me this year is to finish the dissertation and at the same time, improve English curriculum.” I wanted to ensure her my contribution to the school. She seemed happy with the answer, and she explained, “if you are committed to staying, I will reshuffle the school executives.” I had no idea what she was talking about. When I was scratching my head trying to figure out the response, she was called out for a meeting.

A couple of weeks later, a change in Susan’s position completely altered the dynamics of the research and my role as a researcher:

It was late afternoon. I was in the office typing. Susan walked out of Julie’s office, and I could see through the office window that she and Julie just had a long and private conversation. She came into my office, looking a bit excited and anxious, and asked, “you said you wanted a desk in the foreign teachers’ office?” I answered, confused, “yes?” Susan, “now you are gonna have the entire office.” All at once I tumbled to what she meant, “what? No, no, no, Susan. I do not know anything about the office. I can't be their boss. Besides, it will ruin my dissertation.” Susan, “no, you worked in the office before, and you have lived in the US. You know more about them than I do.” Neither of us wanted to yield. We were at loggerheads when Julie came in, and she invited both us to her office. She explained that I would be a better fit for the management position of the foreign teachers’ office, because I have lived in the US for a long time and I know them well enough to manage them. Susan got a promotion, and she would be the vice principal of Human Resources for her contribution to the school. Being puzzled why Julie did not ask me first, I turned it down right away and explained that it was not in our initial agreement, and it could potentially ruin my dissertation. I expressed appreciation for the offer, but insisted, “I am afraid that I am not qualified for such a position.” Julie thought I was just being modesty, and so tried to convince me, “You won't have a problem with it at all. I know you enough to know that, and I am sure it will be an easy piece for you.” Again, I said no. Realizing that I meant not to take the job, she became a little angry, and sounded unpleasant, “You used to be confident, but now why you are acting like this. A few years of studying in America turned you into a coward?” I was intimidated because she has never said anything so harsh to me before. I sensed a signal of anger and pressure. After an awkward silence, I gave up and said yes with a droned voice. It happened only four days away from the fall semester started.

Soon the school made the reassignment official with a stamped document and the announcement at a school-wide meeting. Like it or not, I became the boss of 22 foreign teachers. The abrupt appointment changed my relationships with the NESTs, and consequently, I had to shift from the formative intervention, design research approach I was taking, to an ethnography that allowed me to maintain the professional distance needed for my new position, while also collecting meaningful data.
Ethnographic Study

Within the context of my new role, I now intended to do an ethnographic study (Creswell, 2009) that would still involve a formative intervention (Engeström, 2011). Over the initial three-month period of study, I had attempted to practice more of an observer's style of approaching the participants, being a non-threatening friend, a detached observer, and a humble learner about their life and profession. During this period, I introduced the research to all foreign and Chinese teachers and the Chinese administrators, recruited participants, and completed the first round of interviews and class observations.

However, the reassignment altered my positionality and endangered the equilibrium of my relationship with the participants, which certainly affected the research setting and potentially the research results. I was suddenly placed at the center of attention, and people were on the fence about what this new boss would do after eight years of “Susan's regime.” As an authority figure, I could no longer focus on the formative intervention, because now this research activity would be construed as compulsory, and evaluative, rather than as un-coerced, meaningful research. That said, I was obviously expected to do something new and different because otherwise there was no reason to put a Ph.D. student who was committed to returning to the US in a managerial position. In order to avoid too many watchful eyes, I postponed the acculturation activities until I learned what the job was about, and the foreign teachers and I adapted to each other. During the three-month transition, I spent a lot of time learning about individual foreign teachers, their teaching practice, and structure and management of the department. This endeavor gave me the chance to listen, read, participate and learn about NESTs personalities, and their everyday life, struggles, and concerns in the profession of teaching young children English in a cross-cultural context. After gradually easing in to the new position, I made a work plan for the department that integrated the
acculturation activities, incorporating the predesigned within-work hours activities as part of “the expected changes” and offering the after-work ones only for the research participants. This enabled me to see the effects of acculturation on a larger scale from multiple perspectives, including the non-participants, as part of ethnographic observation of the entire cultural ecology of foreign teachers at Ming.

In addition, throughout the project I had access to data that an outsider could not possibly imagine: everything from the past eight years was in written records; I was also privy to anything managerial such as the unwritten rules of hiring, the conflicts and tensions everyday between foreign teachers and their Chinese co-workers in 48 classrooms across campuses; daily access to all English classes; teaching practices reported from their Chinese co-workers, interns and Chinese parents; Foreign teachers’ personal life issues that required Chinese administrators’ attention in every aspect of foreign teachers’ professional and personal lives; and a big desk at the bounded corner of the office that has open access to the rest of the office. I was immersed in all kinds of conversations, chit-chat, gossip, office jokes, arguments, quarrels, fights, you name it. As the leader of the department, I also served as a liaison between the Chinese community and the foreign teachers, being informed or involved in most affairs of interdepartmental collaboration, communication, and conflict resolution. This information and experiences were documented in the field notes that I started gathering at the beginning of the research, and the documents, department archives, pictures, meeting records, and other administrative profiles were collected and analyzed, which helped me infuse the ethnographic process with deep insider's insights and a variety of artifacts.

Being a Chinese researcher who had deep connections with the Chinese community endowed me opportunities that exceeded the view of university professors. I was considered “one of our own (自己人).” The Chinese staff shared their true thoughts with me and would
not hide what they really thought about NESTs from me. This attitude was reflected on multiple occasions in my notes. When Julie sensed something problematic going on at the school, she believed I was entitled to know, but warned me not to tell foreign teachers, because “they might use it against us.” When Charlie, a Chinese teacher, had a problem with his English teacher, he came to me to seek help, but insisted I not tell the foreign teacher because he might flip out. In the interviews and focus groups with Chinese administrators and teachers, there were jokes and sensitive comments, calling NESTs by derogatory terms, joking about NESTs’ being unprofessional, and asking me “not to tell.” My relationship with them enriched the quality and richness of the data.

I also established rapport with foreign teachers, especially the NEST participants who were initially interested in working with me on the research project. The social endeavor I had made early on to become their friends and the hours of sharing during the in-depth interviews had paid off. We became friends, and early in my tenure, it was obvious that we were already comfortable with working and talking with each other. I was later invited to their usually NEST friends' exclusive parties, girls nights out, or for lunch hang outs. For the most part, I think the NESTs treated me as a “within outsider” and a special friend who understood them, which was reflected in a few comments in my conversations with NESTs:

Max teachers my son. In the morning I told him that he said nice things about him at home. Max grinned, “That's nice. I am now happy to work here.” I followed up, “What made you happy?” He replied, “I guess it's kind of nice to have a friend of yours be your boss.”

Dan, his friend, and I were having dinner together. He introduced me, and then commented, “She is our boss and my friend. We like her, you know, she knows about us.”

Over time, the NESTs and I have established a trusting relationship, and they believed that I was reliable, honest, willing to listen, and most importantly, capable of understanding their culture. They were accustomed to my presence in their lives in and out of the school.
However, even though I humbled myself in learning about their world, the imbalanced power between us might have posed threats to the data. Some of the participants might have intentionally changed their behaviors as for my presence as the “boss”:

It was Friday night. We were in Shagang Bar (where customers were mainly NESTs), drinking beer and chatting. Having her arm on my shoulder, Becky was telling me a dirty inside joke until Elsa stopped her, “she is our boss. You can’t tell her that.” Becky paused and continued, “Don’t worry about it. She is Xiaohua. She could have some fun.” Elsa was obviously aware of “the special part” of me, even at a drinking party on a Friday night when everybody cut loose.

Realizing the potential risk of the imbalance in power, I resigned from the job six weeks before the research project finished and announced the resignation eight weeks early. The last round of interviews, class observations and focus groups were conducted after the resignation to ensure the NESTs’ confidence in sharing their honest final thoughts with me, without fear of repercussion from the Ming school.

Nonetheless, I had little control over my position in the field. As Glesne & Peshkin (1992) notes, “Research participants often assign the researcher a role in keeping with their own conceptual frameworks” (p. 93). I was identified and referred to by multiple names, “boss lady” “my friend” “a fun girl” “boss friend” “one of us” or even “American Chinese”, and I believe all these roles allowed my access to a variety of information and balanced the costs and benefits of my participation as a “boss friend.” In addition, fortunately, the overall research climate did not change, because the school managerial system, the culture, and tradition that Chinese and foreign teachers were separately managed, remained intact. The NESTs' physical locations, class placement, work schedule, and their teaching pedagogy were maintained when the research took place. Therefore, this intact human habitat largely ensured the likelihood of success of the research.

In addition, being a young Chinese scholar who have academically trained in America, I had been constantly negotiating with myself and others on how much of a Chinese or
Western participant myself to be throughout the research. For the most part, I understood the Chinese and the Western ways of work, and the intentions, motivations and ideologies that were behind them to underpin their culturally varied actions, but I often found myself lost when these two different ways were contradictory, because I had a hard time to differentiate which part of me was Chinese and which American, and decide which perspective I choose to take. A simple example of the different concepts of a school calendar would illustrate the point. Ming school did not have a school calendar with specific dates for calendar events. Instead, they had a calendar with date ranges, like the graduation ceremony was scheduled for the last week of June and the preparation for the ceremony began in the last week of May, which they believed would give them the flexibility for unexpected instances like weather changes or a powerful person’s surprising visits. I understood it, giving the Chinese appreciation of being flexible, but like many Westerners in the office complained, I felt uncomfortable with this kind of vaguely defined flexibility. I could not talk with the principal and ask her to change it, because I understand the importance of this flexibility to her. Nor could I tell the foreign teachers to understand the calendar, because I found myself uncomfortable with using such a calendar that made my work disorganized, constantly disrupted and chaotic. It was undeniable that this tension of balancing my Chinese and American perspectives influenced my presence in the field and the understanding of the dynamics of the intercultural interactions, but also served to enrich my understanding of the community from multiple perspective.

Methods

To complement the ethnographic field notes I collected, I conducted two rounds of in-depth semi-structured interviews with NESTs and Chinese administrators, multiple focus groups with Chinese teachers and interns, and guided class observations.
Interviews: The formal interviews took place during the first two months and the last month of the research, usually through personal appointments over lunch breaks. The initial round of individual interviews aimed to understand their experiences of working at Ming, and how they view these experiences. The second interviews intended to involve the NESTs in self-reflections on what they have experienced and learned through the enculturation project. Both sets of interview questions are listed in Appendix I. I also interviewed on spontaneous occasions, prompted by questions that had been lingering in my head after reviewing an interview, an office incident or just an opinion. For instance, when Lola called understanding of dictatorship. Two Chinese administrators were interviewed, the principal and the previous head of the Foreign Teachers’ Department.

There were also informal interviews across the school year of data collection, which aimed to make clarifications about a participant’s opinion, gain in-depth understanding for a situation or ask for feedback in informal conversations. These interviews were spontaneous, usually happened when I run into the participant or someone who was involved with the participants in a hallway or in the dining room, and lasted less than five minutes. For example, Lola said in multiple occasions that “that’s dictatorship (refer to Chinese administration)” or “she (the principal) is such a dictator.” I was not sure about this “dictatorship” was, and so I asked her when we were eating together one day, “What was this dictatorship you were talking about this morning?”

Focus groups: Two focus group sessions with the NESTs participants’ Chinese co-workers, with each session lasting for about two hours, and one with their intern teachers. All of the focus groups were conducted in a secluded conference room. Many of the Chinese teachers were my friends and previous working partners, and so both sessions were filled with a lot of insider jokes and laughter. They were all eager to participate, venting out the "unfair
treatment” that favored NESTs and the unpleasant experiences of working with NESTs, even though I started with a question that specifically asked about their positive experiences. I had to stop them for a couple of times in order to proceed with the predesigned schedule. The focus group with interns was a bit different in terms of discussion climate. As usual, I started with informing the confidentiality policy and questions about the research, waited and then proceeded with the first question. There was silence, and I had to reinstate the confidentiality rule and nudged them to comment anything they wanted to share. It wasn't until the second question that everyone started jumping in, and after that, they were prompted a couple of times for participation. In general, I believe the occasional silence was the Chinese way of being polite, and they were comfortable and open during the discussions.

*Class observations:* I conducted two rounds of classroom observations with the Social Organization of Learning Protocol Sheet to track the changes of NESTs’ participation in the cultural community over the course of the study. The first round of observations took place in late June and early July in 2016, a month after the research started. The second round was done in the same time frame in 2017. All observations were arranged through appointments which the NESTs picked a time and the class they preferred to be observed because every NEST had two classes. In the case that the NEST was at a supervision position without teaching classes, the observation was waved. Most observations lasted two hours, either in the morning or afternoon during a typical school day. Each observation included typically two group teaching activities, transitions, and snack time.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis was partially done simultaneously with data collection. I regularly reflected on my data through discussions with my advisor and writing research memos, organized them, created new questions, and collected artifacts based on these initial analyses.
However, due to the prolonged time in the setting, the data I have collected was insurmountable so that it was not feasible for me to transcribe all interviews. Given this, my process was that for every entry of each speaker, I used four to five sentences to summarize the statements with one or two sentences of verbatim transcriptions, coded these summaries and transcriptions, and then transcribed extensive excerpts of data when I needed it for analytical or writing purposes.

I used Dedoose, a web-based qualitative research analysis app, for data analysis. First, I familiarized myself with the data by listening to all the interviews and going through all memos, videos, pictures, observation records, and other artifacts. Then I coded them line-by-line, and identified specific segments of data that correspondent with different themes within the transcripts, notes and across the corpus of data. Finally, I searched for patterns, associations, concepts, explanations, and their corresponding counter evidence, and rearranged the categories and subcategories a couple of times. The following major themes emerged as I was coding were, “the social, cultural and professional isolation of the NESTs,” “White supremacy and internal colonialism” and “shifts in the NESTs’ professionalism and practice.”

In addition, the relationships among these themes and subthemes were considered and examined as well. I interpreted the data and carefully drew conclusions based on both deductive (i.e. guided by initial questions) and inductive analysis (i.e. open to new information as I described above) (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Finally, the following strategies were adopted to continually evaluate the findings to facilitate deeper understanding and ensure strong conclusions.

1. **Triangulation of data** – the data were collected through multiple resources including individual interviews, audiotapes, artifacts and documentation. This allowed me to examine
the consistency of different data sources and among data pieces at different times and places.

2. Acknowledgement of Researcher Positionality – As described in the section entitled “Research access,” I was conscious of my own opinions and desires related to the NESTs learning. While I could not eliminate these biases in qualitative research practice, I did acknowledge my position in this research, and recognize the impact it may have on my interpretations of data.

3. Prolonged time in the setting – I worked with the foreign teachers on a daily basis for a year for this project.

4. External auditor review – My advisor, who did not participate the study, served as an external auditor to review the entire project.
CHAPTER VII. THE NESTS ISLAND

“You cannot stop into the same river twice, for fresh water is forever flowing in,” This ancient insight from Heraclitus of Ephesus perfectly illustrated a condition that the NESTs’ situated in China experienced each day: away from their home countries and cultures, they were experiencing profound and all-encompassing changes of their cultural habitat. As a result, all of the NESTs and foreign teachers were more or less forced to establish a relationship with the host environment; what varied was how they reacted to this, either with estrangement or acclimatization. Nevertheless, the dominant Chinese culture in which they found themselves kept pushing and enforcing particular types of interactions on them, the only question being in what ways the NESTs might or might not choose to learn about the new culture.

According to theories of cultural cognition, people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities of communities, which in turn contribute to the cultural evolution of these communities. In this process, a complex of web of cultural negotiations manifests itself in multiple aspects of activities of a cultural community, the role of individuals, interpersonal relations and community activities (Rogoff, 1997). Rogoff (1993, 1994, 2003) further explains that as people participate in, and contribute to, cultural activities, their involvement brings about changes in both the activities, and the participants themselves, changing the people, the tools, and the practices of every cultural community through generations across the history. The NESTs and foreign teachers at Ming were constantly negotiating, and struggling with, the local culture, and while there were tensions that made integration difficult, many of them made choices to reject personal adaptation altogether. Just
as Rogoff argues for viewing the cultural process as, "dynamic properties of overlapping human communities,” the NESTs and foreign teachers’ involvement in their local cultural community was the key to the success, or failure, of their acculturation and consequently instructional success.

In this chapter, I will describe what relationships the NESTs established with the host environment, and explore their mentality and the choices they made in the development of the relationship. More specifically, I will delve into the factors that lead to the NESTs’ distant intercultural relationship—including their monolingualism, monoculturalism, and the “othered” role in the community that they eventually inhabited, and constructed for themselves. Additionally, I will explore how, while adopting different cultural interpretations, the NESTs and their Chinese administrators perpetuated stereotypes and prejudices that accelerated the cultural “Othering” process both of them were involved in. The stereotypes that they held of each other bred tensions between these two cultural groups, which forced feelings of distrust and resentment against each other. Eventually, the NESTs’ negative attitude towards and rejection of Chinese cultural practices, coupled with the exclusion from the host culture, exacerbated the alienization and isolation they faced, with negative consequences for all involved.

**NESTs and Intentional Monolingualism**

Unlike its neighboring, former colony cities like Hong Kong and Macao, Mandarin is the only official language spoken at Ming, and most of the Chinese administrators were not proficient in speaking English. Further, while many Chinese teachers at the school speak English, many had limited proficiency. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, most of the
foreign teachers at Ming do not speak the local vernacular⁴, and in fact, all the NESTs participants in this study were proficient in neither Mandarin nor Cantonese. Given that these individuals had chosen to live and work in China, this is surprising, especially considering that learning Mandarin would have had instrumental benefits beyond this situation. Chinese is one of the most spoken language in the world, and one in every six people is a native Chinese speaker. Even so, the NESTs did not desire to learn Chinese, and nor did they long for obtaining such a key to access to the culture community. A hint at this attitude can be found in a field note collected on Nov. 22, 2016.

Me: “How is your Chinese? You’ve stayed here for more than six years, right?”
Dan: “It’s all right. I have enough to get by. I can order food and tell taxi drivers, you know, ‘xia ge lu kou, xia ge lu kou’ (next intersection). That’s all I need.”
He said it in such an exaggerated and exotic tone that both of us laughed.

Elsa has worked in mainland China and Hong Kong for more than eight years, and I knew her Chinese was quite limited. I asked, “Are you going to learn Chinese?” Elsa: “I will, but it’s just so hard, you know. It takes a long time. I am not even sure how long I am gonna be here.”

The NESTs were very aware of their temporary sojourn in China, and they felt that there was little functional utility or social prestige to be gained from speaking Chinese and becoming bilingual in their monolingual, English dominant home countries. Considering Chinese learning was viewed as “very hard”, the cost-benefit analysis that NESTs made in regard to learning Chinese, led to an easy conclusion: it would take me a long time and a huge effort to obtain a language that I do not see as delivering me any measurable value.

**Why Bother?**

Most NESTs live in an environment where Chinese, as their foreign language, directly mediates every contact and transaction with the local community. They were immersed in the language. Their co-workers, with whom they share classrooms every workday, the children

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⁴ In the school year of 2016-2017, the Chinese proficiency levels of the foreign teachers at Ming were: the Chinese Australian, native Chinese speaker; one NEST, superior; two NESTs, intermediate; one non-NEST, intermediate; nine NESTs, limited; one non-NEST, limited.
they teach, the staff members they see each day, all speak Chinese, and many exclusively speak Chinese. Even a simple question about an upcoming event or a pay slip cannot be completed without speaking the language, unless translation is available. Developing even rudimentary skills in this second language would have afforded the possibility of interacting with their environment in far more enriching and rewarding ways, and eased their reliance on translators for minor problems. Yet, they seemed determined not to develop proficiency in the host tongue. Fantini (2012) ascribed second language development to a mindset of openness to a different linguacultural and the willingness to learn from it:

Moving beyond monolingualism, in fact, begins with what I term “incipient” bilingualism. Simply put, this stresses an attitude of willingness to engage with others with no common tongue and attempting to communicate. In this view, bilingualism begins with attitude, a willingness to engage, even when no skill exists. Such a dispositions begins the process and allows one to move forward toward eventually developing the needed skills (p26).

Essentially, the NESTs did not intend to develop bilingualism; on the contrary, they seemed intentioned to maintain their monolingualism, and expected the Chinese staff, colleagues, and community to accommodate them. This attitude seemed rooted in a belief in the hegemony and importance of English, and an idea that English-proficiency entitled them with the privilege of accommodation, since they saw English as being the “international” language. In his first interview, when asked about experiences of working at Ming, Dan commented:

It’s crazy to me that they put so much money into the school, which is quite a show, but the quality of the teachers not worthy. Maybe in a Chinese school, they are fine, but they are in an international school where they are supposed to be interacting with us, then I think their English should be much higher… She (the principal) is the problem. She just learned a couple of words in English in the last few years. If you are running an international school, you should have a lady, a headmaster who, first of all, understands western culture, at least a little. Second, speak English. She is not even qualified.

These comments were embedded with a sense of superiority that maintains a hegemonic standard around English, assuming that whoever does not meet a high proficiency in English
must strive to do so. Moreover, these comments reveal a condescending attitude, revealing a belief by the NESTs that international legitimacy is linked to English, as Dan says, “if you are running an international school, you should have a lady, a headmaster who, first of all, understands western culture, at least a little. Second, speak English. She is not even qualified.” To the NESTs, English is considered as a norm, and a legitimized representation of being international. Whoever and whatever fails to meet the norm is questionable. Holding such a belief largely ensured that the NESTs’ responsibility of developing bilingualism was displaced, and the pressure of integrating was instead placed onto the Chinese hosts.

Most of the NESTs were critical of Chinese administrators’ and teachers’ English proficiency levels. When asked about their Chinese co-workers, they would naturally comment on the ability of speaking English, which they considered an important quality of being a teacher, even here in China, as was evident when Elsa described her Chinese co-worker primarily based on her English, saying, “She is nice. Her English is good.” Or when, NESTs felt frustrated with working with a head Chinese teacher, who was often an experienced educator with limited English proficiency, they would use English proficiency as the grounds to complain about them. For instance, Max complained, “How can I work with her? She barely speaks English,” and John criticized, “She wouldn’t talk to me. She always asked the assistant teacher to tell me everything, because she doesn’t even speak English.”

Indeed, English is an important skill that many Chinese people crave, and the capability of mastering such a skill is one of the criterions used to hire teachers at Ming. In fact, English, along with its cultural values wrapped in the language, has been worshiped by some elites in China, and can be viewed as a “Trojan Horse” that allows Western values, and cultural and linguistic imperialism creep and seep into education, policy, entertainment, and every aspect of social life of Chinese people (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016). To many Chinese citizens,
English is believed to be a portal to modernization, a channel to upward mobility, and a safeguard for career opportunities. This economic, cultural and political myth of English, supported and promoted by a series of Chinese educational policies, is widely accepted by the Chinese society (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016; Stanley, 2013). As a legitimized representation of hegemonic English, the NESTs were of course endowed with the right of easily obtaining financial stability and social privilege in China, even without making any efforts to understand the host language. In fact, their right of resisting intercultural linguistic adjustment was protected by the school. They were not encouraged or even allowed to speak Chinese at their work setting, which was clearly stated in their contract:

Party B (foreign teachers) must speak English only with children in the kindergarten during work hours unless Chinese is absolutely necessary.

Party B (foreign teachers) will be expected to help Party A (Ming school) create an English-speaking environment in the kindergarten. (This implies that they are encouraged to speak English with everyone at the school, according to the previous office manager of foreign teachers)

Language is never a neutral medium. English, when it is equated with modernity, advanced civilization, and being international, accrues hegemonic power that dominates the hierarchy of linguistics and cultures. At Ming, a high-end Chinese private school where elite parents concentrate, many parents actively demanded a full day English program for their children, completely eliminating native language instruction for their young children. This linguistic imperialism was not only securing the NESTs an English teaching job in China as long as they speak the language, but also sheltering their resistance to acculturation. Standing on the top of the hierarchy, as invited representatives of this hegemony, the NESTs developed and affirmed a notion of their own linguistic superiority, denying the necessity of learning the second language surrounded them, even as they ostensibly taught others to become bilingual. As Alptiken (1984) pointed out,

In fact, it is quite ironic that, while espousing the idea that foreign language acquisition
is a means to increase cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity, the guest teachers are often unable to understand the host culture or to speak the local vernacular. Another irony lies in their attempts to expose their students to the norms and values of the English-speaking culture in the students’ own setting, while very often they themselves continue to remain monolingual and monocultural there (p. 16).

Indeed, the NESTs had never doubted the dominance power of English, so they never questioned the importance of their own learning of the ‘Other’s’ language. Additionally, the power that came along with speaking English gave the NESTs a justification to their resistance to broader acculturation, which allowed them to remain monolingual. However, Language is a pathway that can lead to a different worldview, and “each worldview is a cultural-linguistic construct – a way of perceiving, conceptualizing, expressing and interacting with a sociolinguistic context” (Fantini, 2012, p267). Yet their lack of access to the language blocked such a window, and consequently, intercultural participation became limited and weakened, and as a result, further cultural confusion, ambiguities, and biased presumptions arose.

**Beyond Monolingualism**

To understand more fully the role and impact of language to intercultural communication, let us further consider how language mediates culture. Sharifian (2011) believes that “cultural groups are formed not just by the physical proximity of individuals, but also by relative participation of individuals in each other’s conceptual worlds. The degree to which individuals can participate in a group’s conceptualized sphere determines their membership of the group” (p3). The conceptual world, in Sharifian’s theory, consists of ‘conceptualizations’ that are fundamental cognitive processes such as schemas, categories, metaphors and conceptual blends. These conceptualizations vary largely from culture to culture, and are deeply encoded in their particular languages. For instance, for many European Americans, the word “home” associates with an independent house owned by them
or their family, whereas for many centralized Chinese residents it gives rise to the conceptualization of a finely decorated apartment, but in an abstract sense, not something associated with their familiar or familial dwelling. A collection of these conceptualizations, which is called “collective memory bank” (Sharifian, 2011, p. 39), are unevenly shared and spread across a cultural group, and emerge and activate as interactions occur among members, reinforcing central ideas and “collective memories”.

In the context of intercultural communication, although there might be some overlap and elements shared by two cultural groups, there are still considerable component parts of messages that may not, which could potentially create “fuzzy understanding” (p. 7) or “partial understanding of a message” (p. 7) in communication. More importantly, this kind of fuzzy or partial understanding could be further weakened by either party’s inability or limitations in speaking the language used for communication. As Sharifian (2011) says, “Language is a central aspect of cultural cognition in that it serves as a ‘collective memory bank’ for cultural conceptualizations, past and present” (p. 39). Moreover, language is also the primary mechanism that ensures communication and exchanges of cultural conceptualization, and “a fluid vehicle” that transmits and passes on these socioculturally embodied cultural conceptualization to other members, or the next generation. Language from this view plays a primary and vital role in culture cognition, as Sharifian says “Language and culture are under all circumstances inseparable: human language is always embedded in culture” (2011, p12). Essentially, cross cultural communication is largely, but of course not solely, transmitted through language, and a willingness to gain knowledge of the language, the primary conduit for acculturation, enables a better understanding of how to communicate with the local community in culturally and contextually appropriate way. As Kim (2012) explained how the intercultural communication flows with the help of the
knowledge of the host language:

Also included in affective competence is the development of a capacity to appreciate and participate in the local people’s emotional and aesthetic sensibilities, thereby making it possible for strangers to establish a meaningful psychological connection with the native habitants. The cognitive and affective capabilities work side by side with the ‘operational competence’, the capacity to express outwardly by choosing a ‘right’ combination of verbal and nonverbal acts in specific social transaction of the host environment (p236).

While there are people who have entered other cultures to varying degrees without host language knowledge, it is easier to imagine that entry, acceptance, and deepened understanding of a new cultural community in which one may find themselves are facilitated and accelerated when one speaks, or endeavors to learn, the local vernacular. In fact, in terms of striving for democratic biculturalism—a valuable aspect of effective intercultural education and educators—it is imperative to successful teaching to be competent in both the language and the culture of one’s context (Darder, 2012; Fantini, 2015). From this perspective language, could be a bridge that supports intercultural communication, and a lack of language a wall that hinders intercultural participation.

Without doubt, all individuals entering a new culture undergo some degree of new culture learning, that is, the acquisition of new cultural patterns and practices. Given the role of language in culture cognition and bicultural integration, the NESTs’ monolingualism largely limited their involvement and participation in the cultural community of and around Ming, and thus their understanding of Chinese culture remained as murky as the Chinese language itself. The previous office manager of foreign teachers who had worked with dozens of foreign teachers for eight years concluded:

Question: If there was a challenge that foreign teachers complained about most, what would it be?

Susan(right?):(Translation from Chinese) The biggest problem English teachers had was Chinese teachers being rude. Many of our (Chinese) teachers do not speak English well, and so they would say things to them like “sit down” “come here.” It’s really a cultural difference, and also language barrier. You know, in Chinese, adding “can you” “please”
for requests is considered not appropriate for people who know each other well. It feels distant and estranged. They (foreign teachers) don’t speak Chinese, and so it’s hard for them to understand. Many of them have long been complaining about – “why did she always command me?” “Why are they so rude?” They don’t understand. We have a different way to be polite in our language.

Bilingualism isn’t just straight translation. As Federico Fellini says, “a different language is a different vision of life.” Languages reflect unique cultural ways of being in the world, and by refusing to learn Chinese at all, the NESTs were refusing to learn these unique ways of being, which led to this kind of issue that Susan describes – they just did not get it, and could not, so long as they rejected becoming bilingual.

Monolingualism also created confusion and misunderstanding. During a regular weekly meeting, the toddler and pre-K English teachers sat around a table, reflecting on the teaching in the past week.

Becky said, “Lora (the vice principals of teaching) said we should throw our robots (robots that the children made during their small group activities last week) away because ‘they are ugly’. ”
Max supported the claim, “Yeah, my teacher told me the same thing.”
Me, shocked, “What? Lora told you to throw away kids work because they looked ugly?! I don’t think Lora would do that. That’s rude.”
Kim, “Yeah, I know. But my Chinese teachers told me that.”
Eli, “Yeah, I was wondering where our trains were gone.”
Grace, who speaks Chinese, but with low proficiency, explained, “‘I don’t know who said this. It could have been Frank. I don’t know. It was because they were going to have a big event, and they needed more space in the hallway.”
Kim, “It’s not like they won’t do it. They have done this to us before. They care so much about how the school looks like.”
Me, puzzled, “Ok. Thanks for letting me know. I will ask and let you all know.”

After the meeting, I went upstairs, asked a couple of Chinese teachers, and it turned out Lora did ask them to move their children’s works into classrooms due to the event, but she said it was just a temporary arrangement, and the foreign teachers could put them back in the hallways after the event.

After work, Grace came to me, “I asked my Chinese teacher. Lora asked her to move in the robot because it may get sabotaged on the Children’s Day Event. My teacher put it in the little room, the room under the staircase between the classrooms. When the nursery teacher took it out, it was fallen apart because it was too big, and so she had to throw it away.” (Note, June 2nd, 2017.)

Because of their limited Chinese proficiency, Lora’s intention of protecting children’s
work by moving them inside from the hallways was interpreted as “getting rid of them because they were ugly.” This was just one of many examples of misunderstanding, which sometime could become rumor or gossip flying around the NESTs community. It was well-known among the NESTs that Frank (the vice principal of logistics) said, on a few occasions, that Ashely was the best foreign teacher because she was a great dresser. They believed that, “the school was just a show,” and “all they (the principals) cared about was how the school looks,” and so it was not surprising and actually highly possible that a Chinese principal would tell teachers to throw away children’s work because they were ‘ugly’. The truth was that Lora never said anything like that. Later that day I went upstairs and asked the Chinese teacher myself, and just like Grace reported, it was because Lora did not want these children’s work to get ruined as for the large group of parents they were expecting for the event. Lora did not say it “the ‘kids’ works are ugly” and no one knew where it came from. As an assistant who had worked for her for four years, I could guarantee that she would never ever say, “children’s works are ugly.” Partial messages, distorted information, and mismatched linguistic conceptualizations like this, mixed with discriminated assumptions, prevailed among foreign teachers due to their inability to access the host language. Consequently, in their minds, the Chinese administrators became unprofessional, ignorant people who cared for nothing but superficial beauty—a situation that raised tensions, and deepened divides even further. Even though many NESTs had no interest in developing bilingualism, for long term settlers as the NESTs were at Ming, contact and participation in the host society and its culture was a central issue that they had to confront every day. When such participation was restricted by their own language barriers and limitations, they felt confused, frustrated and disappointed. This is evident as Max shared about his confusion of Susan, his Chinese boss’s
talks with him,

I have never had any doubts about my ability to teach … With that all being said, I’ve heard weird things coming out of Susan’s mouth over the time of the year. She would say, “your teachers have been angry with you, because you haven’t given them the paper or something” The first time I’ve heard about it I was shocked. I’ve never had a relationship problem with my teachers. It’s not like trying to keep a shape of the relationship between me and my Chinese teachers, but I get well along with them very well. But everything I’ve heard from her was always bad news. She said, recently, that my teachers had told Julie (the principal) that I wasn’t doing well enough. And I asked, this is the end of the day, I put them in a group, look, I’ve heard these issues, if there are issues here, bla, bla, bla. My KA teacher said, no, I’ve never talked to Julie about you this year and she gave some tips, and I said I’d definitely improve that. I talked my KD teachers, and they were like, no, no, I haven’t talked to Julie in two years. So Susan’s told me Julie wasn’t happy that I wasn’t doing well, because my teachers have talked bad things about me… I’ve talked to my teachers, and nothing was being said… I see it as a way her trying to get me to improve, and pushing it to blame on someone that kind of exist in the situation, because I can’t, I can’t talk to Julie about it, unless I had my girlfriend or someone there to translate. She doesn’t speak English.

Max was facing this problem of receiving all kinds of signals that his job was in danger, which seemed beyond his understanding. He did not know why he was accused of being such a bad teacher by his Chinese coworkers who then denied the accusations. He was told by Susan that Julie, the big boss, had a problem with him, because his Chinese colleagues complained about him to Julie. But when he confronted and asked his colleagues, they all said they did not even get to talk with Julie for a year. Then Max seemed realize, when he was describing and sorting out his situation in reflection, that Susan has been using the higher-ups as an excuse to push him to improve. Awkwardly, he could not confront Susan, nor could he talk it over with Julie, because he remained concerned as to whether Julie held negative opinions against him. However, he would not be able to complete such a complicated communication without help, and doing so would mean that a personal and private conversation that he did not want anyone else’s presence involved in except himself would become, in a sense, a public exchange mediated through a translator. In the wake of this, he came to me, hoping I could help. He was anxious, stressed, and confused, because he
was about to lose his job because of the accusation, but he had no idea what it was about, and it seemed there was nothing he could do about it.

Frustration like what Max had been feeling was a common emotion that many NESTs shared while working at Ming. When asked about the challenges they have had, ten out of eleven interviewees confessed how frustrated to work at the school they were because of the lack of communication, which was partly caused by the language barrier. Some of these responses were:

- Eric: there are a lot of last minute changes.
- Becky: No one tells us until the last minute.
- Elsa: You never know what’s gonna happen next minute.

While it is true that Chinese administrators tended not to plan everything beforehand, which is an issue I will discuss later in this chapter, more often than not, the messages were posted well in advance, but were in Chinese, which the NESTs could not comprehend. This language impediment was frustrating to the NESTs, for these language issues were intertwined with the problems of intercultural communication and re-socialization in a different cultural context. The ability of speaking the host language would have helped in many ways; ensuring they were getting informed promptly, having unimpeded communication, overcoming professional ambiguities, avoiding interpersonal misunderstandings, learning how to appropriately react in different situations in this new culture, and mostly importantly, gaining a deeper appreciation of the cultural community. As Kim (2012) explained,

…In the absence of adequate host communication competence, engagement in host social communication activities and functional fitness, individuals are subject to frustration, leading to symptoms of maladaptation such as marginalization and alienation. Conversely, those individuals who have acquired high-level host communication competence, who actively participate in host social processes and who are proficient in their daily transactions in the host society are likely to enjoy a greater sense of fulfilment and efficacy (p238).
Unfortunately, the host communication competence of all NESTs in our study remained limited throughout the research study and years beforehand. There are a couple factors that triggered the NESTs’ monolingualism and paved the way to the marginalization. For one thing, under the umbrella of English hegemony, the NESTs saw little affiliation and instrumental benefits of Chinese language and culture because they had carried such an entitled ideology about how the community and Ming should be catering to them and their English language. At least, they were not expected to speak Chinese to be employed. For another, the deeply-seated belief in the equation of ‘English equals international’, which was further reinforced by the parents’ fetishism of English, shunned their responsibilities of making effort to learn about the language and the culture. Imagining a lack of access to the language through which communication in a community takes place, it’s hard or even impossible to become intelligible, legitimate, and acceptable members of a cultural community because of the consequential loss of participation through the specific communication system. For many NESTs, not knowing Chinese was detrimental to their acclimation with the Chinese community. Social isolation became inevitable.

Enclosed work and social life

Beyond language, multiple additional marginalities contributed to the divergence in culture between the NESTs and the host cultural community that they lived in. An isolated working environment, a segregated work system, and an enclosed social life were the actuality they faced every day, exacerbating the divide between the NESTs and the Chinese community.

The secluded NESTs’ office was rarely visited by anyone besides the foreign teachers themselves. Chinese administrators never visited the office unless invited; Chinese teachers seldom came in, and only when they needed to use the printers; few visitors to the school...
have been to the office, even though the school regularly had large group of international and
domestic visitors almost every week. The secluded physical position of the office made it
easy for the school tour guides quietly and carefully avoid it as directed by the principals.
Frank, the vice principals of logistics, openly criticized that “the office was messy and
disorganized”, and “it did not match the image of a highly ranked international school of
Ming.” She was ashamed of the messy place like that existed at the school.

Different from their Chinese co-workers remaining in their classrooms throughout the day
except for their office time, the office was where all foreign teachers spent all of their after-
class time at school. They were reluctant to hang around classrooms because they generally
did not have a sense of belonging to the classes they were teaching, even if they spent most
of their work hours in those classrooms. As they described it, they were treated like ‘guests’
in their classes. They did not have their own closets for teaching materials, nor for their
personal belongings. They did not even get to use the materials in their classrooms, because
they were required to apply for teaching supplies as an individual department, which was
sourced and accounted for separately from the department of Chinese teachers. They did not
know most of the Chinese parents in their classes, nor did they typically form relationships
with their Chinese-co-workers deep enough to just hang out as friends. Instead, they had a
close interpersonal relationship with their English-speaking colleagues in the office, even
though they worked in different and separate classrooms.

They came to the office before they went to classes in the morning. After classes, many of
them came back to the office again, and some stayed over the three-hour lunch break. It was
more than just a place where they worked; it became a community space, and the hub where
they shared their lives, sorrows, and joys with one another, exchanged thoughts and ideas,
and established friendships, as well as navigated tensions and disagreements, which largely
remained unknown to the rest of the community due to the language barrier and the isolated location.

Even beyond the office, space at Ming was segregated. In the dinning hall, which housed and served more than a hundred of Chinese teachers and administrators for lunch, the foreign teachers had their own designated area under a big sign that read of “Western Food Area.” There were two sets of food preparation tables in the dining room, one for Chinese teachers at the entrance and another for foreign teachers at the very end of the room. The Chinese food was made available for foreign teachers at all times, but the Chinese teachers were not allowed to eat the western food until noon, after foreign teachers had eaten. As the school explained, the kitchen had a quota allocated to western food because the foreign ingredients were more expensive than regular Chinese food materials. The foreign teachers would usually choose to sit at the back, under the sign, right next to their food, and remained isolated from any “outsider” who was not affiliated with the NEST office. At lunch, in the ostensibly shared space of the cafeteria, they communicated with each other in English, teasing, joking and sometime laughing among themselves. When the weather permitted, they would move to beyond the self-identified “western area” to sit at a patio table outside in garden, but never with Chinese teachers. There were factors that attributed this isolated dinning culture of NESTs. First, as we discussed before, the language barrier really set them apart from the Chinese teachers. Second, as a Chinese teacher recalled in an interview (Focus group with Chinese teachers, July 5, 2017), they were not like club as exclusive as now when the school just started, and some foreign teachers, especially those who spoke Chinese, would occasionally sit with Chinese teachers, but the set-up of ‘Western Food Area’ completely changed it and further pushed them to retreat to the club of foreigners.

During a work day, a large proportion of the foreign teachers’ work time was spent in
classrooms with Chinese teachers, yet they rarely created opportunities and time for communication. When they were in class, both foreign teachers and Chinese teachers were engaged with young children, limiting both time and freedom to talk. By the time children left for the day, and Chinese teachers got off work, most of the foreign teachers had already arrived home, given that their work day was five-hours long compared to Chinese teachers’ standard eight-hour day. Indeed, the only time that both foreign and Chinese teachers could possibly sit down and talk was during their lunch break, but the foreign teachers did not work over the break, while the Chinese teachers did. Altogether, the NESTs typically only had five hours of work for a day in which lunch hours were not included, as stipulated in their contract.

All these separate arrangements reflected a segregated management system between foreign and Chinese teachers. The department of foreign teachers ran as an independent division that was responsible for its own salary system, human resource management, curriculum, supervision and development, and administrative hierarchy, which were all different from the systems in place for Chinese administrators and teachers. The English curriculum model was teacher-centered, and taught in lessons that were drastically different from the child-centered and play-based Chinese teaching model used throughout the rest of the school day. Furthermore, all managerial duties for the NESTs deviated from the standard school procedures. Rather than getting materials from the logistic department as in all other classes, NESTs got whatever they needed as one group of foreign teachers. NESTs also never participated in the school wide faculty meetings regularly held after work in the evenings. Even when “all staff members” “school wide” or “all teachers across branches” were indicated in a notice to attend, the foreign teachers would automatically exclude themselves from these meetings; Foreign teachers were also specially treated in regards to rehearsals,
preparations, and arrangements of the school’s big events—the Teachers’ Day Celebration, Science Festival, Christmas Show, Sports Day, Chinese New Year’s Celebration, Graduation Ceremony, etc.. For example, the New Year’s Celebration Show—a significant cultural event for the community and China—was a large school-wide event that attracted more than a thousand people in audience. This event would take the school more than a month to prepare; yet for such a big event that required the whole school’s effort, foreign teachers were always arranged by the Chinese administrators to present as an independent and separate team by the Chinese principals. They used to be mingled with Chinese teachers in different shows, according to the school’s dance teacher, but the school had to separate them out because in previous years, the foreign teachers had had a lot of conflicts, and even open fights, with the Chinese teachers during rehearsals for these more collaborative activities. Therefore now their show was designed and done by themselves, unlike the rest of shows that involved collaboration as classes and teachers intermingled. At this significant event, it was a tradition that the foreign teachers stood in front of the main gate as a group to greet parents, while the Chinese teachers were scattered around the campus, helping facilitate the event (Note, the New Year’s Celebration, Dec. 30th, 2016).

Signs of an exclusive community of foreign teachers through special treatment and separate management pervaded the school and augmented the exclusiveness of the English-speaking community in their social life. In contrast to the locals whose eating out is one of the most common way to socialize and deepen friendships, they formed and maintained a social life style that included a small circle of westerners, having parties, hanging out in gyms and initiating charity events⁵. The frequent attendees of these social events were usually foreign teachers, and their Chinese family members or friends who were related by

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⁵ Having parties, hanging out in gyms and initiating charity events are social events that Chinese people rarely engaged themselves in. Instead, treating people with meals in restaurants is a typical way of socializing.
marriage or romantic relationship if there were any Chinese. Although Chinese restaurants and bars could be found in every corner in the city, the foreign teacher cohort tended to go to bars that were owned by westerners, or restaurants serving western food, which were usually filled with English speaking customers.

These illustrations are not meant to essentialize all foreign teachers. Rather, they are stated to demonstrate the habitus in which foreign teachers interact with the host environment around them and react to it—constructing themselves apart from the culture world they were surrounded by. These descriptions provide a glimpse of their isolated work and social life, which, in return further alienated them from the locals and the host society. There were a couple factors that contributed to the isolation. First, the management system of foreign teachers was separate because, for one thing the language barrier made the system consistency undesirable, for example, a one-hour meeting would drag to two or even more hours if added the English translation at the meeting. Without translation, the they would not be able to get any information out of the meeting. For another, most foreign teachers found the Chinese work overtime culture unacceptable. Frequent after-work meetings, sometimes lasted three hours from 6:00 PM to 9:00PM without overtime pay, were a lot to take. They were asked to have meetings during lunch time rather than after-work, but all foreign teachers got together rejected it because, as stipulated in their contract, lunch time was not calculated in their work hours. The Chinese administrators had to set up the meeting time on Friday from 11:00 - 11:30AM, even if at the cost of half-hour class time. Second, the Chinese administers had to accommodate the needs or requests of foreign teachers, because they were pressured by parents to keep them as a representation of ‘an international school’ and ‘English immersion’, but the seller’s market of foreign teachers, especially white NESTs, made it extremely competitive to employ and retain them. However, more importantly, the
deeply seated cultural differences were the inherent factor that produced the segregation.

The Chinese special treatment

Part of the reason this island was so distinct was the special treatment that foreign teachers received at Ming; a situation backed up by considerable research. In fact, many sojourning native English speakers have experienced similar red-carpet treatment when working in China. Ordinary white men often found themselves sexually and socially desirable by Chinese women, and white women were presumed to be polite and well-educated (Stanley, 2012). Stanley (2012), who studied a group of white male NESTs in Shanghai, named the social response to this newfound attention “superhero” syndrome.

At Ming, foreign teachers enjoyed amenities befitting of V.I.P.s. They were paid twice as much as what local Chinese teachers earned, albeit they worked only five hours a day. This is a stark contrast compared to Chinese teachers, who usually worked more than eight hours every day, and sometimes even ten hours. Moreover, foreign teachers shouldered less responsibility for supervising children in class than Chinese teachers. Indeed, Chinese teachers would be fined for any incidents happened during English time, while foreign teachers were under no such punitive pressure. Less was also expected of foreign teachers when it came to complete a mission that required school wide effort, as they were exempted from after-work meetings, performance rehearsals, gatherings and team building activities, or group overtime work during lunch breaks (Note, January 5, 2017).

These special treatments reflected the prevalence of attitudes of white superiority in the local community (an idea I will return to shortly), which mirrored a typical Chinese psychology of viewing foreign teachers as desirable outsiders. In intercultural communication settings, we tend to identify ourselves with a cultural group in which members are “one of our own,” namely in-group people, and define non-members as
members of out-groups (Thomas & Liao, 2010). This in-group versus out-group
categorization plays an important role in Chinese communication in the context of interacting
with foreigners. Governed by Confucian concepts, Chinese culture has been identified as an
exemplar of collectivist culture, in which people tend to draw sharp distinction between in-
and out-groups because “Guanxi” (interpersonal relationships) are the core of socialization
(Thomas & Liao, 2010). Accordingly, most Chinese treat people in diverse categories
dramatically different, as Thomas and Liao (2010) stated:

(For Chinese people) With out-group members, the relationship is temporary and
anonymous and is embarked upon solely to attain immediate, personal goals. Interaction
with out-group members, as opposed to the complex set of norms associated with in-group
members, is thus more instrumental and less informed by normative considerations (P686.)

Given this ideology, it was acceptable for the foreign teachers to be differently treated.

Rather than colleagues, foreign teachers were seen as “temporary outsiders,” which, in
 conjunction with post-colonial attitudes privileging whiteness, justified the exceptions they
were allowed, and the privileges they were afforded. Logically, it was not worthy to invest in
the relationships with them, and they could be taken less seriously. After all, they were not
“Zijiren 自己人” or, “one of us”. This attitude was reflected in conversations with the
administrators of Ming for which I noted:

In Susan’s office, Susan and I were going through the newly drafted contract as I
requested. I wanted to synchronize the contract time with foreign teachers’ work visas,
because we are having the big issue of asking them to sign contracts with fake dates to
meet the government regulations. The teachers were employed at different times, but their
visas are only issued on yearly basis, which created problems like a teacher who was
employed in May would have their visas expire in May a year after, two months before a
semester finished. The way Susan used to solve the problem was to make two contracts
with different dates, the real one for their own use, and the fake one for the government
use of visa application.

I was explaining the intention of drafting a new contract to Susan, “I want to get rid of
the fake contracts. People aren’t comfortable with signing fake ones, even just with fake
dates.” Susan, “Well, they do not need to know this. All you need to do is to make another
copy with a different date and add a copy of the page with the signature. Everything
remains the same but the dates.” Me, “well, Lola knows about it, and she is not
comfortable with it at all.” Susan, “Why did you tell them? Just don’t let them know.” Me,
“Lola has to know it. She is my partner.” Susan, “That’s why I did not put her in a managerial position. She is a foreign teacher. You don’t tell foreign teachers everything. There was no need to tell them everything.” (Note, June, 27th, 2017).

The implication here was clear: foreigners are outsiders, and thus do not deserve informational transparency. She told me a few times that the foreign teachers did not understand the local regulations and laws, nor could they comprehend the complexity of dealing with the Chinese government. The best and the easiest way to deal with this was not to keep them informed, but rather to avoid the troubles of foreign teachers’ complaints. Stanley (2012) had a similar finding in her ethnographic study of a group of NESTs teaching in a university in Shanghai. Participants felt they were treated as if they were irrelevant, with one participant learning only after the fact that a student score was overturned without his permission because this student’s father was an important figure to the school, and a general feeling that they were lied to about the way the students were assessed. Whether the NESTs in Shanghai, or here at Ming, they were deemed irrelevant out-group members, temporary sojourners, rather than colleagues; and thus they were not entitled to know or understand the complicated way in which Chinese society functions. On the contrary, in-group members were believed to be more similar in beliefs and behaviors, and more likely to understand complicated Chinese cultural situations and practices, such as making a contract with fake dates—a practice often used to deal with the Chinese government’s bureaucracy. Although I began work at Ming for this research later than Lola, I was considered as an insider due to my prior relationship with the school and community, and logically it could be safely inferred that I would understand. In fact, I was informed and aware of the illegal contracts, and was trying hard to eliminate them. Nevertheless, it was assumed that insiders deserved to know the truth, but outsiders were temporary, irrelevant, and hard to trust. The distrust against foreign teachers was reflected in Julie, the principal’s reaction to Lola’s presence at a
suspected case of child physical punishment at school, as I noted:

I received a report on physical punishment of a child by a Chinese teacher. I immediately checked the monitoring recording and located the excerpt of the punishment. Lola was there with me when I was review the recording. Having found the evidence, I reported it to Julie. When I was mentioning that Lola was there to help me, Julie interrupted me and warned, “please do not tell foreign teachers things like this. I am afraid they would post it on a website or somewhere, you know, just to tell a story about how horrible Chinese teachers are.” (Note, Nov.29th, 2016)

The Chinese administrators were always conscious of foreign teachers’ presence, which they believed needed be guarded against, especially when situations were difficult, or involved negative or problematic events, like the cases of physical punishment, or the fake contract. As an old Chinese saying goes, “家丑不可外扬, family ugliness must not be aired,” reflecting a code of silence around difficult moments and out-group individuals. Foreign teachers were not “family”, and as a result, administrators did not want them seeing any ‘dark’ side of Ming, or Chinese education culture. In contrast, despite my role and close relationships to the foreign teachers, I was seen as, “自己人 one of our own,” and it was safe and even necessary for administrators to make information transparent and clear for me without worrying about “losing face (public disgrace).”

Overwhelmingly, when domestic disgrace arose and foreigners were involved, the Chinese administrators tended to draw a distinct boundary between in- and out-group members. Foreign teachers, unfortunately, automatically fell in the category of out-group. The special treatments, exceptions, and exemptions they received reflected the mindset of Chinese administrators who saw foreign teachers as “more instrumental and less constrained by social norms”. The intentional disguise of circumstances, the deliberately withheld information, and guarded look was another way of repeating the same insular attitude: foreign teachers are foreign. This kind of attitude, in the field of intercultural communication, has a professional term, “host receptivity” in Kim (2012)’s theory.
“Host receptivity” refers to the degree to which the receiving environment welcomes and accepts strangers into its interpersonal networks and offers them various forms of informational, technical, material and emotional support (p237).

Host receptivity was identified as a key factor that heavily influences a given stranger’s adaption and acculturation to a new culture. Different host environments show different levels of acceptance of foreigners (Kim, 2012). People in a hegemonic society like China tended to hold low levels of host receptivity (i.e. they were less welcoming), and thus showed less pluralistic and tolerant attitudes toward outsiders who were ethnically different. This attitude was obvious to Max:

Max, “Before it was like, we have never been taken seriously. We were treated as a lower level of employee. It can be hard for a foreigner. People have reservations about a foreigner.”

Me: What kind of reservations?

Max, “Like making assumptions about you without seeing you. Chinese people do judge. It can be anything and everything. Anything they say, oh, they can be lazy. They get paid so much. They are fat…I feel like if you are not in the loop, the assumptions come, they will get to come. If you don't toll the party line, you will get left outside. You will get kicked outside. something like that (Max interview, July 10, 2016).”

“The assumptions about foreigners” and the constant feeling of “you will get kicked outside” that Max described were not unique to this context, nor to the individual. As Stanley (2013) stated, “while individual foreigners in China are well received, few managed to be accepted into Chinese society as their ‘foreignness forever sets them apart. While foreigners many be accepted, they are always excepted” (p.47-48). The socially and historically constructed fear and distrust against foreign teachers, implicitly and explicitly, excluded the them from cultural participation and professional growth. For one thing, the Otherness of foreign teachers deprived the Chinese administrators of opportunities to know them at a deep level, and thus establish deep connections with them. The NESTs’ insecurity and anxiety resulting from their Otherness and deprivation kept Chinese administrators from investing in them in terms of professional development and career opportunities. As Susan explained
previously, “That’s why I did not put her in a managerial position. She is a foreign teacher.” After eight years of working with foreign teachers, Susan’s conclusion was sorrowful in that foreigners were not trustworthy so that could not be put in managerial positions. Eternally being treated as “an outsider” and “a foreigner,” of course, the NESTs would see little future or attachment to the local community. On the other hand, the Chinese administrators were very aware of the patterns of NESTs temporary status, and foreign teachers’ typically sojourning teaching experiences in China, and their tenuous attachment to the local community, and thus they refrained from supporting them professionally. Later in her interview, Susan commented that the school once offered an opportunity of professional training for some foreign teachers in the office, with the school giving them the time and financial support, but soon after, they all left or returned to their home countries, which made her see little benefits in investing in professional development for sojourning foreign teachers in a long run. These conditions of receiving little professional support, and having a temporary job that lead nowhere, largely discouraged foreign teachers from putting themselves out there and doing their best. Consequently, apathy was a pattern the foreign teachers themselves often noticed in their colleagues, and identified as something about themselves. As Eli noted, “some foreign teachers, they just don’t care. They don’t give it a damn to what they do. Just find something fun someday and leave teaching. I don’t want to be one of these teachers.” Dan, who defined himself as one of these that, “don’t care” teachers, explained,

I used to complain a lot, but I don’t anymore, because it’s useless. I don’t care. The school doesn’t give a shit about what they do… I have been to Shanghai and Asia. That’s what you get in these countries (Dan interview, May 20, 2016).

Dan’s expression might be a bit extreme in that he believed the school “doesn’t give a shit about what they do,” but his frustration was real. He later elaborated in his interview that it
was because the school was not treating them seriously, like a real teacher, that he disengaged. With no professional support, no supervision, and no feedback, he felt frustrated and thus there was no point to take the job seriously. This “don’t care” attitude resulted from the Chinese administrator’s anti-foreign sentiment: “they are FOREIGN teachers,” an attitude that not only propelled the NESTs from active participation in community practice, but also eventually lead to the NESTs’ social, cultural, and professional marginalization, their questionable professionalism, and low teaching quality, a point we will return in Chapter IX.

Furthermore, such isolation and alienation were, in many cases, further exacerbated by a lack of Chinese administrators’ understanding of western culture and expectations. As Ray concluded in his interview, he believed that the majority of problems the foreign teachers were experiencing were fundamentally cultural, and due to the lack of cultural host receptivity by Chinese administrators:

Like Susan, she has worked with us for eight years, but she fundamentally doesn’t understand some aspects of western culture, the willingness of foreigners to question, and have a dialogue rather than top down policies… (For example,) I had no idea about what Chinese teachers do for the parents open day. Theirs was just play, but ours was a lesson (laughing)… Like Susan, she doesn’t even take feedback for the open-house day. You asked for some feedback, she says no, no, no. (Ray interview, June 27, 2016).

Ray was not alone in this impression of Chinese host receptivity and exclusion. After years of living in a foreign territory, many foreign teachers had their own stories about Chinese leaders’ unawareness of their culture, and the unwillingness to include them:

I wrote a letter to Julie (about a request to negotiate her salary of re-employment), which was polite to me, but she didn’t even reply. Whereas in my country, it doesn’t matter the answer is yes or no, my boss will reply. I feel like she is rude, you know, like you are just this teacher, and I am too busy for this…They are not accessible. I can’t talk to the other administrators. They are like, this is my area. I will say hello, but don’t come in. They are absent, quite stern. They don’t come to see kids. They come after important things, like the graduate show. They don’t chat with people in a less formal way (Elsa interview, May 19th, 2016).
Note: It was the day for the big show tonight. In the morning, when the school was having the last time of rehearsal on a big stage in the playground, Frank, (the vice principal) was yelling and shouting at teachers over the microphone. It was so loud that every corner of the school heard it. I got yelled at, too. Even though Lola did not understand what she was saying, but she noticed the unpleasant tone. She complained, “How could she do that?” Jack, who was standing right next to her, answered, “last year, during the rehearsal, she walked to the stage and dragged teachers around. Like, you here, you there. Was it last year?” He turned to Becky to confirm. Becky, “yeah, it was last year.” Lola, “If she pushes me around, I will shout at her. Who do the fuck you think you are? I will quit.” (Note, Dec.30th. 2016)

It comes as no surprise that Anglo-American culture and Chinese culture are distinct and vastly different. Individuals from an Anglo-American background tend to have a strong desire for privacy, physically and personally; they are not comfortable with others using cues to indicate status; they appreciate open conversations and sometimes even confrontations; they are concerned about time efficiency; and the list goes on. These cultural habits, common to most of the NEST foreign teachers, are in stark contrast to many Chinese habits and cultural customs, and it was not hard to understand that the foreign teachers felt offended when they were gruffly ordered about, which was considered rude treatment in their culture. There were also certain manners that foreign teachers appreciated that the Chinese administrators were not aware of, such as replying to a formal request from an employee indicating reciprocal respect, or small talks as entailing a friendly and necessary relationship building gesture. Without the awareness of this ‘common sense’ about western culture, the Chinese administrators were interpreted as ‘rude’, and made the foreign teachers feel like “you are just this teacher. I don’t have time for this.” Nor could the Chinese administrators have engaged in small talk with the NESTs, which was considered inappropriate in Chinese hierarchichal culture of work. Therefore, they were interpreted as ‘stern’ and ‘not accessible,’ by the NESTs, when the reality was neither side was recognizing divergent cultural practices that were guiding their interactions, and contributing to their estrangement. Additionally, the Chinese administrators who were at the positions of power in a culture with rigid hierarchies
often found it hard to understand the western culture of equal treatment. As I noted a conversation with Frank, who was the vice principal, my superior:

At 10:15AM, I got a phone call from Lora, Frank’s assistant, demanding me to get the foreign teachers to for the soccer game opening ceremony rehearsal in ten minutes. I said no, because I wasn’t informed early, nor was I notified during the ceremony plan meeting.

At lunch, I met Frank in the hallway. She questioned me in front of Lora, “Didn’t I tell you there would be a rehearsal on Thursday?” I answered it firmly, “No. On the meeting you said there would be only two rehearsals.” I continued, trying to explain, “Please don’t worry about it. They (English teachers) don’t need to do much for it. All they need to do is to stand in the middle and walk. They will be fine.” Frank frowned, “Really. I don’t think so. Look at these English teachers, stood there (on Monday, the first rehearsal) slouching. They do not know how to stand properly. Tomorrow (the opening ceremony) if I see an English teacher not standing well in the group, I will not hesitate to shout at her/him. By then do not blame me on it. They deserve that! Pass the message to them.” I was really in the dilemma. How can I pass a message like that to my teachers? So rude and disrespectful (Note, March 30, 2017).

When a superior address to a subordinate, it is culturally acceptable for Chinese to use condescending attitude and even a scolding tone in public, though certainly not encouraged. The superior status that Frank was culturally entitled was demonstrated in almost every aspect of her rebuke, the harsh criticism, the tone of command, and the threatening. Ironically, she commanded me to pass the message to the foreign teachers, a message that even I, who had only lived in America for a few years and gradually formed an intercultural identity, found it rude and disrespectful. However, as a Chinese, even though I was not comfortable with the way she spoke to me, I was clearly aware of the right of rebuking a subordinate that she owned in Chines culture practice. Whereas Lola, a NEST, thought differently about it:

…That’s dictatorship. That’s not the way you should treat people. Why does she think she can do that? Because no one has ever stood up to her. All she does is to threaten people. Who does she think she is? Why did she need us there, anyway? She just wants, oh, look, we’ve got all these foreign teachers. It’s all about showing us again. Why didn’t she treat us just like normal teachers? Like just be there to help (Note, March 30, 2017).

Obviously, Frank had no idea how she sounded rude and like a dictator to the foreign teachers, because it was normal from her perspective of a Chinese leader based on Chinese
culture practice. In fact, Frank had a long history of tensions with foreign teachers. She condemned foreign teachers in public on a school assembly, and shouted “you damn foreign teachers,” because they would not listen to her command; She tried to fine the foreign teachers for their disorganized office desks, which was strongly resisted by them, and eventually she declared “foreign teachers do whatever they want, I do not care.” These tensions were mainly caused by her presumed positionality of a superior Chinese leader, which often considered rude, ignorant, disrespectful, and dictatorship by foreign teachers.

Unfortunately, Frank was not the only adminster who “fundamentally did not understand some aspects of western culture.” Even the manager of foreign teachers, as Ray commented, was not aware of the divergence of cultural interpretations, sometimes over the same issue. Susan, the manager, shared her management strategy of taking notes, which was described as ‘ridiculous’ by Dan, a NEST:

Susan is very proud of her work. Today in my office, when she was there to take her stuff, she shared her secrets of the successful management for the foreign team. She was like, “You need to keep tracking everything down. Check out all these notebooks, I have finished six of them in eight years. See, all filled with notes.” I asked, “What are all these notes about?” She happily replied, “meeting notes and other things, like what things I addressed on a meeting. When they (foreign teachers) violated the rules that I already made clear, I would bring the notes out and show them, like see, I’ve told you. I’ve warned you. Then they won’t be able to find excuses for their wrongdoings and they will change… And detailed records, like who was late on what date, who was complained by a Chinese teacher…Then I will talk with them with my book, show them, you know with evidence, what they have done wrong…” (Note. Sept. 13th, 2016)

Interestingly, when asked about challenges of working at Ming, Dan mentioned this notebook of secret managerial weapon:

She came to me and said, “I need to talk to you” …I had no clue. She got her little list (in her notebook), nine month later. Telling me, “Ah, September, your KB teacher complained about you three times. October, you KD teacher complained about your paper work.” I was like, (shaking head with his eyes wide open, paused) speechless. Why didn’t you tell me? If I had known these problems with her, I could have worked it out with her… I don’t understand at all. (Dan interview, May20th, 2016).

Dan and Susan had drastically different understandings of the notebook, but neither
appeared able to recognize these differing cultural interpretations. For Susan, it was hard and serious work of feedback that could help avoid random accusations. For Dan, however, it was an inefficient and ridiculous way to address expected improvements for employees. Dan felt confused, and mostly offended by his boss using ‘evidence’ to criticize him. He did not understand why she appeared to be using everything she could possibly collect to attack him, rather than help him solve the problem. From Susan’s perspective, however, based on her Chinese cultural understanding it was constructive feedback and management, similar to how she might have conducted an annual performance review. Though uncommon from Dan’s culturally situated perspective, straightforward criticism is a common feature of Chinese daily life, as Tobin, Hsueh, and Karasawa (2009) argued,

(Straightforward criticism) As a familiar component of Chinese everyday life in families, neighborhoods, schools, business dealings and social life, criticizing others does not carry a s harsh a feel in China as it does in the US, Japan, and many other cultures. Constructive feedback from both experts and peers can be found in Chinese education not just in the early childhood classroom, but also in the preparation and ongoing professional development of teachers (p68).

In Chinese cultural practice, it was common for your boss to have a talk with you when you are considered not performing well. These talks usually center around criticism hoping you would improve, like a Chinese parent disciplining a child, and what one does, as a subordinate, in these situations was to acknowledge your wrongdoings and swear you would change. Dan, an American NEST who was raised in the culture that appreciates positives and problem-solving, Susan’s list of wrongdoings certainly carried a harsh feeling and an sense of absurdity of collecting ‘evidence’ to be against him. Intercultural communication often brings about cross-cultural entanglements and causes miscommunication because of interlocutors’ socially and culturally different norms for interpreting others behaviors, and their intentions (Kramsch & Uryu, 2012). This was certainly the case at Ming. The lack of understanding of western culture, combined with the dichotomy of cultural interpretations,
fostered an environment of inhospitable host receptivity, which breeds feelings of deep
distrust and hostility against Chinese administration, as Dan shared:

Susan is a compulsive liar. She wanted herself look good. She always blames on Julie. She did not even talk to Julie…Chinese administration is not trustworthy. For example, the British couple were told (before they came to China) that you’d have to sign a 2-year contract. When they got here, they were told, like, “oh, we actually only do one year contract, and we’d sign you another year after this one.” Then he got an argument with Frank’s friend, and Frank wanted to fire him. After a year they said we won’t resign you, even though they were promised two years. They both left (May 20th, 2016. Dan interview).

I feel trust is still at their (Chinese administrators) mercy. I feel at any point they can turn around and change everything. They still make last minute plans. I saw more effort of communication, but definitely more from this side (July 11th, 2017. Elsa interview).

Issues of cultural conflicts in the context of intercultural communication at Ming were common, and these conflicts, without direct communication and open dialogues, ultimately led to distrust and even enmity. A positive attitude towards the host society plays a vital role in cross cultural adaption, which helps foreigners engender greater openness and lesson unwarranted negativism toward new cultural experiences that linked to willingness to participate in the host society (Kim, 2012). Unfortunately in our case, a predominantly negative attitude towards the Chinese host community was formed, a feeling of distrust was cultured, and thus maladaptation of marginalization and isolation became inevitable for the NESTs. Even worse, the Ming administrators were not aware of these issues of foreign teachers’ collective negative feelings against the Chinese management team. Quite to the contrary, Julie, the principal of Ming, believed that the foreign teachers were content with what they have been experiencing at Ming:

(Translated from Chinese) What does the foreign team view the Chinese administration? They acknowledge our administration. You remember I asked them to share their opinions about the school. Someone said they have been to many schools in China, but this one was the best, but the strictest in terms of management. They loved our (Chinese) team. The collaboration with the Chinese teachers was good. They had opportunities of professional growth and development here. They also commented that we are not perfect, but we do not spare effort to improve… (Julie interview, July 19, 2017).
The language barrier and the lack of intercultural communication deprived opportunities of Chinese administrators to learn from foreign teachers about their culture, and blinded them from viewing these long-standing and deep-seated problems of distrust. From the rude behaviors of inappropriate physical contact, and ignorance to an employee’s request, to the retributive way of addressing problems, the NESTs were experiencing extreme challenges to their cultural beliefs, practices, and values, but without any guidance or explanation for how or why these things were occurring. They often stated that the amount of “craziness” and “ignorance” to their culture they felt as foreigners were overwhelming. In many cases, I played the role of cultural mediator as they came to me to ask for help, complain, or demand an explanation. When Max was warned that he was going to lose his job, he was confused about the reason (Note, Max interview, May 25, 2016); When a Chinese teacher was ordered to apologize in front of all teachers because she punished a child to drink four cups of water at one time, Joy, her co-worker, came to me, condemned it as “a backward way of management that was used five hundred years ago,” and asked me to “do something” to prevent it, with tears all over her face (Note, March 30, 2017); When Lola was constantly asked to notify the foreign teachers at the last minute to change their plans, she felt frustrated, disappointed, angry, and desperate, “Why? Why is always the last minute? I can’t. I can’t do this anymore” (Note, preparations for the evaluation at the provincial level, Dec. 22, 2016 ). Yet, the conflicts remained unresolved, deposited and turned into distrust and animosity.

Conclusion

The relationship between the foreign teachers and the Chinese community of Ming became a vicious circle: The NESTs’ inability to speak the local vernacular largely limited the possibilities of their cultural participation and the potentiality of establishing deep connection with the Chinese community, which eventually paved the way to mono-
culturalism and the retreatment to an enclaved community of exclusive foreigners. As Aptekin (1984) stated in his analysis of NESTs’ sojourning experience on a foreign land:

…They (native English speaking teachers) are conscious of the temporary nature of their sojourn in the host country, and see little need to ‘affiliate’ with the hosts, either linguistically or culturally. Finally, as instructors in the host society, they feel they need to be treated as 'important', as bearing the cultural superiority that they suppose whoever asks for foreign teachers must concede (p17).

Indeed, the NESTs saw little instrumental benefits of making effort to be accepted by the Chinese host community, and as representatives of “advanced civilization” they distained cultural adaption to the Chinese community and held a condescending attitude towards the members of the community, which is a point we will return. The NESTs were further forced into remain living in the enclave, because members of the Chinese host culture with conservative acculturation views held negative intergroup attitudes and behaviors, and a strong of sense of xenophobia the ostensible which was demonstrated in the special treatment to the foreign outsiders. This deeply rooted and culturally seated exclusiveness to foreigners in Chinese culture ostracized the NESTs from participation and observation of cultural norms, patterns, and expectations. Additionally, a mutual distain for cultural learning, combined with the Chinese administrators’ lack of understanding of western culture, resulted in cultural dissonance, which formed an inhospitable environment of receptivity that fostered a hostile attitude toward the Chinese local community of the foreign teachers. And in return the low cultural receptivity further repelled foreign teachers to be acclimated and acculturated. The community of foreign teachers at Ming was drifting like a desert island, surrounded by the ocean of Chinese culture, but eternally propelled from the mainland. The rejection of both cultures resulted in alienation and exclusion of the out-group foreign teachers, a consequence that ultimately culminated in their discordant teaching practices at Ming, which will be further discussed in chapter IX.
CHAPTER VIII. WHITENESS AND STRUCTURED RACISM

Introduction

This chapter explores the intersections of global whiteness and internal colonialism, and how these factors help to understand the isolation and alienation of NESTs in China. As discussed in the previous chapter, monolingualism and monoculturalism were significant factors that prevented the NESTs from cultural participation in the local community. Moreover, the inhospitable host receptivity and intercultural misunderstandings of Chinese administrators further repelled the NESTs from the community, and exacerbated the already fragile relations between the NESTs and the locals. These processes of “differentiating from each other” forced the NESTs to retreat intensely into their NESTs enclave.

The first theme of this chapter considers how whiteness played out in the NESTs’ interactions with the postcolonial context of the host culture. It is reflected in the assumption of superiority of inner circle mainstream English, NESTs' development and deployment of “white savior” perspectives and ideology, and the deficit perspectives about Chinese culture and people that they held. Together, these factors created a space and a social ideology that allowed the NESTs to engage in problematic behaviors that may not have been socially sanctioned in their home communities—including but not limited to a casual and unprofessional commitment to their employment, social arrogance, and sexual promiscuity—but could be indulged in the setting of Ming and its local community (Stanley, 2012).

Effectively, the NESTs colonial ideology was defined by notions of ‘standardized’ English,

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6 Inner circle English is a term often used in the field of TEFOL (teaching English as a foreign language). It refers to the English that is spoken by the English Five (countries), the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
‘funny’ pronunciations by Chinese speakers, and an implicit criterion of an ‘Australian way’ of doing things. Moreover, as will be discussed, these attitudes were linked to predominantly negative perspectives of Chinese culture and people, such as a belief that China was dominated by “a culture of fear and dictatorship” and the Chinese were “a people unable to think for themselves.” These forms of colonialism and white supremacy were embodied in the NESTs’ perceptions about Chinese culture, and the community, and resulted in their stagnated process of acculturation.

The second theme in this chapter addresses issues of institutional racism in China, and how this manifested itself in the privileged status of white NESTs in employment. It also examines how internal colonialism was displayed among Chinese administrators, teachers, and parents. This was emblematic of what I describe as a socially imagined “scared Western White community,” constructed and upheld in the imagination of Chinese administrators that uncritically equated modernity and advanced civilization with whiteness. Placed together, a myth of Western superiority and an internalized preference for White skin promoted a ‘Otherness’ and marginalization among the non-NESTs community and the Chinese people, and cultivated white supremacy and racism within the context of Chinese schools employing NESTs.

Defining Whiteness in A Chinese Context

Before we embark on a discussion of these themes, two concepts need to be clarified and differentiated: whiteness, and white people. For the purposes of my discussion and analysis, whiteness should be understood as a social concept or a worldview, while White people represent a racial category usually based on the physical appearance or phenotype of having white skin (Leonardo, 2002). As such, even though, “white people are often the subjects of whiteness because it benefits and privileges them,” this should be understood as distinct from
the ideology of whiteness, which, “is characterized by the unwillingness to name the contours of racism, the avoidance of identifying with a racial experience or groups, the minimization of racist legacy and other evasions” (Leonardo, 2002, p. 32). Thus, a white person could engage in anti-racist actions and ideologies that would position them in opposition to whiteness even if it ostensibly benefitted them, while a person of color could identify and promote an ideology of whiteness throughout life, even if this was an ultimately self-defeating position. Whiteness then is also connected with the notion of white culture, writ large. What White people practice every day are aspects of distinct Western, Eurocentric ethnic cultures, each of which are contextually unique, linked primarily by the fact that the principal adherents to those cultures are phenotypically White, however, “whiteness is the attempt to homogenize diverse white ethnics into a single category (much like it attempts with people of color) for purposes of racial domination” (Leonardo, 2002, p. 32). That said, though varied in their ethnic and national origins, the white participants in our study were engaged in the practice of whiteness, and perspectives reflecting whiteness, but in many cases they were not intentionally or knowingly advocating for white supremacy. Rather, they were passive participants in the reality that whiteness has been globalized, and what was observed among the NESTs involved a global phenomenon being mirrored in the cultural practices of NESTs at Ming.

A Tacit Sense of White Superiority

Around the world, whiteness stamps its claims to linguistic, cultural and political superiority. In our study, whiteness is embedded in the NESTs’ alleged ownership of English, the white normality of cultural values, and the Otherness of cultural diversity. As discussed early in the theoretical framework, the dominance of English and the White cultural values wrapped up in the English language—not just in China, but globally—has created linguistic
hierarchy and racial discrimination among people in non-English speaking countries. Indeed, the spread of English teaching serves as a tool of colonialism that reinforces the mythic norm of a ‘standardized’ English, and idealizes its White native speakers (Kubota & Lin, 2009). As a result of this English hegemony, in China, an accompanying status of subordination is tacitly assigned to other varieties of English beyond the normative, dominant forms used by the ‘English Five,’ and thus the people who speak these other iterations of English. This false belief in an ideal native speaker-ism was prevalent at Ming among foreign teachers. The NESTs teased non-NESTs about their accents and pronunciations, and made caricatures of the Chinglish that Susan spoke, like using “James US” and “James UK” to differentiate two James-es rather than adding their last names. Grace, a Ming foreign teacher from Singapore, shared her experience of being a non-native English speaker.

Sometimes I make a mistake. I don’t say very. I say wery. Like w, watch, and v, violin. When I teach the kids, I say very, but sometimes like when I am talking, like quickly, I say wery. The whole office laughed at me, just last week. I was like, so, why are you laughing? They were like, “oh, that’s ok. I’ve had many friends from Singapore, and they always say wery”. What did I say? You said wery. I was like, ok. I will try to make it Very (ironically)

What did it make you feel?
At the beginning, I felt bad, but now I don’t give it a damn. If you think you are smarter than me, go ahead. In the beginning, I used to feel very very bad, but now I am ok.

Grace is Singaporean, but she was born and grew up in Indonesia. She has been educated in English since early childhood, and throughout college. Even though she speaks three languages, she identified English as her first language because it is the language that she speaks with her family. The mistakes she made in English in daily conversations were not even noticeable, but she was considered as an “inferior speaker” whose pronunciation were “funny” by the NESTs. She felt her legitimacy of being an English teacher was questioned, challenged and ridiculed, and so disheartened. Ironically, here in a bilingual program, a teacher who was trilingual and deeply conscious of the ways language operated and functioned, was devalued and treated as subordinate by a group of monolinguals because of
her ethnic background. This sense of ownership of ‘standardized English’ among White
NESTs was evident in Dan’s interview:

Dan: They (non-NESTs) are not qualified… Like Zara (from Russia), Joy (from a
European country), and Grace, what are they doing here? They don’t speak English (Dan
Interview, June 20th, 2016).

He repeated these sentiments later in the year on a different occasion and in a different
context:

It was the end of the day. Teachers were getting ready to leave in the office. Lola was
joking with Joe because he used to say that Lola and I are “guy teacher haters.” We’ve
never hired a woman teacher so far. Lola, “Joe, guess what? James, Ali, these are guy
names. They are coming to our office.” I added, “we are hiring a French guy.” Dan, “oh,
you are like Susan now. You would hire anyone who looks good. French guys do not
speak English.” (Note, June 7, 2017)

Dan believed that non-native speakers were not qualified English teachers simply because
they were not native speakers. The NESTs ridiculed Grace’s accent because it was viewed as
an alien variant rather than a difference. The idea of lingua franca did not exist among the
NESTs. They did not hesitate to claim the ownership of English, “a superior language” that
many non-English speakers try to imitate, and thus those non-native speakers “don’t speak
English” because they were not entitled to the privilege of speaking ‘standardized’ English.

There were a couple of factors that supported and reinforced the NESTs’ linguistic
superiority and a strong sense of the English Five's ownership of 'standardized English'. First,
the dominant status of the English language in the world and the privileges NESTs were
afforded by the school legitimated the social superiority NESTs felt entitled to, simply
because they were born with the capital of speaking the English language. Such a social and
cultural capital was directly transformed into social prestige and economic benefits in China.

It had been easy for the English Five NESTs to find English teaching jobs in China, despite
having no teaching qualifications, no understanding of bilingualism, and lacking the ability to
speak the local vernacular. Second, there was an acknowledgment of native speakerism in the
local community. In many cases, schools included NESTs exclusive requirement in their recruitment advertisements, with a clear intent to exclude non-NESTs, even if they were cheaper on the labor market. As Bunce (2016) points out, “native speakerism fraudulently legitimates a hierarchy of political dominance. It continues linguistic imperialism in new forms, does not contribute to social justice and interlocks with racist and linguist hierarchies” (p. 4-5). In the case of Ming, this asymmetry of linguistic power operated simultaneously as a system of White racial superiority in the community.

This notion of racial superiority was reflected in the dynamics of linguistic power among foreign teachers. The Ming office of foreign teachers, with people from seven different countries, was a place in which multiple varieties of English were used and represented. Even within the inner circle of English Five countries, a New Zealander's English could sometimes be difficult to comprehend for a NEST from the United States or Canada. Interestingly, when these natural differences occurred, there were also hegemonic and standardizing pressures at play, as demonstrated in Grace’s reflections during an interview:

Grace: …At the beginning, working with so many foreigners was quite challenging.
Me: What made it so challenging? Could you give me a couple of examples, like from the very beginning?
Grace: Yeah, but it’s still now, like oh, you don’t pronounce things correctly or they say, oh, we don’t say that. I am ok. I am fine with it. You can correct me. You know, at the beginning, when we had Jonny (White British), like the coordinator of English teachers, he would say, “this is not how you say it.” For example, fire truck. Maggie (White American), a good friend of mine, would tell me, “we say fire truck!” But you know, we say fire engine. We don’t say fire truck. I was like, do I follow the American English? Do I follow the British English? I am so confused.
Me: What English do you speak now?
Grace: I would follow American English. Fire truck, fire engine; trash can, rubbish bin…
Me: Why so?
Grace: Because Susan told us to, you know, it’s better to follow the American way. Why does everybody have to follow the American English?
Grace: I don’t know. (Interview with Grace, July 18, 2016)

What might appear on the surface to be a menial fight over whether it was fire truck or fire
engine, Grace's narrative was loaded with messages that translated into positioning her as a ‘subaltern' outsider, who was not even qualified to engage in these semantic debates. English is her first language as well, but her ownership and claim to that language was made invalid by her ‘non-standard’ English, and her ethnic, racial, and national identity. She felt as though she was part of a hierarchical English-speaking world where the British and American English were endowed with elevated status. These were the standard, hegemonic versions of English, which positioned Jonny and Maggie as the ‘owners’ of the English language, giving them the right to tell her, “this is not how you say it.” This left Grace questioning herself, and which English ‘standard’ she should follow. For Grace, a non-White woman who spoke English as her first language, mastery of English should have translated into acceptance; but what she found was a confusing hierarchy in which her English was merely positioned as ‘Mimicry’. As Bhabha (2014) pointed out:

then colonial Mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite…Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power… The effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. For in "normalizing" the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produce another knowledge of its norms. (p. 126)

The power of coloniality, in all it variations and implied narratives, was embodied throughout the office. ‘Standardized’ English became the tool of establishing a political and cultural hierarchy with the English Five NESTs forming an inner circle of mainstream speakers at the pinnacle. This created a dynamic and discourse in which the diversity of English was absent, and racial disparity—linked to the linguistic hierarchy—prevailed. Therefore, in the little office of Ming with English speakers from seven different countries, Grace, a non-White teachers from Indonesia, was placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Additionally, the power of coloniality exercises its authority through the discourse of
hegemony, which produces a context rich in mimicry. The employment of NESTs to teach young children English, and prioritizing white NESTs over non-NESTs in the process of recruitment reflected the Chinese community’s desire of mimicry. The colonial discourse was further reinforced by the pressures of the Mimicry that normalized the superiority of ‘standardized’ English, continually marginalized the non-NESTs, despite their qualifications, and mastery of English as well as multiple other languages.

**The Standard of Canada**

In addition to the ‘standardized’ English, there was another standard that the NESTs adhered to, the social and professional standards of Canada. Lola was the only NEST who had extensive experiences teaching young children and working in a professional education setting in a western country. She had been a classroom teacher and administrator in kindergartens and at elementary schools, and she soon became the referee for how things should be done in the office of foreign teachers. When in doubt, English Five NESTs would ask, "do you do this in Canada?" Here is an example in my notes:

It was our weekly meeting. I was asking for the teachers’ feedback on the evaluation system I proposed last week. It was the system in which their salary increase would depend on which scale they are at according to the evaluation result. I reinstated the purpose of such system, “I just wanted to make it fair. You are not accountable for things you can’t improve overnight or beyond your control, but you are responsible for your professional behaviors, like being here on time, not leaving early and things like that.” Charlie was upset about it as if the system was targeting him, “That’s basically cutting off 300 RMB of our wages.” I explained, “It’s not cutting off your wages. You are not promised that you will get 2,000 RMB more each month every year. The contract says here, quote, salary increase ranges from 500-2,000 RMB after completion of the contract. What I did was just to add an objective tool to decide at what point in the range you deserve.” Charlie, “That’s docking our wages…Linking pay to your performance? People do not do that.” No one followed up to support his claim. He turned to Lola, “Do you link teachers’ pay to their performance in Canada?” Lola said no and went on with an extended explanation on how they do it (March 6, 2017).

Obviously Charlie turned to ‘the Canadian way’ for referee or back-up for his point, because it is viewed as an ultimate ruling when things were disputable. Emma had the same
observation:

Emma: I would say communication has been improved. You explained it better (than the previous manager), you know, the school policy and stuff. Sometimes when the buy-in was hard, you were like this is how it’s done in America or Canada, then they all shut up.

The American or Canadian way became the judge of the legitimacy of the Chinese school’s policy and rules. For many NESTs who did not have experiences of working as a teacher in their homelands, they could only refer to ‘the superior experience’ of how things work in Western countries when the Chinese way is deemed ‘backward’ or ‘unreasonable.’ A couple of days after the meeting, in a conversation about revising the evaluation rubric, Lola introduced doubts about the legitimacy of the evaluation system, as she reasoned:

“In Canada, we do not do salary increase and the evaluation. Each year you get an automatic increase. You will create competition among teachers, and too much competition is not good. Teachers compare.” Then she sketched the scale in my notebook (March 9, 2016).

Linking pay to teachers’ performance was indeed not common practice in Canada, but this had little bearing on whether or not to develop it at Ming in China. It was understandable that Lola, as an experienced teacher from Canada, referred to her previous experience to solve a problem in her current work setting. However, there was no doubt that she believed, without considering the specific context, using the exact same scale from Canada to apply to a Chinese context would be effective because it was ‘advanced.’ Therefore, instead of reasoning with the concrete problems we needed to solve and the logic behind it, she insisted the ‘advanced’ way would apply and work.

In many ways, these references to Canadian norms were ways to cover up problems the Chinese teachers had long been complaining about—a number of behaviors considered unprofessional in China. Throughout the year, the Chinese teachers had reported that “Jonny was sick every Monday. Like literally every Monday, he was sick,” or sometimes joked around, “it seemed English teachers are much more likely to get sick because they are so
vulnerable to diseases (laughing).” It seemed at Ming it was routine for some foreign teachers to be tardy, late or absent. Determined to change this pattern, I tried personal reminders, private talks, and a three strikes system, but none of these strategies worked. The revision of the evaluation rubric that Lola took umbrage with was my last resort. Unfortunately, its legitimacy was denied because, “it was not practiced in Canada.” The notions of “it doesn't work because it's not our way of way doing things” prevailed among the group of NESTs, and there was a deep belief in “our way is the right way.”

Essentially, whenever the NESTs criticized something about Ming, they would validate their critique by referencing Western cultural ways of doing this. In discourse, they would accomplish this by adding “it would not have been done this way in Canada” or “whereas in America” to statements and critiques, as Lola and Dan showed in her interview when asked about their understanding of Chinese way of doing things:

Lola: … They (the Chinese administrators) don’t give time to think and the freedom to make a decision. You have to do what you are told here and the teachers are too scared to question it. Whereas in Canada teachers got to say no…When I was in administration, you would suggest some different ideas, encourage them to try with them, you know, what works well, what doesn’t, you give people time to get their head around it, you have discussions and then you sort of implement it…

Me: Question: Anything that bothers you working at Ming, a Chinese school setting?
Dan: One example, because I just saw this yesterday, they put the pesticides pallets out in the plants during recess time, in the West, let’s just say in America, if the school had all these foliage and they are going to use it and probably just use for the foliage, and if they did, they would only do it if it would dissolve before they find it out. It will just take A kid to pick it up and put it in his mouth… That’s just crazy to be doing that.

From the logistic arrangement to independent thinking, the NESTs set forth a position of the centering of whiteness. They were using a standard of how it was done in America or Canada to evaluate their situation in China based which generated an evaluation result that set to failure because it was not aligned with the white values or ways of doing things. As Leonardo (2009) stated, “As a privileged marker, whiteness assumed that the lives of people
of color depended on white progress and enlightenment, whereas a heliocentric critical theory puts whiteness in its rightful place in racial cosmology, as largely dependent and parasitic on the labor and identity of people of color” (p94). This assumption, in the context of Ming, mainstreamed and justified their own inadequacies based on deficit views of China and Chinese culture, and became the excuse of shirking the responsibility of cultural adaptation. As Lola claimed,

Dan, “…Susan and Lora loved the way Jonny has been teaching. Stand up like in a military yelling RED PAJAMAS, everybody, red pajamas. They loved it! They thought he was the most amazing teacher.”

Lola, “I know Lora has some sort of degree, but China evolved. China is evolving into like western, you have seen enough in the west how it should be done. And if they have taken on the HighScope properly, that’s good…” (Informal interview, March 23, 2017)

There was an uncritically accepted notion among the NESTs that America, Canada, or the generalized Western was of doing things was the future of China, and therefore it was what China should be striving to achieve. As Kapoor (2004), synthesizing Spivak’s work, points out, the elite global professional class who Spivak calls ‘native informant’, while in our case the representatives of Western, made up of both First and Third worlders, is “so imbedded in managerialist culture that it is easily blind to the Third world subaltern or is prone to projecting developmental/ethnocentric mythologies onto the subaltern” (Kapoor, 2004, p. 274). The NESTs, just like the ‘native informant’, were so indulged themselves in the magnificent Western materialist achievement that they could not help themselves projecting the ‘advanced civilization’ of the West onto China. Therefore, there came the conclusion and prelude – “China is evolving into like western, you have seen enough in the west how it should be done.”

I wish to stress here that what I am questioning is not the comparisons between China and the NESTs’ practice of their home countries; it is natural to draw comparisons to what you are familiar with if you have lived in multiple countries. What I am interrogating is the
mindset of projecting White cultural practice onto a Chinese community; the way that these comparisons functioned for NESTs to assume the domination of white ideologies, and Other Chinese culture and people. As Leonardo (2009) says, “Not only whiteness encourages us to be ‘flat earthers’, but it constructs a Ptolemaic universe that misunderstands a world it has created after its own image” (p. 94) Exactly, the NESTs were interpreting the Chinese world based on the prerequisite of “if it resembles the West,” in the “Ptolemaic universe” that centered whiteness. One will find the absurdity of this logic by simply swapping the subjects in the sentence, “The West is evolving into like China, you have seen enough in China how it should be done.” However, the truth of how a social universe functions is that the West will never evolve into China, nor will China ever evolve into the West. The NESTs’ notion of their own superiority was latent in the deficit interpretation of the local cultural community, an excuse that would legitimize their conceited content of being an eternal foreigner and outsider.

**TIC: This is China!**

Strategically using comparisons to undermine Chinese practices was not the only way that NESTs perpetuated Whiteness and coloniality. As Kapoor (2004) stated, “Modernization thinking, which has so dominated the field (education) barely even mentions colonialism. For it, Third World history begins post-World War II, with First World growth patterns serving as history’s guide and goal… it reinforces Western ethnocentrism and triumphalism” (p. 273-274). The modernization thinking that many NESTs held ignored the fact that the White’s history of colonialism resulted in global inequality of the international division of labor and Chinese socioeconomic impoverishment after WWII, and believed that the great materialism achievement of the West approved that it deserved to serve the guide of the Third World of China. Based on this precondition, the discomfort of the NESTs’ cultural dislocation also
reinforces an impression of a backward China, further justifying their condescending attitude toward learning about the local cultural community and its practices. In all formal semi-structured interviews, the NESTs were asked to comment on their understanding of Chinese culture through concrete questions, such as: "how do you understand Chinese way of doing things?" or "Anything that bothers you working at Chinese school setting?" The NESTs unanimously responded in a way that they felt disappointed, weird, ridiculous, or unpleasantly surprised about how “absurd” and “backward” the Chinese way of doing this was. Several examples follow:

   Dan: We grew up like, don't tattle. I feel like the government culture here, like, if you know your neighbor is doing something wrong, tell us. We don't do that. We will go to them or don't do anything at all. More like going behind, telling your boss. Tattle. I think that also comes from the style of government.

   As planned, we had a meeting with the NESTs participants and their Chinese coworkers during lunch today, but many Chinese teachers were reluctant to voice out their opinions as they did in private. I shared my thoughts with Lola, “Why did not they (the Chinese teachers) talk about it? You know, I prompted them so many times. I wanted to see honest communication.” Lola commented, “it is because you do not have individuals. I mean, not you, you have studied in America. Your education does not allow you to have individual opinions. You were told what to do, and you were not allowed to have your own ideas. When we did the place mate, I noticed the English teachers got in groups and had individual opinions first in columns, but the Chinese teachers did not know what to do. They do not have their own ideas. They do not have individuals.” (Note, Nov. 16, 2017)

   Dan believed that the Chinese way of government produced a Chinese culture of tattle. It might be true that some Chinese people tattle, like some Americans do too, but generalizing tattling to a people was questionable. Tattling was considered inappropriate in Chinese culture as well. This kind of generalization, based on personal experiences, was also reflected in Lola’s conclusion about Chinese teachers who she believed did not have individuals. Given my cultural perspective, it was apparent to me that the Chinese teachers did not speak out not because they did not have their opinions or ideas, but because they sought to avoid a confrontational situation. Understandings of how one expresses critical views, or publicly
voices opinions are understood and interpreted drastically different in the West, and in Chinese culture with its Confucian influences. While publicly speaking one’s mind in the West is highly regarded skill—upheld as a personal quality, a right of free speech, a power and trait of leadership, and an art (Li, 2012)—it is quite the contrary in China, where there is a long tradition of distrust in public pronouncements, and an appreciation for action over words.

Confucius (year for text cited below) discussed mainly three kinds of problems with verbal craftiness, all of which are potential impediments to one's moral self-cultivation (the ultimate goal of learning): 1. The glib tongue divorces the mind from the heart; 2 flattering speech undermines sincerity; 3. Boastful speech lacks humanity (p. 297). It was also evident in research that Chinese students showed a high level of participation and active thinking when remained silence in class (Li, 2012). Given these cultural precepts, being silent or not speaking does not mean one is unable to think independently, rather, it is more likely an indication the Chinese teachers were trying to avoid confrontation, a potentially face-losing situation7. The culturally encapsulated Western assumption and practice around publicly stating opinions that Lola was using to evaluate the practices of Chinese culture prevented her from being able to engage in understanding the complexity of a different culture. After a year of working at the Chinese cultural setting, I asked her to talk about what she had learned about the “Chinese ways of doing things” at the end of the research, and she replied:

Lola: …Then even school-wise, you see all these kids at school, they all not allowed to question, and they are not allowed to do anything. I actually believe that sometimes Chinese can’t think out of a square, because they are not brought/bought out to being able to think globally. They are taught just thinking in one way, not in the other. Can you give me an example?
    Like just the drilling. If you are drilling them to work, you are not promoting thinking

7 Face here can most closely defined as “dignity” or “prestige”, but no translation can aptly cover all its fine nuances. Confrontation is considered a potential threat to “keep up face.” Chinese people tend to adopt a non-confrontational and indirect attitude towards conflicts, and tend to use an affective-intuitive style of conflict management rather than being confrontational (Chen, 2002).
for themselves or to think outside of the box, because you are only presenting this with one way of doing things. But I am like enjoying the challenge of it and learning more about it. At first, I thought it was ridiculous and I don’t agree with some of it, but I can see why it is that way now. Like When you go back to how Chinese has evolved, and how it is functioned, that’s why it is the way it is. It’s not something you can change overnight or even in ten years (interview, July 4, 2017).

Lack of the knowledge of the host language, and consequently culture, deprived the NESTs’ of the ability to decode the information they were presented with in accordance with Chinese cultural practices. Rather, their deeply held Eurocentric cultural values distorted the Chinese cultural reality, judging it by an external, colonial standard. As Boyle (2000) pointed out, “those who wish to work as a foreign teacher of English in China must take every opportunity to educate themselves into a historical and cultural awareness, and a social sensitivity to the Chinese culture” (p. 154). Unfortunately, such awareness and sensitivity were absent in NESTs’ understanding of intercultural experiences, and indeed, they were not even willing or eager to comprehend Chinese cultural realities.

In the interview transcriptions and anecdotes of the NESTs’ informal conversations, “Dictatorship” “not open to dialogue” “a culture of fear” “drilling” “not reliable” and “rude” were words and phrases the NESTs commonly used to characterize the Chinese school culture. These sorts of sentiments were captured in a conversation with Lola:

We would have to collect resources and materials at really short time and carry out “perfect lessons” with a new daily schedule in three days for the evaluation at the provincial level. No one was happy about it, and Lola went to the extreme. “I thought the whole thing was a joke. How could they do this? Why did they do it a year ago…It’s all because of your culture. You know that.” Me, “the hieratical thing?” Lola, “Yeah. Julie is a dictator. She is not a leader. If in our culture, this would not have happened. You were told to listen. Seriously.” Me, “what would have happened in your culture?” Lola, “Everyone would have been told a year ago. We make plans a year ahead. People would be involved and consulted in this thing…” (Note, Nov.30, 2016).” The hasty preparations aimed to pass the kindergarten evaluation of the first level status within the provincial level, which the school had been preparing for years. Lola believed

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8 Here kindergarten refers to educational organizations that provide services for children from 2.5 to 6 years old.
Julie was a dictator because it was her, a principal who was so disorganized, that everyone had to have a frantic rush to get everything ready for the unexpected inspection. The truth is that the school was notified that the inspection would take place in the specific year without exact dates, because it was a tradition for the evaluation committee to do unexpected inspections with short notices to avoid staged performances for the evaluation. While their language and discourse were problematic, many of the experiences NESTs complained about were true; and the frustration and disappointment they experience from working in a different culture were authentic. They were indeed asked the last minute to write lesson plans with more details based on the evaluation requirements. However, they foreclosed upon any remedy to this because of their deficit understandings of Chinese culture, which were based on the standards of white normality. As Leonardo (2002) states,

Whiteness is guilty of a certain ‘hidalguismu,’ or son of God status, in its quest to exert its brand of civilization on non-white nations…Hidalguism is the obsessive pursuit of status and honor, the alpha and omega of hidalgo’s life. Whiteness stamps its claims to superiority, both morally and aesthetically speaking, on its infantilized Other by claiming to speak for people who apparently speak in gibberish. It aims to comprehend a people better than it comprehends itself (p34).

The NESTs tended to infantilize Chinese cultural practice based on their limited understanding of the local community. Their conclusions about Chinese culture of “dictatorship” “Chinese people do not have individuals” or “Chinese people cannot think out of a square” demonstrated a typical way of White ‘hidalguismo’ thinking. From the perspective of centering whiteness, to refrain from public speaking was interpreted as the lack of individual identity, and a collectivist culture of hierarchy was understood bluntly as dictatorship.

The Eurocentric mindset, the uncritically accepted ideology of “I am your future,” and the condescending attitude towards learning about the ‘backward’ host culture exacerbated the Otherness NESTs felt in and towards the Chinese cultural community. There is a circle of
cause and effect here: Whiteness allowed them to dismiss any pretense of humility or a need to learn about a different culture, and empowered their attitude that their perspective was so ‘standard’ and ‘right’ they could better understand the cultural dynamics in China than the locals could, which, in turn, reinforced their impression of a culture mired in ‘communist dictatorship, coldness and indifference,’ and thus produced the idea of a ‘backward’ China, that they need not learn much about.

This perception of backwardness extended beyond the NESTs’ work, and was generalized to every aspect of Chinese society, such as medical services, parenting, diet, popular culture, etc., a fact evident in their daily life ‘wisdom’ in China:

It was Friday. I was complaining about my knee problem that prevented me from playing badminton over the weekend. Lola suggested, “you should go see a doctor when you get back to America.” Me, “Yeah, but why America?” Lola answered incredulously, “Are you going to see a doctor here?”

Lola’s sarcastic tone connoted a scorn for Chinese medical services that are responsible of billions’ Chinese people’s health. Even though she had never personally experienced any failure of Chinese medical services, she jumped to the conclusion that it is not trustworthy, simply because it is Chinese. This kind of deeply rooted deficit attitude and white supremacy was everywhere, disguised in rhetorical questions about Chinese services, informal conversations, and trending blogs on the NEST groups’ Facebook and Wechat social media pages. Indeed, social media became a safe space to vent subtly deficit-oriented perspectives on their host country’s cultural practice. In 2017, I noted an article critiquing Chinese practices from a Western viewpoint had been spreading among NESTs:

There was a trending article in the circle of NESTs, titled “China's Young Children Are Overheating in the Middle of Winter.” It followed up with a horrifying claim: “deep-seated tradition and poor public health knowledge have parents bundling up their kids in too many layers of clothing”. It went on with the ‘advanced’ Western science, “medical studies have revealed that keeping children too warm and staying too long in an excessively hot or stuffy atmosphere can lead to a lack of oxygen, high fever, heavy sweating, and dehydration. These are potentially life-threatening conditions, and stories of
overheated children have occasionally attracted the attention of Chinese media. Yet the compulsion to block out the cold runs deep in Chinese tradition.” The argument of the whole nation’s children suffering from overheating was supported from the highlight italic word “stories”, and when you clicked on it, it did not lead you to the trended news on the cases that children were hospitalized for being overheated. Instead, it was a blank page. Searching by keywords like "overheating" "Chinese children" and "too many clothes" in English and Chinese lead the same result (Note, Dec. 28, 2017).

It was because of the ignorance to Chinese parenting practice that this kind of article could actually get its way among NESTs. One could easily tell the opinions and evidence in the article were completely flawed. There was no data throughout the article, not even a cardinal number, yet it’s called “Chinese parents” phenomenon. It’s just common sense that what it says about Chinese parents is not true. Indeed, some grandparents or parents tend to bundle up their children in cold weather, just like in many other cultures, but I am sure they won’t overheat them to death. I am a Chinese parent, and dozens of my friends are Chinese parents, and we are all equipped with certainly not “poor health knowledge” to know how to dress our kids properly for the weather. Interestingly there was emphasized at the end of the article that there was a cultural shift that "Chinese child care methods are evolving…and many parents in 20s and 30s now care less about what their children wear…” but such information did not appear anywhere in the title. Using such an appalling and extreme title, poorly supported by distorted evidence, rampant overgeneralizations, and discriminated presumptions, to feed the NESTs’ deficit perspectives about Chinese parents, and to cater to the mentality of ‘backward’ China that needs the White enlightenment. Some NESTs posted this article with comments like “it’s dangerous for children to wear too much cloth” on their Wechat of Chinese social media, criticizing the ‘backward’ Chinese cultural practice with the intention to educate the ‘backward’ and ‘ignorant’ Chinese parents.

So extreme was their deficit orientation to Chinese cultural ways of being and practices that the NESTs even created a private term they could share among themselves to capture the
‘backwardness’ and the ‘absurdity’ of Chinese – TIC, this is China. The way this was deployed is evident in both social media among the group, as in Becky’s post:

Becky (Wechat post): Decided to try a new breakfast place, they are still cleaning from the night before open at 7am doesn’t necessarily mean ready to serve at 7am. TIC!!!

And in their regular discussions, as it arose in an interview, wherein Dan defined TIC for me:

…Yesterday they put the pesticides pallets out in the plants during recess time… I see the kids picking them up and playing with them. All it takes just A child to pick it up and put it in his mouth. All I can think is the possible lawsuit for that…That's just crazy to be doing that…They were so worried about kids' safety. And then something, which I think it's really important, and many other foreign teachers said, it's crazy, did you see the guy out there with pesticides. They shut down every fan that year because some kid was in a restaurant in Hunan broke off the ceiling and it fell and hit him, it killed him or whatever. But the whole thing, like broke off the ceiling, was connected, though. How much is this fan? Probably like 2000 RMB each, and there are in each room. They just shut them off.

How do you feel about this?

Well, I mean you can’t get upset about it, as a foreigner. People do. I’ve people here for like ten years, and they are still like, ah ah ha, upset. I am like, you are just stressing yourself out. It's not something you can control. So I don't like the pesticide guy doing it during class time, but I said that I just have to deal with it. I'll just have to watch my kids extra close at that point. Stuff like that. Maybe I told you before. We say TIC, this is China. Something happens you see that you don't agree with, it's kind of like, you would be like “oh, TIC.” Everybody, foreigners, would be like, oh, ok, which means just let it go.

TIC, as the culmination and encapsulation of NESTs deficit perspectives on China, at once captured their White resentment, and the helplessness and the anxiety of the NESTs as they struggled in the process of adaptation to an unfamiliar cultural environment. They were ill prepared to operate in China, but instead of seeking growth, they invoked TIC as a way of claiming their cultural superiority. This move reflected a group psychology of shrugging off the notion of learning about Chinese culture and ascribing the foreignness to cultural inferiority and backwardness.

There are multiple factors that influence NESTs’ levels of acculturation, which included, but not limited to psychological factors such as knowledge of the host language, motivation for acculturation and positive attitude towards the host society, and social integration, such as
interpersonal relationships with the native (Kim, 2012). However, under the regime of postcolonialism, there were multiple variables that played out in their process of acculturation, power relations with the local community and non-NESTs, race, ethnicity, physical features or geographical region. The pedagogy of White racial hegemony saturated everyday life of Ming foreign and Chinese teachers. The ‘hidalguísimo’ of whiteness propelled the NESTs from humbling themselves to learn about a different culture, and deprived them of cultural competence - empathy, openness, tolerance of ambiguity, readiness to decenter, and willingness to engage with others (Guilherme, 2012); they claimed their racial superiority “on its infantilized Other by claiming to speak for people who apparently speak in gibberish,” and claimed to “comprehend a people better than it comprehends itself” (Leonardo, 2002, p34), which was illustrated by their mantra of TIC. Therefore, instead of trying to make sense of their own ‘Otherness’, they leveraged their Whiteness and white superiority as much as possible to instead claim that it was the Chinese, not them, who were odd, strange, and ‘Other’. Consequently, their motivation to fit in this strange community suffered, and their interrelations with the ‘other’ was impaired.

The Sacred Imagined West

While the attitudes of the NESTs were hugely impactful in their struggles towards acculturation and successful teaching, their ideologies were not the only ones that shaped their experience at Ming. As discussed earlier in this text, the power of coloniality has reached every corner of the earth. In the context of Eurocentrification, Chinese culture is thus Othered by hegemonic Western discourse, and placed in the inferior position of "subaltern,” where the West and its English language remained at the pinnacle of the linguistic, cultural and political hierarchy produced and enabled by Western imperialism and the colonial power. As a result of the pervasive influence of colonialism, English has been
associated with the myth of modernity and a better life in many Asian countries (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016; Kubota & Lin, 2009). In fact, across China and many other Asian
countries, everything Western, from the political regimes, to drinks like Coke and Starbucks
Coffee, have become positioned as attractive and superior. The result of these hegemonic,
colonial forces is the construction of an imagined “sacred Western ideal” in the collective
Chinese imagination (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016; Bunce, et. al., 2016). As Zheng wrote,

The West does not denote a geographic region but rather a field of meanings. Local and
global media, such as pirated Western … DVDs, form the basis on which Chinese
conceptions of the West are based. These raw cultural materials are refined into complex
concepts. The final product is only tangentially related to the raw materials themselves.
Thus, the process is better described as the creative use of foreign cultural products rather
than the direct impact of Western culture on Chinese society. … In this sense, the West is
‘(re)made in China’ (p270).

Just as China and Asian culture have been imagined, essentialized, exoticized and reduced
by colonial ideas of Orientalism (Said, 1978), the West has been imagined, essentialized,
exoticized, and reduced in China. This imagined scared West was, without exception,
associated both with prosperity and modernity, but also with an image of white skinned
native English speakers (Stanley, 2016). At Ming, both Chinese teachers and administrators
seemed to admire this imagined, sacred West, and the ideal of whiteness it carried in the
focus group with the NESTs Chinese coworkers:

Feifei: What I felt most was that foreigners are very protective of their private time. I
wanted to post the contact info of our teachers for parents, but Elsa said she didn't want
give her phone number to the parents, and Wechat account, or online chatting group, she
denied them all.
HongXia: They really respect children. I could see that. Joe always offered the kids
choices, every time he was preparing materials for kids artwork, he always did. It was nice.
And Max, they are both like that. They always said nice things to kids, like they could
have done nothing wrong.
Dingding: I felt like that they are like enjoying life more than we do. You know, they
have all kinds of hobbies and interests to explore. When they have something, they would
invest a lot of time and energy in it. But most Chinese don't have hobbies. All we do is to
work.

When a teacher found out that teachers in the West worked as hard as they did, which was
contrary to the easy life of five-hour working day that foreigners enjoy at Ming, she sounded surprised and indignant:

Fan: “My class had a few teachers this semester, and they’ve studied abroad and worked as a preschool classroom teacher in the West. I’ve asked them if teachers abroad never work overtime. They said no, and in fact, they would work more overtime than we do. Anyways, it's like us, if you can't finish your job at school, you work overtime or bring it home…So it is not like that foreigners don’t work overtime and all that. Why is it different when they come here? Is it because they have never worked as a teacher in their home countries? ”

Hongxia, “Yeah, like here, the foreign teacher never work overtime. It's like a regulation.”

Peng: not a regulation. It’s like, ah,
Said all, ”a default rule.”

When asked about any cultural difference that they were aware of among the foreign teachers, the Chinese teachers paused for a bit, and then gradually came up with predominantly positive descriptions of being “protective over their private time” “respect to children” and “enjoying life more.” When they found out that teachers in the West worked hours as long as they did, they were shocked and offended, because they used to believe that in these countries that they were so advanced that teachers would be free from financial concerns, and would not need to work even eight hours a day, which they believed was the reason the foreign teachers at Ming were working much less hours than they did.

Interestingly, in Shanghai, a thousand miles away from our research site, Stanley (2012) shared similar observations in her study, where she documented the stereotypes that young Chinese women hold for white male foreign teachers in Shanghai. Because of their association with the idealized and modern west, White males were presumed to be sexually accomplished, financially comfortable, and romantic. All these reductive and essentialized stereotypes of a developed West creates a postcolonial discourse that goes beyond of the hallucinatory perceptions of the West. Everything Western, from Nike shoes, Prada hand gags, and all products made in the West to Western cultural values, ideologies, and pedagogy
were believed to be superior. Western cultural practices were labeled as "international" and “advanced”, and identified with “modernity”, and something the Chinese ‘we’ should learn.

When asked about experiences of working with foreign teachers, Julie, the principal, at Ming, shared:

I remember it was at the very beginning when the school just got started, and so the toys and furniture still had that fresh paint scent. We thought there could be some pollution in classrooms, even though the test result did not indicate so. It was hot summertime, and so I allowed to have the air-con on with the classroom windows open, you know, to increase airflow. He(a white NEST) was very upset about it. He runs to the classrooms, shutting the windows, one by one. He rushes to my office, accusing us of wasting energy and sabotaging environment. I think the idea of environmental protection is carved into their minds. We are like, we talk about it a lot, at the conceptual level, but they are doing it and practicing it…He also had a problem with the activity we used to do on the Children’s Day Carnival, put the fish in the small pond, and kids using little nets to search and catch them. He was again very upset about it and said it was disrespectful to life, and so we canceled it (translated from Chinese. Interview with Julie, July 19, 2017).

It was common knowledge at Ming and in China that “the West equals modernity or advancement.” Driven by a mixture of internalized colonialism and the Confucian ideology of ‘modeling’ — the pedagogical repertoire that Chinese instructors use to cultivate students’ individuality and morality — the West was constructed as exemplary in every aspect of society, and an ideal that the Chinese should strive to follow and humbly learn from. This preoccupation with acceptance of western modernity, blinds Julie from recognizing rude and inappropriate behaviors displayed by a white supremacist who acted as an activist with the “advanced idea of environmental protection” and demonstrated complete ignorance to the specific situation, and the Chinese cultural value of respecting leaders. It would be hard to imagine a Chinese staff member rushing into an administrator’s office, shouting and admonishing a principal for failing at environment protection, and receiving no disciplinary consequences, and indeed only a sincere acknowledgement of their points, given the Chinese cultural values of strict hierarchy; yet this was exactly what occurred in this instance due to Julie’s perception of the west and western NESTs as idealized employees. In reflecting on
the NESTs, Susan shared similar uncritical assumptions about the NESTs:

Foreigners, I mean as a group, are honesty. They are not like us, all that flexibility thing, you know, allowing wiggling room. They stick to rules. They do as they promised. For example, time concept is like a trigger to conflicts between us. You know, when we have a meeting, say the scheduled time is from 9 to 10, but it won’t probably start 9, nor would it end at 10. This happened, and they taught me a lesson. I said the training would end at 5 a clock, but when it clocked five, I was still haranguing. They said, “sorry, our driver is waiting for us”. I felt I was really being disrespected, and it was so rude. You know, they stood up, said “we are leaving”, and they left, right at five a clock. But I thought about it and figured that we needed to change the way we work. We should learn from them. They value the spirit of agreement. You said the time, and then you should do as you promised. This is telling us where we need to improve, to complete things in the scheduled timeframe, and not to change it (Interview with Susan, June 25, 2016)

The act of leaving in the middle of a meeting without permission was obviously rude and unacceptable in Chinese culture, as well as NESTs' home cultures. Yet Susan interpreted as “the spirit of agreement”, and something exemplar that “we need to from.” Obviously the idealized Western values blinded her from recognizing the NESTs’ rudeness to her. Later I asked Eli and Elsa if there were NESTs had actually left in the middle of meetings, and they said they did not remember doing so, but it was very likely that the anecdote referred to Becky and Dan who, on multiple occasions, said or implied that they did not respect Susan as a leader. The NESTs were obviously aware of the inappropriateness of the behavior, because no one had ever walked out of any of the weekly meetings that I as manager had held, even though quite a few times these meetings extended after work hours. Ironically, even being offended, Susan interpreted the disrespectful behavior of NESTs as a superior cultural value of the ‘spirit of agreement’. The only rational explanation to this absurd interpretation was the belief in the ‘advanced West’ that Susan, and many Chinese people, held. Just as the NESTs projecting the West onto China’s future, the Chinese people themselves were not only acknowledging such a projection, but also accepting centering whiteness, and thus the white value of the ‘spirit of agreement,’ became a golden rule that the Chinese must humble themselves to learn.
Essentially, global coloniality and whiteness, in all its variations, was replicated in the school setting. In this case, the Chinese teachers and administrators placed themselves in the ‘subaltern,’ colonized position, deferring to the superiority of white, western, colonial cultural values. Linked closely to this, however, was social and linguistic stratification that prioritized white bodies and English over others.

Standardized English and structured racism

English language hegemony represents a rampaging phenomenon of the dominance of English all over the world. Now, in China, as well as many other places in the postcolonial world, the, “English language has come to represent capital and power and symbolizes a kind of dividing rod of class and racial disparity within the US and around the world” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 53). In short, in China, as more parents demanding English mediated instructions at school, English became the ‘servant of imperialism’, slaughtering cultural and linguistic diversity (Gao & Rapatahana, 2016).

In many cases, the Chinese government and intellectual elites became agents at work in the spread of English, and the promotion and idealization of the ‘standardized' English myth. In 2016, the Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs of Shagang (AFEA-Shagang, 2016) issued a new policy of hiring foreign teachers in which it was regulated that:

Foreign language teaching staff should, in principle, be engaged in teaching with their first language (listed countries include the UK, the US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and other Commonwealth Nations), hold at least a bachelor’s degree, and have more than two years of language teaching experience. Candidates from Singapore, Philippine and countries with English as an official language may be granted a working permit on the condition that she/he has a bachelor’s degree in the listed native English speaking countries (AFEA-Shagang, 2016)

It was also specifically stated in Ming’ recruitment materials that candidates were required to be Native English Speakers from the specified inner circle of English Five countries:

English Teachers are wanted at Ming International Kindergarten...
Qualifications
1. Be a ‘Native English Speaker’ from U.K., U.S., Canada, New Zealand or Australia, with clear enunciation.

2. Have one of: BA (Hons) in Teaching, BA (Hons) in English, BA (Hons) in other relevant teaching fields, or a PGCE (Ming International Kindergarten, 2018).

Both statements that comprise the advertisement imply that only inner circle, English Five countries’ mainstream English are legitimate models for language learning, which reflected and reinforced the superiority of the mainstream English of these countries, and the cultural and linguistic hegemonic dominance of the people who speak it. This structured, institutional discrimination created the hierarchy of language speakers among the NESTs and foreign teachers that “often mirrors a racial or ethnic hierarchy, constituting a further, racialization myth, which conflagrates legitimate English speakers with whiteness” (Kubota & Okuda, 2016, p. 81). Effectively, this privileged status of native English speakers was also increased by having white skin. I noted one of these latent rules of discriminatory hiring practice at Ming in a field note:

I asked Amy (office assistant) today how she was doing with the new teacher recruitment. She said she already posted the want ad in a few websites, but she hasn’t had any luck yet. I was puzzled because it has been a few weeks and we should have had something. I wondered if there was something wrong with the websites. I logged in a couple of website accounts myself and found out there were quite a few candidates who submitted applications. Being surprised, I went to Amy and questioned if she had regularly checked the accounts. She said yes, and pulled out one of the accounts, and commented as she was scrolling down the page, “Where are they (qualified candidates)? This one is not good. No degree. Not good, black.” I stopped her with a question, “they are qualified, and they are native English speakers. Why not? ” as I pointing at an Asian and a black teacher. Amy answered, “I was told not to hire them. You know, before you came, it was the policy. You can’t say it, but you don’t hire black and Asian looking teachers because parents will have a problem with it.” (Nov. 9th, 2017)

The blatant racism and anti-blackness involved in this was shocking. I told her immediately that from then on, we would welcome people of color as much as white candidates. Later, while we did recruit teachers of color, the principals rejected many of these qualified teachers I had carefully selected and interviewed. My reflections on this process were captured in a field note:
We needed 13 foreign teachers for the four branches for the coming fall, and so far, we have only had two. Today Lola and I were thrilled because we interviewed a Chinese Canadian woman who had teaching experiences in Hong Kong. We both thought she could be a great fit. I was excited to call the principal at Mountainside to let her know we’ve got one for her only to find out that she didn’t want her because of her Asian looks. I went on calling another principal, who was desperately in need of an English teacher for her new classes, thinking she would be interested. The answer was still no, because she was Asian. I had to really sell this teacher, and even threatened a bit, like I can't assure you to even have a foreign teacher if you don’t take this one. She eventually agreed to take her, but on the condition that I will get her a white one in the future (June 21st, 2017).

But the ultimate outcome was archived in a recorded phone call which captured the details of the negotiation in which the principal was trying to cancel the contract with a newly hired, well qualified black teacher I was trying to push her to accept:

Principal Qian: I don't want to take the black teacher anymore. My assistant has sent you a few resumes (white non-native speakers). Can you just pick one out of them?

Me: I've gone through the resumes and interviewed one of them, but they were either not qualified or barely speaking English. Why don't you take the black teacher? He is a qualified teacher. He is a certified teacher with a bachelor’s degree in education, a rare find. Plus we've already signed the contract with him, and he is coming for training in two weeks.

Principal Qian: Teachers here can't accept a black teacher, and nor could the parents. In fact, parents on the main campus don't acknowledge black teachers, either.

Me: Well, I don't think so. We’ve had a black teacher here, and her name is Niko. She was well received by the parents. I mean parents, students, and Chinese teachers all loved about her. …Now we have a black teacher at Dong campus, and she is well received there…The resumes you sent me, they are not qualified. It’s illegal to hire them (teachers not from the listed countries) …(after a couple of rounds of negotiation)

Principal Qian, being irritated, “just find me a white face! Now everybody is against it (hiring a black teacher). I can't take him…Anyways, pick one from the resumes I sent you, but the person must be white. I don't care if the person teaches well or not. The brand of Ming could be downgraded by having a black teacher. I had thought about parents’ resistance, but I just realized the potential threat to the school's reputation…” (Phone call with Principal Chen, June 27th, 2017.)

It was a painful fact that structural racism and anti-blackness were prevalent in the local Chinese community, and especially in the English teaching business. Whiteness and English were so tightly bound together that they became inseparable in the imagined West Chinese administrators were seeking to depict in their schools. In fact, this was not just happening in China. The presumed lineal relationship of Whiteness and English saturated the post-colonial
discourse in many cultures around the world. Japanese English textbooks portray a foreign language teacher as a white native speaker of the ‘standardized’ English. Similarly, there was also systematic racial discrimination against non-native, non-white native, English speaking teachers in Japan, and Brazil (Jordao, 2016; Kubota & Okuda, 2016); while students from Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium were stressed with they were placed in non-white families for English language learning and intercultural communication in Australia, because non-white was construed as "not Australian" (Stanley, 2016). Around the world and in China, whiteness and English are mapped in a one-to-one correspondence. In this environment, “Whiteness cannot be apprehended without, for example, the expectation of a complete lack of skill in using chopsticks; nor can the identity of those with white skin be comprehended if they do not speak English” (Stanley, 2008, p. 70). At Ming, this tight correspondence between whiteness and English language ability created a linguistic hierarchy among the NESTs that school administrators and the local ideology fueled, reinforcing white skin privilege, and institutional racism against teachers of color.

The impact that colonialism and whiteness had on the Chinese principals' decisions, and perspectives, were tragic. They would rather hire a white face with limited English proficiency at the cost of teaching quality, because for them, Whiteness, as a common sense, translated into acceptance by Chinese administrators. As a result, the NESTs did not have to be active promoters of White supremacy. The structural, internal colonialism necessary to reinforce their privileged position in employment, the language they speak, their cultural practice, and almost every aspect of social life even in a foreign territory, was already institutionalized through the administrator’s imagined western ideal. As Leonardo notes, “through the reification and subsequent hegemony of white people, whiteness is transformed

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9 Many Chinese people cannot differentiate English speaking Caucasian white people from non-Caucasian and non-English speaking people with light skin from Russia or non-English speaking European countries.
into the common sense that becomes law. As a given right of the individual white person, whiteness can be enjoyed, like any property, by exercising and taking advantage of privileges of co-extensive with whiteness” (Leonardo, 2002, p. 38). In our case, the “property of white privilege” was uncritically accepted by administrators and Chinese culture more broadly, and thus, bestowed by parents.

When accused of racism, some principals explained that they were forced to be “selective” in hiring white teachers because of the capital whiteness held among Chinese parents and in the larger society. This excerpt of Susan's interview speaks to the parents’ belief in whiteness, and the way it impacted administrators decisions:

Parents have kind of two mindsets when it comes to foreign teachers. On one hand, they think highly of them and look up to them. They are, wow, (white) foreigners, and they are proud to have a foreign friend. They would be boastful about having a foreign friend, like, “oh, Michael (a typical foreigner’ name) is my friend. “On the other hand, they have expectations for their kids’ English learning, and so of course, their kids’ English teachers. If these expectations don’t match, they complain…Some parents have a bias against black teachers. We used to have a black teacher, a really good one, but the parents were kind of judgmental because she is black. A parent, who studied in the UK and had worked there for a few years, generally speaking, is not supposed to have this kind of bias, but he, like at his core, discriminated against black people. The teacher was great, but they (parents) would not accept black teachers.

It is a poignant fact that the parents divided and judged the foreign teachers based on discursively constructed phenotypical features. The linguistic hierarchy has been translated into racism, which evoked other forms of prejudice and personal discrimination against black teachers and an uncritical acceptance of whiteness. As Moreton-Robinson (2015) wrote, “Race matters in the lives of all peoples; for some people, it confers unearned privilege, and for others, it is a mark of inferiority.” For non-white English-speaking teachers, the internal colonialism and privileging of whiteness were so deeply ingrained in their surroundings and relationships that they were doubly placed at the ‘Othered’ position. Emma, a Chinese Australian English teacher shared her experience with this tension:
Me: Have you had challenges of working at Ming? If yes, what were they?
Emma: To be honest, I am a foreign teacher, but I don’t look foreign, and so I have suffered a lot from my looks. I know I have to work harder than the other teachers to win over parents. It takes time, you know, for parents to realize that, oh, she teaches well. I am not like the other teachers. Even if their teaching skills suffer, it’s ok because they look foreign and parents adore them. You know, they have a white face to ‘swipe’, but I don’t.
Me: Can you give me an example?
Emma: It was in 2012 when I just started my job. Susan wanted me to start with a baby class because I was new. The kids were like 16 months old, and Susan believed that the parents would not expect much English from babies who could barely speak Chinese. She even said a baby class could really bring the best out of me. I am nice and friendly, and I speak both English and Chinese so that I could better understand the needs of babies. I said ok. It was about the fifth lesson, and one day, I was shocked because there were only three kids. It used to be 12. I thought it was quite strange and thought it might be the cold going on at the school. But it was still like three kids in the week after… It turned out that eight parents got together and boycotted the class. They got all kinds excuses, like bad classes, not prepared or me being irresponsible. Then I found principals coming to my classes, observing and taking notes… Susan told me, like they’ve observed my classes and everything, and it wasn’t because I wasn’t serious about the job. It was because of my Asian look. The principals had a talk with the parents, and they were like, “we would not change a teacher who was professional and had a strong sense of responsibility…” but the parents insisted on having a teacher with a “ghost” face, and they all pulled their kids out of the program…crying. I still feel (crying)… (Translated from Chinese. Interview with Emma. May 20, 2016)

Emma’s encounter with racism from the parents was later confirmed by Susan, and the Chinese head teachers who worked with her in the informal interviews (Note, March 16, 2017). According to them, Emma was always assigned to work with grade leaders who were considered experienced in parental communication. They all knew that Emma’s skin color was her “weak point,” and it would take longer for her to establish a relationship of trust with parents because of it. However, last year, even if they had been very careful about working on “her weak point,” the same encounter of racism, though with a different group of parents, happened again just before the end of data collection window for this project. Several parents in Emma’s class attempted to create a petition to replace her with a white teacher. One of the parents committee members called upon the parents in her class to draft the petition, and the reason was unfair treatment that all classes but theirs had a white foreign teacher. The petition was later dropped, and the parents got a white teacher, because it was the school’s
tradition that Emma would not loop up with preschoolers at the age of her current class. Incidents like this are why some principals in the study confessed that they felt ‘forced' by parents to screen out teachers of color in the recruitment process. As principal Qian argued in the phone call, she would face a lot of pressure from parents if she took on a black teacher, and of course, she did not want to find herself in such a troublesome position.

These were poignant manifestations of internal colonialism present on Chinese parents, who were considered local elites who sent their children to a privileged private school of Ming. The Chinese administrators and teachers accepted and acknowledged the racial stratification that was playing in the larger society, and among the parents, because for one thing, parents in private schools were considered customers that needed to be pleased, and for another, they themselves accepted whiteness as we discussed before. The racist, internally colonized conceptualizations that the Chinese parents and administrators held were disconcerting. They believed that whites were superior to their own culture and ethnicity, ignoring the oppressive nature of white dominance, and found themselves willing to exclude teachers of color, even those who shared their same ancestry. A representative of the parents committee said on a PTA meeting, “many of us wanted to have full-day English program, because our kids aren’t educated in English enough,” demanding a complete wipeout of mother tongue education since early childhood for their children. The research evidence on mother-tongue based bilingualism or multilingualism has reached consistent conclusions: the literacy skills children establish in their mother-tongue lay the foundation of all later language learning, and leads to improved educational results (Bunce, et al., 2016). However, the normalized colonization ran so deeply that the Chinese parents claimed and acknowledged white supremacy regardless of the educational impacts. Emboldened by the postcolonial context and the centering whiteness, they became fanatic in their belief that
abandoning their own language, and separating themselves from their own people and culture, was a justified way to secure a bright future for their children. As Bunce, et al. (2016) pointed out, “the organization of the teaching and learning of English should, therefore, aim not at producing poor copies of native speakers of English but at producing proficient users of English as a second or foreign language who can adapt their language according to culturally relevant needs. Ironically, even today, such localized Englishes are consistently subsumed by the monster Hydra head of standardized English” (p. 14). Unfortunately, and tragically, this was what was happening at Ming. The parents demanded English to replace their own language, and demanded whiteness as part of the package in which that English was acquired.

**Concluding Thoughts**

All these confounding factors, the obsessiveness over ‘standardized’ English by both NESTs and Chinese administrators, the deficit perspectives about Chinese culture that NESTs arrived with, and the institutionalized racism among the local Chinese community and school leadership that reinforced NESTs privilege, contributed to the dominance of whiteness in the local cultural community. The imagined West, the internal colonialism and the racist norms of Chinese people, fanned the flames of whiteness, and kept white supremacy alive even in the absence of a plurality of white people. Consequently, these monstrous ideologies circumscribed the NESTs, and created an exotic and hallucinatory space that allowed them to engage in counter-productive social behaviors and anti-Chinese racism of their own that would likely not have been acceptable in their home cultures. It was widely known that a NEST at Ming had been having extramarital sexual relationships with multiple mothers at the school until one of them became pregnant, and made the affair public. Another NEST was involved in a crime of assault, hurting a couple of foreigners, so that he
was deported. Their professionalism was also questionable. As a NEST reflected in an interview, “everyone trashes Susan, but I believe English teachers create the negative image by ourselves. We’ve just got a teacher walked out of the classroom in the middle of a class, no reason, just not in the mood for working. And John (another NEST) just simply vanished; no phone calls, emails, messages, nothing. People don’t care.” Interestingly, in Shanghai, similar findings were observed of NESTs engaging in poor behaviors, including NESTs engaging in prohibited and exploitative sexual relationships with their college-level students (Stanley, 2013). Obviously, what was happening at Ming provides a blueprint to understand how the phenomenon of NESTs plays out in a postcolonial context across China. Indeed, the phenomenon of exercising white privilege and racism was not exclusive to Ming teachers; rather these experiences are commonly produced by Chinese educators and parents themselves in thousands of education organizations and childcare centers in China, where more and more NESTs and non-NEST foreign teachers are hired as China marches towards the international arena and the ‘modernity’ of the imagined west. In fact, in one meeting I hosted with principals and teachers from 68 different private early childcare centers all over China, many of them shared similar observations, and reported NESTs’ problems with unprofessional behaviors, lack of cultural understanding, unwillingness to involve in local cultural activities, and parents' racist perspectives against teachers of color.

The purpose of this research was to explore NESTs’ acculturation in a Chinese education setting, and its influence on their professional practice. The analysis endeavored to deconstruct the process of acculturation and its potential impacts. However, the degree to which whiteness and racism played an adverse role in the NESTs’ resocialization towards greater compatibility into Chinese host culture was unexpected. The impact of whiteness, white supremacy, and internal colonialism on NESTs was real; eliminating their motivation
for acculturation, and promoting resistance to intercultural learning and communication which would have led to improved teaching performance and professional growth. With this in mind, the next chapter will explore the impact of whiteness and racism on the education quality at Ming, introduce the activities of acculturation, and discuss their influences on the NESTs teaching practice.
CHAPTER IX. THE URGENT NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Introduction

As discussed in chapter II, many NESTs did not have a professional background in education and received little or no in-service training before beginning their work at Ming. Consequently, their teaching quality was already lacking, with the confounding social and cultural isolation as we discussed in the previous chapters contributing to the challenges facing their instruction.

However, assessing teachers’ work, or quality of instruction, was difficult at Ming, where there was not any form of assessment available for children’s English learning, or for robustly assessing teachers' work performance. To address this problem and track changes in the NESTs teaching, I used two classroom observation tools—the Quality Responsive Classroom Observation Protocol, and the Social Organization of Learning Observation Protocol—for two rounds of classroom observations in June 2016, and again June-July 2017. Additionally, I interviewed different groups of people who had either observed the NESTs' classes or worked with them on a daily basis for at least a semester in order to gain multiple perspectives on the NESTs pedagogical performance. These groups included the research participants themselves, the Chinese teachers and administrators, seven Chinese intern students, three American intern students, and Dr. Sana Green (pseudonym), a respected American professor and experienced school administrator who visited Ming. All interviewees but the participants had majored in, or had expertise in, early childhood education. They were all asked to comment on the NESTs’ teaching quality, or their observations from visiting their classes. Lesson plans, children’ works, video excerpts, and
pictures of their lessons were also collected to support the data analysis.

Results from the interviews and the class observations were consistent in reporting an English teaching model that was teacher-centered, and involved extended periods of large-group time, with little or no one-on-one instruction. Observations of challenging behaviors during class, and developmentally and culturally inappropriate teaching contents were also consistently reported. Before we move on to the elaboration of these findings, let us return to the cultural and historical context of English teaching at Ming.

Cultural Isolation and marginalized practices

Early childhood education (ECE) in China has gone through waves of innovation in the past two decades, mainly through top-down policy changes and reforms. With the determination to embrace the West, the Chinese government initiated ECE curriculum reform movements aiming to shift their traditional pedagogy to a westernized model, becoming less didactic and controlling, and more children centered and personalized. The government issued the Regulations on Work in Kindergartens in 1989. In the regulation, a new ideology of preschool education was mandated with an emphasis on progressive ideas from the West, such as child-initiated activity, acknowledgement of individual learning differences, learning through play, and process-focused activities (Zhu, 2009). However, these official regulations were widely criticized for their generalized theoretical guidelines, which produced a lack of practical support and guidance around teaching strategies. This made it difficult for practitioners to fully embrace and implement these ideas, even as they were a governmental priority (Wang & Mao, 1996). To bridge this policy-practice gap, the Ministry of Education issued the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education in 2001, which further pushed western pedagogies into Chinese preschool classrooms. Decades on from the initial policy shifts, it is clear that Chinese ECE reflects “the hybrid of traditional, communist and Western cultures”
Though Chinese educators have different understandings of western pedagogies, western pedagogy was usually defined as “those methods developed and used widely in Western countries (relative to China and Asia) that emphasize child individuality, child initiated activities, and learning through play” (Li, Rao & Tse, 2012, p. 604). These pedagogies prefer child centered approaches, learning through play, individual support, child-initiated activities and so on, over direct, teacher-centered instruction (Li, Rao & Tse, 2012).

Representative approaches of this type of pedagogy in ECE include Project Approach, High/Scope and Developmental Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Li, Rao & Tse, 2012).

Important for our context, Ming has served as a pioneer of promoting these ideas in the local professional community. It adopted Project Approach as its major curriculum model since the school started in 2008 and integrated High/Scope Preschool Approach in the following year.

As introduced before, the half-day Chinese program at Ming featured a classroom set-up with divided play areas with abundant materials, play-based learning, hands on activities, and designated time for individual teacher-child interactions. Sana, an American professor who specializes in ECE, visited Ming for a week, and commented with high praise on the Chinese program practice:

I walked in the classroom while they (children) are ‘doing’. I didn’t get to see their planning, but I did get to watch their doing and reviewing. During “the do” children were engaged in a variety of activities. Most were dramatic play. Most children were combining materials from different centers to do some kind of extended dramatic play, and there were a lot of interactions among the children of friendship, peer pairs that went everywhere together, boys that were collaborating. I don’t know why they had rice cookers block area, but it was interesting. And the two Chinese teachers circulated between the different place centers, and interacted with children, very positively, very supportively using lots of language, using lots of encouraging supported touch, and helped them solve difficulties...So I just saw this really nice, extended play. (April 25th, 2016)

She continued to describe a Chinese small group activity in which she saw how the lead
teacher scaffolded learning.

The children were able to listen to each other around the table, and they mostly participated with each other. And that wasn't discouraged like they did it appropriately. It wasn’t interrupting, and it promoted the story. And when the lead teacher came to a child that was struggling to, probably struggling to remember what he did and then to describe it. She said, everyone, do you remember he drew a picture? The kids were like, Yeah, he did draw a picture. And they used the picture to talk about what he did. So she got that little guy to describe what he did. It was as much length as the other children described it. It was really remarkable. It was beautiful.

In contrast, unlike the progressive Chinese curriculum model, the English teaching practice was highly structured and teacher centered. The half day English time was divided into a few sessions. Two large group lessons, a snack break and a half-hour outdoor play time was a typical half day routine that applied to all age groups, even for toddlers. Most lessons were conducted in classrooms, with children sitting in chairs in a semicircle, and the teacher in the middle. Professor Sana shared her comment on the two lessons she observed during her visit:

So another lesson was the second lesson of the day. The teacher was using a material that was designed for individual use, and it was a little letter that went to a little puzzle. He was using it to reinforce the letter sounds and words with letter sounds. So a problem he had was that a third of the children was below their instructional level. They already knew it. A third of the children were not engaged and I couldn't tell if it was at their instructional level. He might have been using it to see, but each child got to do only one letter, and so I don't know he could assess. And a third of the children were probably at right instruction level, but they got very bored. It went to like 45 to 50 minutes, really long. When each child was individually interacting with him, he was great. You know, like what color is this? You know he would give hints. He wasn't extremely patient, but I could see that he had patience. It’s just his second lesson. I am sorry. It’s his second lesson of the day too. It was too much. So that's why I was really pushing the conversation to not abandon the group lessons, but in the second one to become more creative. It was way too much. (April 22, 2016.)

According to Sana, a well-established professor and an experienced principal herself, the English teaching of NESTs that she observed was quite different from the Chinese curriculum, and based on her careful observation of children’ reaction, the NESTs teaching was not meeting the children’s learning needs.
Contrary to the literature in which it was found that NESTs distinguished themselves as new and fun teachers, while Chinese teachers were perceived as pedantic and memorization oriented (Han, 2005; Trent, 2012), Ming foreign teachers adopted a teaching approach that was considered backward and developmentally inappropriate by the local professional community. On a meeting requested by the principals, Julie expressed her opinion about the English teaching:

(Sept. 20th, 2016. Meeting with Julie, Lola, and Lora) I am inviting you to share your thoughts about potential changes (of the English teaching model). I told them (the department of English teachers), years ago, it was not the way to teach young children. It was not developmentally appropriate. I even demonstrated my ideas in a classroom, but in vain.

The foreign teacher’s Chinese co-workers shared similar thoughts during a focus group:

Question: What are the challenges of working with foreign teachers?
Xixi: the problem is that they expected Chinese to manage the class for them. I did control the class by myself, without his help. He is not like some English teachers, you know, they would blame on Chinese teachers when they did not have a good class.
Hong: Some teachers would, though. They would say things like, someone had her class under control, but not yours.
Yiwen: Yeah, they believe they are there to teach, you know, sit there to teach. You, Chinese teachers, it’s your job to discipline the kids.
Li: Yeah, they are like that. It has been all these years, and that’s what they believe.
Xixi: When activities were not at their instruction level, they(children) could get easily distracted. I couldn’t help every single child at the same time, you know. It was just so hard.
Hua: When they (children) were bored, it was hard to control them. When Joy (her English-speaking co-worker) had a good one, it was like easy, and she could handle the class on her own. But sometimes her lessons weren’t organized. And she did a lot of coloring.
Wen: Yes, coloring. Coloring the whole time, from baby classes all the way up to kindergarten.
[Group Laughter]
Jia: They care a lot about controlling a class. It was like managing everything from a teacher’s side. They are not like us, thinking from a child’s perspective. We are professionally trained, but they are not. They are like, I am doing such a great job, why don’t the kids listen? Their perspectives and ways of understanding children are not professional. And they don’t get to watch us, you know, learn from us (translated from Chinese. Focus group with the NESTs’ coworkers, Oct. 19, 2016).

Most Chinese teachers at the meeting believed, based on the judgement of their
professional knowledge, that the NESTs’ English teaching was not at children’s instructional level, which was the main reason that triggered children’s behavioral problems because they were not interested. Whereas the NESTs insisted that it was caused by the absence of Chinese teachers’ supervision and discipline, which was contradictory to the Chinese teachers’ belief that interests makes the best discipline. They were being sarcastic of NESTs’ professional knowledge, “it has been all these years, and that’s what they believe (strict discipline makes a good child).” They also showed a kind of understanding of NESTs’ being unprofessional, and believed that lack of professional training, and the missing opportunities of professional communication between the Chinese and the NESTs was the reason that they had these native thoughts of “I am doing such a great job. Why don’t the kids listen?” As Jia commented, “Their perspectives and ways of understanding children are not professional. And they don’t get to watch us, you know, learn from us.” The isolation from the Chinese professional community resulted in the NESTs’ lack of exposure to updated professional knowledge and practice, and consequently the dichotomy between the monotonous direct instruction of foreign teachers and the ever changing and evolving Chinese progressive practice of learning through play.

After decades of constant renovations in policy, early childhood practice in China has taken on an entirely new look, which features child-initiated activities, integrated curriculum, learning through play, and hand-on learning experiences. These changes could be found across China, from schools in remote areas, to star preschool programs in metropolitan regions like Beijing and Shanghai. In their ethnographic study of comparing ECE practice in three countries, China, Japan and the United States, Tobin, Hsu and Karasawa (2009) documented the change in China in the past twenty years:

The new economy (of China) required a new kind of citizen. A new approach to early childhood education was a key strategy for producing this new kind of citizen. Following
this logic, Chinese early childhood education was rapidly and inexorably becoming more constructive, play-oriented and child-initiated, borrowing progressive ideas freely from Western countries (p.88).

However, at Ming, surrounded by an education paradigm of progressive ideas, foreign teachers were heading in a direction that was opposite to what the Chinese community has been striving to achieve. They were disconnected to the community in which professional voices of new practice constantly sprang up, and were missing in the blue print of Ming’s new ideology of education. They did not even know what the Chinese curriculum was about. As Ray pointed out in his interview, when he was asked commented on the Chinese teaching practice, “With I have all the classes in the morning, and theirs (Chinese teachers) in the afternoon, I have no idea what is happening (in their classes). Or just small ideas, like what was happening when you walked in, like if the kids behave well.” The foreign teachers were also not involved in the professional conversations that had been going in the local community, and while there were mandatory summer training sessions for Chinese teachers, foreign teachers were not required to attend, and none of them showed up to these sessions. While there were regular teaching discussions and workshops in which Chinese teachers observed each other and provided feedback, the foreign teachers did not have any such sessions, nor could they participate due to their language barriers. Even where there were presentations and lectures available in English for parents, the foreign teachers, viewing little career prospects at Ming and cultural affiliation to the local community, were reluctant to sacrifice their own time for them because they were held after work, at night, for parents’ convenience. Additionally, as we discussed previously, the NESTs’ detachment to the Chinese community, and the Chinese hosts’ xenophobia that supported and worsened by the NESTs’ bad reputation, made the Chinese administrators had little interest in investing in their professional growth. While many of their Chinese co-workers have been to conferences,
seminars and school tours in pioneering cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, and some of these Chinese educators were sent to Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, and America for weeks of training, conferences, and school visits, the only opportunity for professional development foreign teachers have ever had outside of school was a conference at Xi’an six years ago. There were no summer training sessions, peer feedback, class observations, conferences, and training abroad opportunities for them. They were completely left out in the school and nation wide movement of creating a new paradigm of Chinese ECE. Their teaching job was a dead-end without any opportunities for advancement, while the Chinese teachers had a standard career path planned out for them. They were treated by the Chinese administrators and teachers ‘guests’ and ‘outsiders’, just as they described themselves.

**Low Quality of Teaching**

As described in the previous section, for all classes at Ming, English time consisted of two lessons, either in the morning or afternoon, for a total of 2.5 hours. The two lessons were intended to be active instruction delivered in large groups, but many teachers asked children to do exercise sheets or coloring for the second session. The lesson contents were based on a collection of themes that circulated around a school year, such as transportation, food, musical instruments, etc., with each theme lasting for two weeks. Among them, daily English, such as days of the week, weather, or greetings, was repetitive throughout a school year. Flashcards and songs rotated to the themes. There were components of each lesson required by the school, including daily English, flash cards, and songs. The English curriculum model was initiated by Susan based on her years of experience of teaching English in a public preschool and kindergarten at Shagang before she came to Ming, and later developed by the first group of NESTs at Ming who established curriculum theme packages that included
theme-based songs, flash cards, videos and other teaching resources that gradually accumulated across the years. The later-arriving teachers were introduced to these packages for teaching preparations.

From June 26, 2016 to July 16, 2016, I observed 18 hours of these lessons for nine participant NESTs teaching different age groups. All of the lessons were delivered in large groups, even for toddlers, and shared similar components of teaching contents, such as games of flashcards, and a teaching style of teacher centered instruction, as described above (note, July 17, 2016). I also documented one of these lessons by, Grace, the most experienced English teacher at Ming:

I observed Grace’s class in the afternoon today. She was considered one of the best English teachers at Ming, because she has taught here for eight years, and most of the newly come teachers shadowed her for training. It is a four-year-old class, and the theme for the week was Music Instruments. The children sat on their little chairs in a semi-circle with her in the middle of an adult chair. She only had 11 children for the day, because some of them already left for summer. She did two lessons, one lasting for 35 minutes, and another 30 minutes.

After settling down, she greeted the children and invited them to do a Spanish dance. She modeled in the middle, and all children stood up, coping her moves and dancing together with music coming from a speaker.

She started her lesson with questions: “Who knows what we are going to learn about today? What’s our new topic?” Then she took out some of the instruments and showed them around. Next, she pulled out a PPT with pictures of music instruments, including saxophone, harp, piano, accordion, allegro, etc. After reviewing the words on the PPT, she took out a pile of flashcards of these instruments, posted them on a whiteboard, and asked the children to identify them one by one. She repeated the identification game for three times, taking out a card and then asking the children what was missing. I noticed some children were actively engaged, but some were distracted, whispering and giggling with their friends until they were called out like "John, if you talk again, you go to the baby class."

The game was followed by individual practice time. Each child went to her one by one standing in front of the group, facing their peers, and practicing the sentence to the whole class: “I can play drums/violin/piano.” The lesson ended up with a transition of washing hands and visiting the bathroom.

A few children got threatened in the middle of the lessons to be removed from the class if they did not behave. I really felt for them. It was so boring. Even I couldn’t help myself wanting to leave. The games were repetitive, and the teaching contents were irrelevant to their lives. Why do I need to learn the English word “saxophone” when I am four? And what is that thing? I have never seen it, and we don’t have anything like that around us (June. 27th, 2016).
Grace and her Chinese co-worker confirmed that what I observed was a typical English lesson, though the children were a bit agitated because the topic was not new to them, and therefore somewhat uninteresting. The lesson contents were not age appropriate because many musical instruments were not relevant to children’ life, such as saxophone or allegro, and based on children’ reactions that the contents were not at the instructional level. Some children already knew these words and so were bored, and some were not interested in the topic. No four-year old would care how to say allegro in English because they probably have only seen it on their English teacher’s PPT. The instructional strategies were mainly drilling by repetitive guessing games or flash cards memorization, asking children in-group or one by one to memorize the words. Throughout the lesson no opportunities were provided of peer interactions and for children to generate their own ideas. The rest of the observations shared similar features: teaching English words or sentences through games, flashcard activities which interlaced songs, activities with and without associated movements, but the children’s engagement in the lessons varied to their instructors. When the games were well-organized and fun, many children were engaged throughout the lessons, even though they were interested and excited about the games rather than the teaching contents imbedded in them.

Nevertheless, the interviewees’ viewpoints and critiques on these lessons reflected a concern with the low quality of the English curriculum at Ming. Professor Green pointed out that, based on her observation of the children’ reactions, the instruction was not meeting children’ learning needs, so that they were bored and disengaged. The large group instructions that the NESTs relied on were flawed in this problem, as for its undifferentiated instruction for all children with varied learning needs. Additionally, all the lessons I observed had teaching goals only in one area – English words, phrases or sentences, and the teaching activities or games were designed to meet the goal of recognizing, memorizing or speaking
these parts of speech. As a result, rather than anchoring learning contents in contextual situations, or with hands-on activities through play, the NESTs teaching oriented towards children excitement and words recognition that served no purpose of learning from children’s perspective other than being required by teachers. As Professor Green critiqued, the way the NEST taught English was, “language for language”, and “not being used to get things done,” and consequently “the children were learning for only getting them not yelled at,” and “what the children had been learning became useless.” As (Genesee, 2016) pointed out, English as a second or foreign language is not taught formally, but it is used as a medium of communication. Young children learn an additional language in the way they acquire their mother tongue, by observing and listening and while doing things in or with the L2 (Genesee, 2016). What the Ming teachers have been practicing was contradictory to the research evidence; teaching English through decontextualized formal teaching without engaging children in meaningful application of learning content. Consequently, what the children have been learning was a group of segregated random words that they quickly memorized and soon forgot. Therefore, Professor Green’s overall comment on the English curriculum was that:

English is a bit different (from the Chinese child-centered model). People don’t have professional background…There is no curriculum. If they had a clear direction they would have been doing so much more (June 22, 2016).

In this comment, the professor politely expressed her concern over the low teaching quality of the NESTs. Other professionals also shared similar concern. For example, Lola, the only NEST with experience as a professional early childhood practitioner at Ming, critiqued the curriculum for not being culturally appropriate at all:

They (foreign teachers) are teaching them houses. No, kids in China don’t live in houses. They live in apartments. And not buses and fire trucks from the UK or America, because they are different... We need to be more real. We need to make it relevant (Note, informal conversation, July 7, 2016).
Lola’s observation was accurate. There were many PPTs with American buses or British fire trucks downloaded from Western websites in the curriculum resource packages that all foreign teachers used to teach. There were also PPT slides that teach children houses, but the majority of children at Ming lived in apartments rather than houses which were frightfully expensive. For another example, the NESTs’ Chinese co-workers criticized the problems of NESTs’ tiresome and developmentally inappropriate pedagogy, which created a high demand for behavior control among the children:

Xixi: the problem is that they (foreign teachers) expected Chinese to manage the class for them. I did control the class by myself, without his help. He is not like some English teachers, you know, they would blame on Chinese teachers when they did not have a good class.

Hong: Some teachers would, though. They would say things like, someone had her class under control, but not yours.

Yiwen: Yeah, they believe they are there to teach, you know, sit there to teach. You, Chinese teachers, it’s your job to discipline the kids.

Li: Yeah, they are like that. It has been all these years, and that’s what they believe.

Xixi: When activities were not at their instruction level, they(children) could get easily distracted. I couldn’t help every single child at the same time, you know. It was just so hard.

Hua: When they (children) were bored, it was hard to control them. When Joy (her English-speaking co-worker) had a good one, it was like easy, and she could handle the class on her own. But sometimes her lessons weren’t organized at all. And she did a lot of coloring.

Wen: Yes, coloring. Coloring the whole time, from baby classes all the way up to the kindergarten.

Laughing…

Hong: you know my daughter is a baby class (at Ming), and I teach 4-year-olds. Their teaching contents were exactly the same. Can you believe that? I've checked, the songs, words, sentences and the games they did in classes, they were all the same (Translated from Chinese. Oct. 19, 2016. Focus group).

These critiques were concerning. Issues like teaching not at children’s instructional level, low class engagement and no teaching contents differentiation even among different grades, were not minor problems, but they were things that many NEST teachers would encounter every day. These problems could potentially jeopardize children’s learning experiences and result in ineffectiveness of learning. The repetition and inappropriateness of curriculum
materials, and the teacher-centered pedagogical approach made classes less interesting and made it difficult to attract children’s attention. As a result of the children’s disengagement, the rates of challenging behaviors increased, which lead to the escalation of teachers’ behavioral control, and increased tensions with the Chinese teachers who were saddled with this responsibility. The foreign teachers, in self-reflection, noted that they felt the biggest challenge of teaching at Ming was behavior control and classroom management, and in multiple occasion they ascribed the problem of class control to the children’s naughtiness and the lack of Chinese teachers’ assistance rather than reflecting on if their instruction was engaging enough (meeting with Professor Green, June 2, 2016). This unprofessional understanding of young children and team collaboration was what Li, the Chinese teacher in the focus group, sarcastically criticized as in “it has been all these years, and that’s what they believe.” However, even though the Chinese teachers were aware of these problems, they had never had chances to collaborate with the NESTs to work on them due to the segregated management system, and the NESTs’ cultural and professional isolation that deprived them of opportunities for team teaching discussion.

Interestingly, however, this curriculum model that was described by Dan as “a bank of random collection of words,” and by Dr. Green, “useless” had never been changed much over the years. When asked to comment on the changes of the acculturation project brought to the school, Eric reflected,

“I didn’t have a reason to do it (the curriculum) other than other people did it for years. They were able to do it, and they didn’t have a problem with it. Nobody had a problem with it…Now you teach with a purpose, with a reason…Why no changes before? It wasn’t a priority. A combination of there is no motivation to change. Nobody saw a reason, and a dimple ignorance of what’s out there… I don’t know how things closed there, but somethings are very closed…My co-workers were not educated in the field. My boss did not provide any sort of (training) … I don’t know, training was from peers. The things we have done through trial and error…Why was like that? I had no idea. I didn’t know how to do things. I had to figure out myself (Interview, June 26, 2017).”
Eric believed that the unchanged questionable curriculum model and teaching practice were caused by “no motivation to change” “a dimple ignorance of what’s out there” and “somethings are very closed.” Obviously, the NESTs community at Ming was so disconnected to the rest of professional community in China that no one had the knowledge or capability to make any fundamental changes that could potentially improve the teaching quality at a large scale within the community.

As a result, children developed negative attitudes toward English learning class, and the purpose of learning English for them became simply, as Professor Green critiqued, “not to get yelled at.” In fact, in the focus group, the Chinese teachers shared deep concerns about the children’ reaction to English time. They said some children could be whiny before English classes, telling them, “I don’t want English.” The professor also noted that the children were disappointed when the English teacher walked into the classroom, and some of them said, “No! No English.” There were a couple of factors that caused the problem of children’s dislike for English time. For one thing, as we discussed early, the NESTs’ questionable professionalism and the Chinese host’s special treatment increased the chances of poorly or none prepared lessons, which of course were less likely to engage and interest children. For another, their cultural and social isolation deprived them of opportunities for professional communication with the local community and thus resulted in narrowly defined teaching strategies that some children might find boring. Nevertheless, it is safe to draw the conclusion that the English teaching quality of the NESTs suffered, a fact that we can reasonably connect to their cultural and social isolation from the local Chinese community.

For the Love of Teaching: Why Foreign Teachers Teach

Given the bad reputation and the questionable teaching quality, and their aforementioned disinterest in learning Chinese, colonial attitudes, and refusal to integrate themselves into the
Chinese community and cultural practices, one may picture the NESTs as a group of young adventurerers looking for a temporary job to support their exotic sojourn; a characterization described and found in most of the literature on NESTs. This was quite the contrary to my findings, as despite all the challenges and issues, many NESTs at Ming were committed to teaching. As noted previously, the majority of foreign teachers were in the thirties, and eight out of the 16 foreign teachers had worked at Ming for five years or more. In the interviews, many of them ascribed their commitment to their passion and love for working with young children:

Joy: I worked at a hotel. I have traveled… I have tried a lot of things, but none worked out for me… I love teaching. I love kids, even when I am in a bad mood, you know, like when I see kids, all gone.

Eli: I am always a big kid in front of kids. You know. When I worked in hotels, grocery stores, or team leading supermarkets, it was just dealing with some adults acting like kids. Now I am like, yeah, working with real kids… Some kids have issues, but when I look at their development and progress, I am so proud of myself. Even since the beginning and now (kids' progress), I feel like I am making a difference.

Elsa: It’s not like a job that you can pretend to like it. You know. If you don’t like kids, every day is a struggle.

Dan: …(a long list of unbearable problems of Ming). Me, why didn't you leave the school? Dan: I love my kids. Leaving them is so hard…

Their love for teaching children was also evident in the Chinese teachers’ observations:

Hong: He (Eli) loves kids. Some teachers favor good ones, but Eli is different. Even the one who has the most challenging behaviors he has the patience. He has never been annoyed by any child. He treats every child equally. He wouldn’t be like, favor the good ones.

Ding: He (Max) loves his job because he loves kids. I can feel it. He has never lost his temper to any child, very patient.

Even though poorly prepared and might have struggled with managing a large group of young children, the NESTs confessed that they chose to work at Ming because of their love and passion for teaching young children, and the bonding and the attachment they formed with their children over time. Additionally, many NESTs considered teaching to be a meaningful career. They remained in the profession of early childhood teaching, partially
because there were plenty of jobs in the field, which emboldened by the parents’ fetish of learning English and White NESTs, but more importantly, they had formed an attachment to their children and their love for teaching young children.

The urgent need for professional support

It has been well documented that foreign teachers in China do not receive much professional support for, in many cases, their first teaching job (Jang & Lee, 2015; Qiang & Wolff, 2009; Stanley, 2013). As discussed previously, many NESTs in China did not have teaching qualifications because the Chinese government did not require them (citation for good measure). As a result, their poor preparation lead to their pedagogical difficulties, and teaching struggles. NESTs tended to have a more casual teaching approach without organization and planning (Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005), which (as was certainly the case at Ming) made their teaching ineffective in meeting students’ varied learning needs (Kim, 2001). At the early childhood level, NESTs’ English teaching has often been criticized for focusing too much on children’s excitement and interests, and consequently English lessons became performances shouting out English words the children already knew, without any robust learning (Fan, 2007). These results were consistent in the literature and with our findings. In our study, the Chinese teachers and two non-NESTs reported that many lessons of NESTs were not prepared in advance and disorganized; the class observations results indicated that the NESTs relied on children’s excitement about the games to maintain children’s attention; as we described early, the NESTs’ main teaching method was large group lessons in which the undifferentiated instruction was unable to meet children’s varied learning needs. In addition, even though it was evident that the unqualified NESTs have been struggling with their debut in teaching, many NESTs in China did not receive any pre-service and in-service training on language teaching (Qiang & Wolff, 2009). At Ming, newly hired
NESTs were offered opportunities for shadowing experienced foreign teachers, but the length and the availability of shadowing depended on how soon they needed to take on the job. As for the problems and challenges they encountered thereafter, they were still left to fend for themselves. Many NESTs shared the experience that they felt they had been thrown into classrooms and left there without any support. Dan revealed a dramatic but true story of his first teaching job in China:

Dan: I always remember my first job. I flew to Hong Kong, on a Saturday night, so I started in Zhong Shan on Monday. Susan, the head of foreign teachers, so I meet her, it's 9 o'clock in the morning. We are talking. Then, she is like “come on, I am gonna take you to the class.” I am like, ok, she is gonna show me teaching. It's like that, she sees me, I am walking down the hallway, nothing with me, just myself. Then there is the class, we walk in, and all these kids sitting there. Forty kids there, four-year-old, she is like, "ok." I am like, "ok, what?" She says “teach. I am gonna watch.” I am like, “what? Do you have supplies? Like textbooks? ” She says, “no, just teach…just sing some songs.” I am fine, at least I have some experience about that, but I am just thinking about that, I am thinking these kids, they just come straight from UNI, they pretty just got done drinking, drugs and having sex for four years, and then come over here, like, “here you go!” “Do you have a curriculum? Do you have a syllabus?” “No, just go.”

While not at occurring Ming, this anecdote accurately caught the NESTs’ feeling of being thrown into a new job without any support. In fact, he was not the only one who felt the helplessness and absurdity of lacking professional support for being an English teacher in China. When asked the question, “have you ever had any challenges in working at Ming?” in the semi-structured interview, all NESTs reported more or less struggling with stress at the beginning due to the lack of professional support. Some examples included:

Eli: Maybe the main thing I noticed for some teachers, including myself, is when it comes to experience and qualifications. Of course, it is very important, practical experience, for someone like myself, had nothing before we came here, it's tough when you are left alone…Really the only training for me was observations. We had a few lessons to watch at the beginning, and then bomb, just getting there and started doing a thing.

Elsa: My co-workers were not educated in the field. My boss did not provide any sort of training… The only training was from peers (referring to class observations), but they don’t know, either…So the things we have done are mostly through trial and error.

Me: Why was like that?
Elsa: I had no idea. I didn't know how to do things. I had to figure out myself. This is
what happened. My guess. It's just my guess. They just had a lot of opportunity and experience to try things out. Just take a bunch of things, throw them on the wall, whatever sticks keeps it. Maybe that’s what happened.

Max: we don't know how we can improve. We don't have support and resources. We have seen people with good ideas come and go, not being respected or taken seriously. I feel jaded. This definitely not inspiring you to put your hundred percent in.

Eric: It is an extremely easy job because the requirements for the job are so little. What defines you succeeding as a teacher is so low. You can be an amazing teacher or bring it in coloring, just color, you are considered both good. Some teachers go beyond and do more, but not because someone is watching you.

It was unsurprising that Chinese administrators’ expectations and requirements for NESTs began with a white face, and ended in the Chinese psychology of “keeping up face.” From the abrupt employment to the absence of professional support, these were poignant manifestations of the show business of English teaching for young children at Ming. As we discussed in the research context, Susan confessed, at the beginning of the school, having NESTs were more of a ‘face’ project than actual bilingual teaching, because the white-skinned NESTs were considered a symbol of ‘being international’ and ‘high-end’. The little training that could last weeks, a couple of days or lack thereof shadowing and observation at the very beginning of their job was far from sufficient to support NESTs to successfully navigate through the challenges in complicated classrooms with a large group of young children who did not speak English. Many NESTs in the interview expressed, more or less, the frustration and the stress of dealing with teaching challenges without any sort of professional support. As Elsa pointed out in her interview, cited above, teaching became an individual experience of “trial and error”, a phrase that the NESTs frequently and commonly used to describe their teaching experiences. She believed that the Ming English curriculum was built on random trials and thoughts, “It was like throwing a bunch of things on the wall, and whatever sticks: keep it,” because they had neither professional knowledge and experiences nor in-service professional support to comprehend the basics of young children’s learning. All they could do was to try and use whatever seemed work from their individual
adventurous trials. Even if the NESTs wanted to improve, or make teaching their career, they had no resources, guidance, professional support, or positive environment in which to do so, because they were treated as ‘guests’ and eternal ‘foreigners’ by the Chinese host. Moreover, the cultural isolation and alienization they experienced and participated in further prevented the NESTs from tackling these problems through communication with the Chinese community. Therefore, they felt “jaded”, and did not want to “put hundred percent in.” This feeling of stagnation typically occurs when the NESTs wanted to improve, change, address their challenges or start a career at Ming, they had neither resources nor support to do so, given the cultural and professional isolation from the local community. Therefore, bridging the gap between the NESTs’ needs and the Chinese host’s support would potentially facilitate the NESTs’ professional growth, and eventually make a difference in the classrooms they teach. In this study, based on the needs of the NESTs at Ming that I identified through interviews and discussions, I collected and reallocated these the resources from the Chinese community and made them available for the NESTs through an acculturation project. As expected, these cultural exchanges brought positive impacts on the NESTs as well as their teaching.
CHAPTER X. THE ACCULTURATION PROJECT AND ITS IMPACT

The Acculturation Project

In the original plan of this study at the proposal stage, I designed four major activities for the NESTs, including home visits with Chinese coworkers; involvement in the cultural community through attending professional workshops for Chinese teachers, introducing the idea of Funds of Knowledge and interviewing members of the Chinese community; a cultural communication workshop that facilitates mutual culture learning; and pedagogical implementation for applying Funds of Knowledge in classrooms. In two months after I set foot in the field, I completed the first round of class observations, individual interviews with the NESTs participants and their administrator, and a focus group with their Chinese coworkers before the summer in 2016, as originally planned. However, as I described in the section of research access, I was unexpectedly appointed to be the manager of the foreign teachers’ office after the summer in September 2016. After the appointment, I managed to complete the first two activities, home visits and cultural community involvement that involved the NESTs in professional workshops for Chinese teachers. Furthermore, I asked the participants to interview Chinese community members and they chose to interview the Chinese administrators, because they had many questions about their management. I requested an open dialogue to the administrators with the NESTs but denied at the last minute for three times. Moreover, as the manager, I received administration orders from the principals in terms of what I was expected to do, and one these expectations was to integrate small groups to the NESTs’ teaching as it was in their Chinese curriculum. This small group
add-on was also suggested by Professor Green to address the challenges that the foreign teachers discussed with her on a meeting, which was highly regarded by the principal. Therefore, the small group integration became a major component of the acculturation activity. Additionally, all NESTs participants did one or two home visit(s) with their Chinese coworkers, and they reported these visited helped understand the child’s behavior better through interactions with their family members, but did not gain much cultural understanding from them because all children they visited were from wealthy families. Based on this report, the idea of Funds of Knowledge idea seemed not to fit the local cultural context. Besides, a onetime home visit was far from enough to gain in-depth cultural understandings for the NESTs who have already been exposed to Chinese culture at a superficial level. Nevertheless, the circumstance change shifted the research focus a bit, but some predesigned activities did happen, just not as the central focus of my experience as a researcher.

The intervention I eventually implemented involved a series of acculturation activities aiming to improve NESTs' cultural self-awareness, their understanding of the cultural learning community in and around Ming, and thus eventually, to make positive impacts on their teaching practice. All of the activities I planned to document for the research were “business-as-usual” events at the Ming school—held for teacher training purposes independent of the study. The difference was that these training workshops used to be for Chinese teachers only, but I translated and made them available for foreign teachers as well. What I intended to do, then, was to provide opportunities for the NESTs to become involved in these activities, accompanying them to provide them with a supportive framework and guidance that would encourage their cultural reflection and learning, and ideally, shift their participation in schooling and community activities. In this way I attempted to shift the outcomes of their engagement at Ming by altering elements of the practices that made up
their activity system. This supportive intervention involved teaching discussions, reflections, classroom observations, hands-on activities, and structured communication with the Chinese teachers. There were six core activities—identifying the NESTs’ challenges, home visits with Chinese coworkers, involvement in the cultural community which included sharing professional workshops with Chinese teachers, and establishing a career ladder for foreign teachers based on the ladder for Chinese teachers, integrating Chinese small group instruction through Chinese traditional lesson study, and setting up Chinese foreign teacher collaboration time—that I supported NESTs’ participation in, and which served as core sites of data collection for this study.

I. Identifying challenges

Dr. Sana Green (pseudonym), by invitation, visited Ming in June 2016, during which time she had a discussion with all of the foreign teachers. This was a routine activity that Ming does for all English-speaking professors who came to Ming, but coincided with the research and my own plan to engage the NESTs in a reflective conversation about their perceived needs and struggles [or something like this]. During the meeting, Dr. Green invited the teachers to share three challenges that they were facing. Two prominent challenges were identified in the meeting were 1) classroom management and challenging behaviors of children, and 2) the need for Chinese assistants’ support for addressing these problems. These challenges were consistent with the ones the NEST participants suggested in the individual interviews. Additionally, more challenges emerged in the interviews, including but not limited to: a lack of communication; no collaboration opportunities with Chinese teachers; a lack of professional support and training; and school management rules not being consistently enforced.
II. Home visits.

At the beginning of the school year, the Chinese teachers are required to visit each new student at home. Historically, their NESTs co-teachers do not attend. During these visits, the Chinese teachers tour around homes to collect information about family culture and interactions, learn about the child's preferences for toys, food, and play, and build relationships with families. These visits are usually planned and attended by the Chinese teacher team, including a lead teacher, an assistant teacher and a nursery teacher.

In September 2016, each of six NESTs participants, accompanied by their Chinese co-workers, took part in these planned visits to one to two families of their choice. I participated in three of these visits, and interviewed the NESTs directly after them through informal conversations. I asked the NESTs to choose families that they were most interested in, and the report results indicated that the NESTs picked the students they either felt was the best or the most challenging child in their classes. They reasoned their choices as “wanted to know how a child learned his/her English” or “needed to talk with the child’s parents about his/her challenging behaviors.” During their visits, the NESTs interviewed the parents and interacted with the child, mainly about getting to know the children at home, such as how they behave, how the child learns English and who takes care of the child, and parents’ feedback on English teaching.

III. Administrative Open Dialogue

One core activity that I initially had included in our intervention was an open conversation with the Chinese administration. The NESTs participants had expressed interest in a direct communication with the principals to discuss and better understand issues they saw impacting them in terms of the school’s management. I requested a three-way meeting between the NESTs participants, the principals, and myself, on three separate occasions.
While the principal initially agreed to each of the requests, every time we were denied at the last minute with excuses, and these meetings cancelled. For the first two times, I was not aware that the subtle hint of her polite decline and she indeed had other engagements at the time. Her presence and support were vital for the dialogue, because the other three principals would not present unless with her permission and support. I decided to give another try. For the third time, I arranged the dialogue after a celebration for Susan’s promotion, and I notified all principals the small gathering for the celebration and a dialogue afterwards. This time, all principals came to the meeting, but at the scheduled time of the dialogue, instead of inviting questions from the foreign teachers, the principal asked each of them to comment what kept them at Ming for years, namely the positives. At that moment, I realized that she did not want to involve herself in such a conversation because she was concerned she might “lose her face” from being questioned by her employees, a situation that everyone tries to avoid in Chinese cultural practice. She said yes to my requests because she promised me at the beginning of the research that she would participate and support my research.

IV. Involvement of the Cultural Community

*Professional workshops:* It is Ming’s tradition for Chinese teachers to start work seven days before a new school year begins; but the foreign teachers arrive back to school later because several of these days are scheduled for Chinese staff professional learning, which NESTs are not required to attend. In August 2016, however, the foreign teachers were required to come back to school on the same day the Chinese teachers resumed work, and received some of the Chinese teachers’ training that I believed were pertinent to their teaching. These trainings included a full day workshop about strategies for classroom management I delivered, and a half-day presentation on instructional scaffolding by Dr. Wang (pseudonym) from Macao University. Both workshops were delivered in English. The
entire day workshop was initially scheduled for half-day, but the foreigner teachers requested to extend to a full day. Some NESTs also participated in professional development activities outside of Ming prior to the school year. Two NESTs attended an international early childhood conference in Hong Kong as a part of the Chinese team. They attended presentations and workshops by Chinese and Western presenters on the conference, and did a Chinese traditional dance with the group on the conference’s reception dinner.

Establishing A Career Ladder for foreign teachers: The career ladder for Chinese teachers at Ming was well-established. It provided them with a multilevel system of positions, along with professional development opportunities and increased compensation at a scale that corresponds with their position levels. However, there were not any other positions, extra responsibilities, or opportunity for advancement for foreign teachers rather than just being teachers. Their salary scales, usually started at RMB 14,000 ($2,210) per month, with a maximum of increase of RMB 2,000 ($315) per month every contract year, but was capped at RMB 20,000 ($3,150) per month. In February 2017 the school unified the career path for both Chinese and foreign teachers, and made three positions of team leaders immediately available. Becky, Joy and Joe applied, and were promoted to carry out these extra responsibilities.

V. Small group instruction integration and Lesson Study

The Chinese curriculum at Ming has long been using small groups as a part of their daily instructional routines, and an important part of the curriculum; but there was no specified small group teaching time in the English curriculum. Requested by the principal, I initiated an introduction of small group instruction to the English teachers and classes. In October, a Chinese head teacher demonstrated a Chinese small-group activity for foreign teachers, and shared their small group instruction lesson plans, activity goals, and practical strategies with
them. After the demonstration, three foreign teachers—who expressed interests in experimenting with the change to this instructional style—and I worked together in classrooms for a month, implemented our ideas of small groups, and designed the format and contents of these groups for English time. In November 2016, we invited all foreign teachers, and the Chinese administrators and team leaders, to observe what we had done, and provide feedback. This kind of professional activity was called lesson study; a routine activity that Chinese teachers did for professional development every semester, but which NESTs had not previously attempted.

The implementation phase of small groups was launched in the spring semester. In February 2017, all foreign teachers received the same training workshops for Chinese teachers on small group instruction. Eventually, in the first of week of March in 2017, as mandated by the principal, small-group time became a part of the daily routine of English time as well. In addition, a half-day of each week was allocated for foreign teachers’ to plan, discuss, organize, and design these small group activities.

VI. Chinese and foreign teacher Collaboration Time

Both Chinese and foreign teachers complained regularly that there was no time for team discussions because schedules were such that there was no overlapping collaborative work time without children. I brought this problem to the principal, and she decided to set up an hour through early dismissal on every Friday for communication between the Chinese and foreign teachers, with the main goals of sharing English lesson plans and set up expectations of Chinese teachers’ assistance. We later called for parents committee meeting and passed the early dismiss proposal. From then on, every Friday from 4:30 P.M. to 5:30 P.M. was scheduled for team building, communication and teaching discussion between Chinese and foreign teachers.
Professional Disposition Changes in NESTs

The implementation of these activities as an acculturation intervention were scattered across the school year from June 2016 to May 2017, with the majority of them concentrated in the fall semester. All these activities aimed to facilitate the NESTs’ integration into the Chinese professional and cultural community through a shift of their activity system from the NESTs enclave to a new activity system for the NESTs that produces culturally responsive patterns of activity. The subjects in this system were still the NESTs, but the tools of this system changed from the isolated community of NESTs themselves to a team collaboration with the Chinese community members. The division of labor became shared participation of NESTs and Chinese teachers. All these factors in the activity system interacted with each other, and facilitated the NESTs’ professional growth and learning through the cultural and social mediated development.

In June 2017, after having officially resigned as the office manager of foreign teachers’ office, I completed the second round of semi-structured individual interviews to avoid any potential influence from my supervisory role on the interviews. During this final round of interviews, I interviewed six white NESTs, three non-NESTs, and the principal, all with a retrospective focus to learn about how they saw NESTs practices shifting. I also did a focus group with the NESTs Chinese co-workers and Chinese intern teachers. All interviewees were asked to comment on if they had noticed changes in the NESTs teaching practice, professional behaviors, and their impressions of the foreign teachers’ office as a whole. Their answers were consistent and positive in terms of the presence of changes, improved professionalism, team collaboration, and teaching performance.

The most prominent of the changes that respondents consistently observed—from eight out of nine participants of foreign teachers—was the improved professionalism and team
collaboration among foreign teachers. This response stood out when the interviewees were asked to reflect on their working experience in the past year. When prompted by the follow-up question, “what surprised you?” after they made a list of changes they had noticed, many of them responded that they did not expect their colleagues would get on board so quickly. As Eli noted:

Eli: I would say, with all the challenges and everything, the one surprised me most, for instance, Dan, (laughing) someone like complete, you know, I don't wanna give someone a bad name, but before this I felt he just had no driving, not motivation, as far as being in a team and sharing ideas, every time we came out of a meeting, he was like that was fucking pointless. Actually, Dan giving some positive feedback, I was like, what did you do to Dan (laughing)? You know. It shocked me to see that someone who I felt really didn't give a damn, come being honesty. I felt that way about Dan, I thought he just didn't care. He did it as a job, he came in and left, didn't have that passion about it. With all the changes going on, it doesn't matter if we are friends outside, what makes me happy is that teachers share the same passion. He feels something is going on. It's nice to see people who weren't as interested and passionate to suddenly showing interests and actually sharing ideas on some occasions (interview with Eli, July 5, 2017).

Dan himself echoed similar observation in a separate interview:

What surprised me? I don't know. I guess everybody got on board really quick this year, because a lot of people kind of liked work independently, even when we had our two-week topics, You know, we kind of still get to do our own style. I think a lot of people were ready for a change, or something more serious, you and the curriculum stuff, I guess I would say that I was surprised that everybody got on board so well and so fast...I mean, not just me, at least my friends were like, oh, finally. When we went from no curriculum to we are putting in a curriculum, which was just pedagogy...so I felt like everybody was ready for something serious (Interview, June 28th, 2017).

The transformation of becoming serious of the job was also captured by a non-NEST, Emma. She shared her careful observations of these changes on the NESTs:

I am happy to see these changes. It was like, all of a sudden, people became passionate about the job and like charging through their day. People saw hope, the kind of tangible and visible hope, and it was like we could turn into Phoenix someday, you know, with the professional stuff... They (NESTs) know it wasn’t like before, doing nothing and muddling along, but now “swiping your face” no longer works... Before it was like, after lunch, the people who cared about the job, started working on lesson plans, but many people just left. When it was about the time for class, they would teach with whatever they saw on someone else's desk. I had a teacher who was like before classes started, would routinely walk around the office checking on each desk, and grab whatever he liked to teach (translated from Chinese, interview with Emma, June 29, 2017).
In these reports, Eli was surprised by Dan’s change of attitude towards his job, becoming positive and more serious about the job, because “he feels something is going on.” Dan in his interview, shared the same observation of the attitude change, and explained that the changes were caused by the professional climate shift in the office, which he called “something serious.” This ‘seriousness’ captured the NESTs’ professional disposition change, and the feeling of “(I am surprised that) people got on board so nicely and quickly” most seemed to faithfully capture the transformation of the NESTs’ professional behaviors. Before the project, as Eli and Emma described, “they (NESTs) did not give it (the job) a damn” and “they would teach with whatever they saw on someone else’s desk right before their classes, but now “all of sudden, people (the foreign teachers) became passionate about the job.” Dan ascribed these changes to the professional support they had received, “we went from no curriculum to putting in a curriculum (the small group integration).” change. This not just happened to the NESTs research participants, but also the other NESTs who did not join the research. Joe was one of them, as wrote in my notes:

Joe has been asking me for two months (September to October 2016), almost every week, “Can I leave early today cause we got this music gig on Saturday?” “Can I ask for a day to leave? I need to go to a different city for a show over the weekend.” It’s such a headache. Every time I allowed him to leave, I had to find someone to cover for him. I called Susan, and she said she would usually let him go because music was his thing…I need to find it out what he wants to do, to teach or play in a band. I need to talk with him… (Note, Nov.11, 2016).

I am pleased to announce, effective Feb. 21st, 2016…Joe has been promoted to be the head of kindergarten level classes…In the new positions, they will be responsible for management of the designated class groups…(Artifact, promotion announcement, Feb.22, 2016).

Today Joe showed me the office closets in which he organized and categorized the teaching materials and resources. I was very impressed because it was such a mess before and it must have taken him a lot of time to get it done. Yet nobody asked him to do it. He just felt such a responsibility for the office now (April 17, 2017).

Joe had never asked for leave early for his music show since the January of the Spring
semester of 2017. In fact, he did not ask for any kind of leave except for necessary medical service throughout the semester. He applied for the leadership position and got the promotion in February 2017. After the promotion he actively engaged in the office management through sorting out teaching resources, initiating and contributing teaching discussions during their lesson planning time, and started new ideas of teaching in his class (artifacts, a picture of Joe trying out new teaching ideas, April 24, 2017; a picture of Joe organizing teaching discussions, May 27, 2017). He even applied for a master’s degree in early childhood education. It was evident in Joe’s change that he wanted to take his job of teaching serious, was eager to get professional support to become a better teacher, and when given an opportunity, was willing to establish a career at Ming.

This turnaround of the attitude toward the job was observed in not just Joe, but across the office. All these changes in NESTs were noticeable to their Chinese co-workers and interns as well:

They became more serious about the job, like, they were prepared to teach… Before (the spring semester, 2017) it was they “do whatever in the mood”… they didn’t really have lesson plans before, I mean, they did, but they didn’t really carry them through. But now they have plans and they stick to them, because they made the plans together, and the supervision stuff.

…

Yes, they had their materials ready and all that…especially since the implementation of the small groups, they added a variety of teaching strategies and resources.

…

Before, it was all like coloring, but now they added a variety of materials.

…(translated from Chinese; Focus group, May 23, 2017)

“The seriousness” brought by the climate of professional support that we discussed previously was also reflected in the classroom teaching. As the Chinese teachers reported above that the NESTs had their teaching plans and materials ready because “they became serious about the job” and “they made the lesson plans together for the small groups.” This change of ‘becoming serious’ was also demonstrated in Dan’s apology for recently having a
big number of sick days:

It was lunchtime. Dan came to me when I was sitting behind the office desk. I asked if there was something I could help. He sat down, "I just wanted to let you know, I know I have been asking for sick leave a lot, but I was really sick. I don't know what's going on…I am going to do a thorough check when I get back in the summer… I have not been sick like this. This is the semester I have been taking the most sick leave. I don't like taking sick leave.” Me, “Yeah, I trust you. Lola and I have been talking about it this morning. I said I know you are an honest person. I trust you." Dan, “I just wanted to let you know I am not taking an advantage, because we are friends. Before I was like, oh, what the hell, I am gonna take a day off, but now, because of the changes and all that, you know, I am trying hard. I don’t like taking leave.” Me, “Thank you for letting me know. I appreciate it. I am sorry, but you do look sick.” He laughed, “well, at least it proved I am sick.” We both laughed (Note, May 24, 2017).

Dan admitted his attitude before as “what the hell,” which was described by Eli as “don’t give it a damn” in the previous excerpt, and now it has been changed to “trying hard.” He ascribed this attitude shift to “we are friends” and “all the changes (the acculturation project).”

All the NESTs wanted to thrive in the Chinese community. Given most NESTs held entry-level qualifications, they needed, more than anyone in the community, professional support and a learning community that addressed their professional learning needs, and professional supports in their classrooms. When such assistance and organizational arrangements were in place, they surprised everyone with their hard work and dedication to the job, as Joy commented:

I felt like we are not just in a kindergarten in China anymore. It’s more serious. It’s my life. It’s my career. The best thing happened to me was the training you gave us. I was like, there is a whole big world out there I had no idea about, and yet I’ve done teaching for so long. It made me realize this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. I want to learn about kids (interview Joy, July 7, 2017).

Many NESTs resonated this feeling of “wanting to know about kids”, and at the end of the research, two NESTs applied for, and were admitted to, a Masters’ degree program in early childhood education with a local university, while a further two applied in the same field to universities in their home countries.
The Changes in the NESTs’ Teaching Practice

The improvements in the NESTs professional dispositions also made impacts on their teaching practice. Some of these impacts were reported consistently among the NESTs, Chinese teachers, intern teachers, administrators, and parents, and were also reflected in the classroom observations, as cited below:

Joy: I felt like behavioral problems are reduced, and the classes are now smooth, because they (the children) are busy, you know.

Principal Julie: I haven't seen much of changes in the foreign teachers, but I’ve learned some of the changes from Chinese teachers and parents. You know, Amanda (a parent) told me the other day that her daughter used to hate the English classes because they were boring, but just a few days ago she told her she loved the stories and the hands-on activities in English. Her daughter’s English class participation has been improved, she believed (translated from Chinese, interview, July 19, 2017).

Feedback from intern teachers:
Lei: I would say children' class participation has been improved like they are interested, because of the hands-on opportunities and the materials, and so they have less behavioral problems.

Jing: Yeah, they weren't as distracted as before, because it was boring. Now they stay focused.

Li: Yes, it’s like they are interested, and so they are more willing to speaking English (Translated from Chinese; focus group, intern teachers, May 23, 2017).

Joy and Grace reported they had less behavioral problems in class, because “the kids are busy” with manipulating materials that the NESTs carefully prepared; the opportunities for interacting with materials reduced the children’s boring impression of English teaching, and thus increased the child’ English class participation, as described by Julie. These reports were consistent with the Chinese teachers’ feedback: “they (children) are interested, and so they have less behavioral problems,” and they were more willing to speak English because they were interested. All these changes could be traced back to the “serious” attitude that the NESTs had for lesson preparations and their job.

Similar changes were observed and documented in the comparative two rounds of class observations, which indicated a shift from teacher-centered to more child-centered
interaction. The observation results also showed improved behavior management, and
children’s interest in the instruction contents. For example, in one of these observations, Eric
read a well-known book called *Ten in Bed* with predesigned questions, and reader’s theatre
games, in which ten children laid on the carpet, acting out the story while Eric sang along.
Every child was completely engaged. These observations were drastically different from his
class at the beginning of the research, which was characterized by repetitive card
memorization games and a crafts activity of making and coloring a paper car which irrelevant
to the learning objectives. Here are some highlights from the observations from my notes
during a lesson he taught in 2016:
June 29, 2016


Learning objectives: Words: battleship, statue, pyramids, Eiffel Tower; Great Wall, Convertible and the Great Temple

Materials and teaching modalities:
First lesson: Eric used flash cards, a picture on TV and a white board for the battleship game.
Teaching materials and modalities: Eric draw a form with rows (D) and columns
(numbered 1,2,3,4) covered by flash cards on the ground, and when a student picks a
square (using position words, like D4, under/next to/ in between to the battleship), he/she
can fire a missile to the designated square and flip over the cards. The students got to come
front picking a square. and mainly used the strategy of close-ended questions in group and
individually: “what’s this?” “What’s under/below/next to the battleship?”
Second lesson: Eric demonstrated how to make a car shapes craft and asked the students to
make the car and then color it. He offered students paper, scissors and markers to make a car

Children engagement:
In general, about 2/3 students paid attention to DD’s talk. Others were disengaged,
playing with their chairs, staring blankly, and shaking forward and backward on their chairs.

Children’s movement during the lessons: Throughout the two lessons, the students did
not get to get off their chairs.

And from a lesson taught the following year, after Eric had participated in the intervention
activities:

June 21, 2017

Today’s agenda on the white board, 1. Hello 2 Story; 3. Songs 4. small group activities

Learning objectives: KC students learn to count backwards and read a story book of Ten in Bed.

Materials and teaching modalities:
The one-hour teaching was a large group and a small group activity. In the large group, Eric did a song and the book of Ten-in Bed. The small group activities were acting out Ten-in-Bed and put beds in order. Eric read the book with questions and directed the activity of Ten-in-Bed with 11 kids laying on the carpet acting out “roll over, roll over” with him sing Ten-in-Bed.

Eric asked the children a lot of questions in story reading. He stopped on every page and asked children questions, like “who fell off the bed?” “How many left in bed?” No pair shares observed, but there were structured dialogues in large and small group.

During the small group, Eric asked all of his kids to lay down on the carpet, and asked them to sing with him while acting out “Ten-in-Bed”, “ten in bed…roll over, roll over” When they finished the rolling over on the carpet, Eric asked the kids to sit in a row on the carpet, asking them individually, “what were you?” “mouse.” Eric, “say, I was a mouse.” “I am mouse” Eric, “I WAS a mouse.” “I was a mouse.” Eric, “good.”

Children’s engagement:
In general, every child in the class was engaged. They listened to and looked at Eric carefully throughout the large group, and they passionately commented on the story, “teacher Eric, cat” “teacher Eric, look” (pointing on the mouse on the picture in the book) When they were acting out the story with everyone laying on the carpet, every child laid on the carpet singing along with Eric laughing, talking and singing along.

Children’s movement during the lessons:
They sang a song together in large group, and the whole class got to do actions, “jump” “shake” “turn around” etc.. They sat on the carpet to listen to the story, and they were allowed to stand up to ask questions and answer questions with actions.

Comparing these observations, one can easily find out that there are major shifts of teaching strategies and objectives, and improvement in children’s engagement in between these two lessons, documented a year apart. The first class observed at the beginning of the research featured a single learning objective of English words, narrowly defined teaching strategy of a flashcards game, and a craft activity irrelevant to their target words. All these problems resulted in the children’s boredom and disengagement. By contrast, the second
class after the acculturation project characterized a large group activity of story reading with well-prepared questions, the learning objectives in multiple areas, math, music and literacy, and a fun small group activity that carefully targeted to provide opportunities for meaningful application of the learning contents. All these age appropriate, fun and hands-on activities greatly improved children’s engagement. The shifts of the instructions were observed, more or less, in all participants’ classes, in part due to the synchronized teaching contents at the same age level but also to the NESTs’ efforts in teaching improvement and investment of time and energy in class preparations.

Although it is hard to establish a direct correlation between the acculturation intervention and the changes, or attribute their growth completely to these activities, the respondents’ positive reflection on the impact of the activities speaks volumes. As Eric commented,

> Before (the acculturation project) we taught not based on anything. It just seemed good... I didn’t have a reason to do it other than other people did it for years. They were able to do it, and they didn’t have a problem with it. Nobody had a problem with it. But now you teach with a purpose, with a reason... Now it’s based on actual research, on thousands of people other than just ten of them. I like that. Like context learning. Using common sense I do see why. Why its effective in that way. You know, there is meaning behind it. You can associate with it (interview with Davie, June 26, 2017).

Eric’s reflection on the acculturation project and the professional learning was his shift of understanding of teaching a second language, from “it seemed good because everyone else was doing it” to “context learning” that was backed by research. It was evident that he was now aware of the importance of contextualizing learning.

When the NESTs invested more in their profession, they tended to be more serious and prepared for teaching, which many NESTs confessed that they had not done previously. This seriousness towards teaching helped them set and convey clear objectives, and prepare appropriate learning materials and tasks to achieve these goals. Consequently, they were more successful in providing positive and meaningful learning to their students. When a
teacher is well-prepared and attentive to what she/he does, of course the classes are more likely to succeed in engaging children, in learning and consequently reducing disruptive behaviors, as reported and analyzed previously by the Chinese teachers and administrators who experienced and witnessed these changes of NESTs’ teaching practice. Additionally, the integration of small groups and hands-on activities forced the teachers to be less teacher didactic, and more child-centered because the nature of this pedagogy required a teacher to interact with children at an individual level.

**An Overall Picture of (limited) Growth**

Positive impacts were also found in collaboration between Chinese and foreign teachers. The NESTs reported that there was more support from Chinese teachers in class assistance, and more of their involvement in English teaching. As Elsa reported: “Chinese teachers are more involved because they have to do things (in English classes). They are part of the small group teaching. And also, the meetings (communication meeting between the Chinese and foreign teachers) sometime worked, sometimes didn’t, but definitely helped, and so they (Chinese teachers) know what I wanted them to do.” The principal commented: “The Chinese and foreigner teacher collaboration was changed. Now they are a team. Before Chinese teachers were like the police, watching over kids behaviors, but now they are part of the class.” Some Chinese teachers shared similar feedback and explained it was because they were clearer about the expectations as communicated during the designated meeting time. Additionally, many NESTs said they were happier about the job, because it was better defined and guided, and there was the “hope”, a well-establish career path for foreign teachers, and the opportunities of improving themselves professionally.

All these influences on the NESTs were surprisingly consistent and, for the most part, positive. What I did to achieve these pleasant results was simple: I played the role of cultural
mediator, helping to bridge the gap between the NESTs and the Chinese cultural community. I was a porter of cultural resources, collecting, seeking and transferring resources from the Chinese community to meet the needs of the foreign teachers. Most importantly, I sought to learn from the NESTs and the local community, trying to listen to them and understand their needs. On one hand, I culturally “translated” the NESTs’ needs, making them comprehensible for the Chinese community members, while transferring the existing resources in the Chinese community to address the NESTs’ needs. However, many of these efforts focused on practical teaching strategies, as requested by the Chinese administrators and the NESTs themselves. On the other hand, I aided the NESTs as they were forced to interact with the Chinese community through acculturation activities, and involve themselves in intercultural communication. All these efforts on facilitating cultural learning were rewarding, which boosted the NESTs confidence in the possibility of having their work at Ming actually amount to a career, and a better life in the host culture.

However, there were many other things that remained unchanged and problematic. First, the NESTs and the Chinese administrators’ acceptance of whiteness has not been changed. The excerpts and quotes about centering whiteness, as cited in chapter VIII, were demonstrated in the first round of interviews in June, 2016 and the second round in June-July 2017. The structured racism, which was illustrated in the Chinese principals’ rejection to teachers of color, was actually documented at the end of the research. Second, the NESTs were still suspicious of the Chinese administrators’ capability and willingness to lead and support a group of foreign teachers. They loved the changes, but they believed it was me, a person who was highly educated in an American university, who made the difference. They attributed the shifts to western education, rather than crediting the Chinese community. As Elsa concluded in her interview,
In general, trust is still at their (Chinese administrators) mercy. I feel at any point they can turn around and change everything… I saw more effort of communication, but definitely more from this (the office of foreign teachers) side…

The NESTs’ distrust of the Chinese administration remained unchanged, which was also reflected in the NESTs’ speculation about the next office manager after my leave:

Lola shared something interesting about the office today. She said there have been rumors going around that Emma, the Chinese Australian foreign teacher, would take over the office after I leave. She passed by Dan and Elsa the other day, saw them gossiping. She was like, “what are you two gossiping about?” They said they were wondering who would be in charge when Xiaohua is gone. They said that it would probably be Emma, because the school would never put a foreigner in charge (note, June 6, 2017).

Elsa still felt that “trust is at their (the Chinese administrator’s mercy).” Dan did not believe that the Chinese administration would trust a foreigner enough to put him/her in charge, and the distrust was mutual. It was my idea to promote Lola to succeed my position, and Julie hesitantly agreed because she did not have other choices, but Susan completely denied because she felt ridiculous to put a foreigner at a managerial position. Eventually Lola took it over, but a year after the research, Lola resigned, stating, “I am so overwhelmed (from working with uncertified teachers and Chinese administrators). I just simply couldn't handle it anymore.” She chose to work at an international school where she could work with certified western teachers and administrators, which she felt could allow her to avoid the harassment she felt while working at a Chinese school. Meanwhile, the Chinese principal called me, and accused her of being irresponsible, and felt it was in the best interest of the school for her to leave. From her perspective, Lola, a foreign manager, was not trustworthy, either. It is evident that the distrust between the two cultural groups that formed the natural basis of resistance to cooperation was still lingering.

Concluding Thoughts

It is generally accepted by scholars in the field of teaching English as a foreign language that specialized pedagogical training, which was, unfortunately, missing at Ming, is required
to be a successful NEST (Boyle, 2000), but it is largely unrecognized that there is an equally compelling need to train them as cultural learners. While cultural guidance is seldom part of the limited teaching discussions that the NESTs had, it is nonetheless a part of the hidden curriculum, a contributing factor in the success or failure of teaching in an alien context. Unfortunately, it is often unrecognized and ignored. Susan, even if had worked with foreign teachers for eight years and tumbled over cultural issues in her history of managing them, as she described, “learned many lessons along the way, and cried a lot,” expressed her suspicion of the importance of cultural difference in her work as a manager of foreign teachers:

(After the research introduction) Well, I am not that interested. I thought you would bring us something like a curriculum model, or something useful, you know, practical that really does something good for the school. I said yes because I thought so. But you will do something cultural. I don’t think it’s useful anymore. I am actually kind of disappointed. The foreign teachers definitely know enough about Chinese culture. Some of them married Chinese wives, and some have lived here for a few years…(Note, May 24, 2017)

For Susan, it seemed suspicious to focus on culture, when the school was plagued by challenges of teaching young children English that needed immediate, effective and practical solutions. She was “disappointed,” because the research was about “something cultural,” which she believed unnecessary. What she missed was to question whether and how the symptoms of teaching challenges and cultural disconnections are connected, directly and indirectly, to the influential role that culture played in the NESTs’ practice of teaching a foreign language in a cross-culture setting. All too often educators, including the NESTs themselves, are reluctant to probe the significance and the power of culture, just like Susan. They wanted a quick-fix panacea rather than tracing the roots of the problems, the fundamentally different cultural values and conflicting beliefs. It may be assumed that many NESTs were aware of the cultural differences to an extent, but as my data showed, they were rarely sophisticated enough cross-culturally to detect where the clashes of different cultural
values were impacting their professional lives and performance, and the danger of cultural ignorance to children’s learning. When specifically asked about cultural differences, most NESTs gave examples of surface level, observable variations.

Me: How do you understand cultural differences between you and the Chinese community at the school setting?

Dan: Cultural differences? (Long pause). Ok, I’ve got one. No swimming this week. I asked the Chinese teachers why they said because it’s rainy outside. IT IS AN INDOOR SWIMMING POOL. An indoor swimming pool, and you can’t swim inside because it’s a rainy day. That’s really weird. It’s weird to all foreigners.

Dan’s response wasn’t atypical. Other responses included drinking hot water over summer, elbowing people, or being afraid of dogs. It had never occurred to them that the poignant problems that they were experiencing could potentially be caused by the clashes of cultural values or a lack of mutual cultural understanding on deeper levels. As Hall (1989) explained in the iceberg analogy of culture, if the culture of a society was the iceberg, then there are some aspects visible, above the water, but there is a larger portion hidden beneath the surface. The visible, conscious part above the waters’ surface includes behaviors and some beliefs—the sorts of things the NESTs were able to identify and observe. Yet the much larger, internal, or subconscious, part of a culture is below the surface of a society, and includes ontological and epistemic beliefs, and the values and ideologies that underlie behavior. These things were evident in the Chinese context of Ming, such as the culturally seated xenophobia of Chinese, the desire for open dialogues of the Westerners, and the concern over critiques from subordinates in the Chinese hierarchy culture were cultural contradictions the NESTs, and their Chinese administrators, remained blind to. Hall (1989) also pointed out that the only way to learn about the internal culture of others is to actively participate in their culture. Unfortunately, as was discussed, there was no way could the NESTs could uncover these hidden beliefs, values, and ideologies of Chinese culture due to the language barrier and their cultural isolation. Consequently, the NESTs continued to judge the Chinese culture based on
overt cultural behaviors, rather than accumulated and profound cultural knowledge.

While the NESTs’ ignorance to culture was damaging, the lack of cultural perception by the Chinese administrators and teachers—ignorance of both their own cultural icebergs, and the cultural ways of being of NESTs—was more subtle, but equally lethal, in sabotaging the relationship of these two cultural groups, and isolating the NESTs. Structured racism and the acceptance of centering whiteness painfully played out in the Chinese employment practices, and the Occidental interpretation of the NESTs inappropriate behaviors. Whiteness had its own hidden unique form of unconscious culture of the Chinese. The deeply seated racial superiority and Eurocentrism of the NESTs, combined with the internal colonialism of the Chinese administrators and teachers, made the resistance to more robust acculturation—changes that would have made cultural understanding and learning possible, both producing the situation as it had been, and ensuring that that the longtime existence of the alienated and isolated NESTs’ enclave was unlikely to end anytime soon.

Teaching a foreign language in an alien context demands the embrace of cultural learning. In what manner this may occur might vary and be questioned by experts in the field, but the connection between language, culture, and pedagogy cannot be denied. An ignorant attitude to cultural learning and understanding—as was unfortunately often on display by multiple parties at Ming—speaks to the inherent risks and difficulties involved in tinkering with and politicizing children’s learning needs cross-culturally. What Ming, and other schools in China needed was more than just quick solutions to the practical problems of NESTs at schools. The NEST system itself needed change that would make its hidden curriculum transparent, and create a shift of mindset and perceptions, and a transformation of cultural learning and participation. Such changes might make educators challenge and reflect on the phenomenon of NESTs teaching itself, and help us understand the indispensable role of
cultural competence and responsibilities in all teachers’ professional development and pedagogical growth, its impact on teaching young children, and help us realize the necessity and the positivity of NESTs’ acculturation.
CHAPTER XI. IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore the process of using a Professional Development program focused on acculturation to enhance the NESTs’ cultural understanding of the local community, and to make an impact on their teaching practice. But eventually, its scope included a much broader examination of the entire cultural ecology surrounding NESTs role as teachers in China.

The analysis endeavored to reveal the NESTs professional lives at Ming, and the impacts of the acculturation project on it. It was not meant to stereotype them as apathetic or white supremacists, but to display the discourse through which they were situated in the Chinese community, and explain how the dilemmas and professional challenges they faced had roots in cross-cultural differences, and a historical and socio-political present marked by whiteness and coloniality. Although the research took place at Ming, an atypical private school in a well-developed city in China, it is reasonable to suggest that the observed phenomenon and trends among the NESTs was not exclusive to this school. As mentioned before, Chinese colleagues from all over China shared similar observations of foreign teachers, and reported similar problems (Nov. 15, 2016. 68 preschool and kindergarten teachers and administrators from schools and childcare centers all over China visited Ming, and I made a presentation for them about Ming’s English teaching model during which they shared these observations).

From the literature review, the need for cultural and professional learning among NESTs was also evident in Shanghai, South Korea, Japan, and other Asian countries (Kim, 2001; Stanley, 2013; Tajino & Tajino, 2000).
I believe the significance of this research lies in its contribution to the knowledge of NESTs' lived professional experiences, and the positive effects professional development with a focus on acculturation can have to their teaching performance. Thousands of foreign teachers, with little or no professional training, are currently working at childcare centers, schools, and universities in China. Our research provides insight into the complexities of cultural learning in a cross-cultural teaching context that NESTs are experiencing, uncovers the importance of cultural and professional learning in informing their practice, and provides a step toward a real understanding of teacher professional development for cross-culture teaching. However, this is just a preliminary glimpse at the experiences of a small group of NESTs. Further in-depth and longitudinal research will be helpful to comprehensively describe and examine the effects of acculturation on NESTs teaching practice.

There are a few key implications from this study, but I have to admit that there were issues in the study that I could not solve even at the level of a single preschool or school. For example, the discourse of whiteness, and the discriminatory recruitment policy at the government level, could not be changed overnight, or even within the context of Ming itself. However, raising awareness of the existence of these problems could help NESTs and their Chinese employees and colleague avoid fueling racism by helping them stop accepting and practicing it. But there is a lot more we could do within schools.

**Cultural Learning Programming**

There are limitations to our efficiency as cultural learners. First among these is our willingness towards learning about the other culture. Given the sojourning nature of NESTs in China, to what extent they are committed to learning about the local community is questionable. Second, even if we become humble learners of other cultures, it is difficult to identify what “culture” to teach. The cultural challenges in our context were not at the
superficial level, being understood as a collection of cross culture do’s and don’ts. They are more of a fluid definition that can only be learned through participation, but this was not acknowledged, valued, or apparent to either the NESTs, or many of the Chinese administrators. Therefore, the purpose of cultural learning is not to introduce what Chinese culture “is,” but to increase NESTs' awareness of the potential impacts of cultural differences, and more importantly to develop reverence to the cultural ways of being of others. For instance, for foreign teachers or NESTs, the goal is to understand the existence of the discourse of whiteness, and the power of coloniality, and thus humble themselves to respect and learn about Chinese culture. For Chinese administrators and teachers, understanding whiteness affirms their culture as ‘real’ and not inferior, and thus helps them dismantle the imagined sacred West in order to learn about, and embrace, “authentic” Western teachers.

The way to realize this practice of mutual cultural learning is through cultural participation. This participation facilitates NESTs' understanding of the local cultural community through active engagement in shared endeavors with Chinese community members as they engage in socio-cultural activities. Take Ming as an example, the best way to encourage this participation is to treat them as equal members of the community. As Lola once suggested to the principal, “don’t treat us special in the show. Treat us like Chinese teachers, you know, teachers from different classes and age groups work on one show (whereas the foreign teachers working on their own separate show).” In this way, NESTs received opportunities to be central cultural participants in the community, rather than peripheral observers. As Becky reflected, after a conference trip with Chinese teachers and administrators:

It was really nice to connect with the principles…which was really nice to see Lilly outside of like the work environment. Also nice to meet with other Chinese teachers in the school setting,…because we, the foreign team, doesn't have much connection with Julie (the principal) on the daily basis, so it was really nice to sort of seeing her every day and talking to her. It's not just hello in the hallway, you know, like we were discussing things and talking, and the dinner and all of us were there at a table, which was fun, and people
were joking around. And the dance, I liked it. It was fun. And I got to know Julie more (Interview, May 27, 2017).

Cultural activities, especially those in third spaces (i.e. neither purely in the context of everyday school business, or purely social), serve a key function in creating bonding experiences for all community members. However, it is not enough just to be actively involved in cultural participation. Cultural learning and language-learning are mutually interdependent, and reinforcing. For NESTs, it is vital for them to learn and master the local vernacular, in order to be able to become deeply involved in these cultural historical activities, and understand the challenges their students face in becoming bilingual as well (Domínguez & Gutiérrez, 2014). As they gain proficiency in Chinese, it is more likely for them to begin to transcend the limitations of ideological whiteness, and their own native cultural system, and less likely to maintain a monocular vision of the world, and thus gain an in-depth understanding of the local culture.

**Provide A Cultural Agent**

A cultural agent, preferably with strong leadership in both Chinese and foreign teams of teachers, is vital in ensuring teachers’ involvement and commitment in cultural and professional participation in the local community. Given the fact of the majority of NESTs’ monolingualism, a strong and respected team leader who understands both cultural groups at a deep level could make a difference through a persistent effort of guiding foreign teachers to engage in professional dialogues with the local teachers and translating culturally to facilitate mutual understanding.

The person must be bilingual, and competent in both languages and cultures. Many Chinese kindergartens prefer English speaking Chinese managers of foreign teachers. However, it is worth note here that the capability of speaking English does not automatically imply the possibility and potentiality of understanding the cultural group of English speaking
people. The willingness to listen to the needs of each cultural group, and the capacity of understanding cultural differences and conflicts and taking actions to bridging the gap of differences are the key qualifications that schools should look for in a cultural agent along with bilingualism. The linguistic and cultural competence of both cultures enables this person to understand the unique and sometimes drastically different needs and expectations of each side and culturally translate these needs to the other group in a culturally appropriate way. In addition to these competences, the cultural agent’s leadership in professional knowledge and practice is important as well. As we discussed in the previous chapters, the dearth of professional support was one of the factors that caused the NESTs’ disenagement in professional development. Therefore, it is important for the agent to be able to identify and address NESTs’ needs of professional growth, and seek resources from the local community to provide the support to address these needs.

My personal background and experience could serve as a great example of a cultural agent’s qualifications. I had worked at the school for four years before I started a PhD program in Teacher Education and Curriculum in America. My extensive working experience at the school granted me the capacity of solving problems through connections with the Chinese community. Meanwhile my studying and living experience in America immersed in the English language and Western culture, and the PhD program deepened my understanding of cultural diversity. Most of all, I have ten years of experiences of working with early childhood teachers, and I worked as a classroom teacher, a curriculum coach and supervisor. These experiences enabled me to identify the NESTs’ professional needs and provide professional support to meet their needs.

There are other indispensable roles that a cultural agent plays in intercultural communication, such as being a cultural ambassador, educating each cultural group about the
other group, or negotiating with both groups to accommodate each other’s special needs. Additionally, having the power and connections with each group to make compromises or enforce accommodations could largely ease cultural tensions, and avoid cultural conflicts. For example, at the school I worked, the contract with foreign teachers listed non-paid after-work events that they must attend, and it included a list of specific events with an “etc.” in the end. Many NESTs found hard to accept, because it could be interpreted as mandatory non-paid after-work events as demand. However, the Chinese administrators had a different interpretation that “etc.” meant the events they would be asked to attend were not fixed and could be under different names. What I did was to explain the deviation of interpretations to the Chinese administrators, and put a cap on the amount of these events that foreign teachers were required to attend. It was not easy to do so because the Chinese administrators believed foreign teachers’ presence were needed most in these occasions as these events served as a kind of school’s recruitment advertisement. In this case, my connections with the Chinese administrators helped them understand the uneasiness the “etc.” could bring to foreign teachers, and agree to make concessions by reducing the number of events. Without such connections, the cultural agent’s effort to push Chinese administrators to compromise could be interpreted as taking the side of foreigners by the locals. Similarly, a trusty relationship and rapport between the cultural agent and foreign teachers could increase foreign teachers’ buy in of Chinese administration mediated by the agent.

**Provide Professional Support**

Even though some NESTs have had extensive experiences in teaching young children English in China, most of them did not have teaching credentials. Many NESTs admitted in the study that what they knew about teaching was mostly done through trial and error at an individual level. Other than that, they had no idea about child development and learning. In
order to be prepared for increasingly complex classroom contexts, teachers must acquire adequate and appropriate skills and knowledge of educational theories. As we discussed before, the NESTs themselves expressed their eagerness to have professional development programs. They also were pleased with the opportunities for professional development they had received from the acculturation project. For example, Becky, again, after the Hong Kong conference, offered compelling insights:

Me: You said those practical strategies you got from the conference were really helpful for your teaching. How come?
Becky: Not just strategies, but the knowledge why do things like this. For example, the last one we saw, the professor. She was talking about, children across like a large group and small group time. I think just the knowledge of why and how children learn (that I didn't know)…

Nevertheless, this task—to assist and enhance NESTs’ professional development—should be undertaken by their employers, and not dependent on luck, or the individuals themselves. These training should include pre-job training on the basics of teaching, training around teacher ethics and school regulations, opportunities to shadow experienced teachers, and ongoing on-the-job training to address the daily challenges of teaching. Meanwhile, the Chinese administrations need to recognize the consequence of “not investing in NESTs” in terms of professional development, and the consequences of treating English teaching as a show business and assuming that NESTs would ‘figure it out’ themselves. What suffered was not only the teaching effectiveness, but also the children’s initial experiences of learning English, which could impact their attitude toward foreign language learning throughout their lives. Drawing upon the resources of the local community and academics, this support could, therefore, ensure a smooth transition to their new job, help release the stress of teaching, and increase teaching quality—deeply benefiting the instructional experience offered to Chinese children.
A Career Path for NESTs

To succeed in the goal of adjusting non-certified teachers to their new jobs, and hopefully retaining them as employees long term, their employers should offer a career ladder to support their professional growth. Some NESTs viewed the job as a means of supporting their interests in traveling, but some, often after a few years of exploration, fell in love with the teaching job, and wanted to pursue it as a career. This is the reason that Becky, Elsa, Joe, and Joy applied for continued education in early childhood. At Ming, there was well-established career ladder for Chinese teachers, and many of them benefited from it to become professional leaders or administrators. For NESTs, working at Ming seemed designed as a dead-end job with a capped salary, which of course would not motivate them to “put one hundred percent in.” An established career ladder could largely solve this problem. It would help to recruit, develop, and retain talented teachers, and also support their professional growth. This is the "hope" that inspired the improved professionalism that the NESTs mentioned a few times in our previous chapter. In this way, establishing career trajectories for NESTs would ensure the sustainability of the program.

An Open Dialogue

The NESTs’ presence at Ming has brought global exchanges to the school, which affected almost every aspect of the community, including beliefs, norms, values, behaviors, and cultural expectations and perceptions. In this way, both NESTs and the Chinese community challenged each other’s horizons. Inevitably, these exchanges produced hidden or overt conflicts. The only way to address these conflicts was through an open dialogue—a conversation that constantly goes on in the community. Such an open discourse would open up a horizon that transcends cultural boundaries, and could lead to trust and deeper understandings of each other. However, the administrators at Ming were not aware of the
importance of such a dialogue. From the interviews, it was evident that the principals had no idea about the NESTs' challenges and complaints, and the manager denied their requests for providing feedback or questioning the management. Thus, open dialogue carries the responsibility of the appreciation of critiques and feedback; the humble mindset to learn from each other, the respect for differences, and the spirit of collaboration to build a better community together must all be present.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the stories of NESTs requires an atypical way of hearing stories; a multifaceted and bicultural perspective of listening to their lived experiences. From 2016 to 2017, I worked with these educators day in and day out. There were a variety of roles I played in different phases throughout the research: a friend, a boss, a boss-friend, a cultural mediator, a translator, and a researcher. All of these different roles granted opportunities for me to see them, and the Ming cultural ecology, from different angles. Through these angles, my participants displayed their struggles, frustrations, and desperation of being forced into interacting with a different culture while being unable to negotiate it. They dealt with their own condescending attitudes, a confused understanding, and sometimes a feeling of anger, mingled with enmity, coming out at the new cultural community; and also a passion and love toward children and the job of teaching them.

Serving all these roles was not an easy job. The NESTs were unsupported, isolated, and pressured. Many of them agonized over how to do their job better. I understand how frustrating it was for them to want to improve, but not be supported in doing so, and to be eager to establish a career, but feel denied the opportunity, and the frustration of wanting to flourish in an exotic land, but being constantly isolated. Consequently, we must listen to the NESTs' narratives in order to understand the nuances between them and the local community.
and what they needed to thrive in alien territory with a new profession. It is the Chinese community’s responsibility to locate and provide local resources to escort their journey to acculturation, and thousands of NESTs are waiting for the help.

However, there are two sides to every coin. It is equally urgent for NESTs to realize the importance of the active participation in the local cultural community for their teaching profession as well as their cultural understandings, to be equipped with the linguistic competence to enable such a participation, and to become aware of the unearned White privilege and the danger of Whiteness, and thus to acknowledge and disrupt White superiority and the power of coloniality. In this way they will eventually develop intercultural identity that enables them to smoothly and comfortably transit across these two cultures, and more importantly, to succeed in their teaching career in a foreign country.

As the ancient country of China opens to the West, the Chinese community is eager to demonstrate its modernity to the world. This eagerness has brought more and more international travelers to visit, interact with, and even delve into, this ancient country. These international exchanges have also created spaces where intercultural communication and multicultural education take place, and where challenges and clashes with, more than ever before, their traditional values and practices. As a result, these dynamics of intercultural interactions are building up a historical and cultural constellations of new cultural community practices, continuing and evolving across generations, leaving traces of the integration or resistance to Western values. Either the fact of teaching English to young children when they barely verbal in their mother tongue, or the hidden ideology of internalized colonialism and racial discrimination is the evidence of the existence of these cultural negotiations. Where is this negotiation heading to? The answer lies in all members of the cultural community.
APPENDIX A -- INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

First round (June, 2016), Introductory Protocol:

To facilitate our note-taking, we would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. Thank you very much.

Note: Follow-up questions were added by the researcher when necessary, and these questions included, but not limited to, “why do you think so?” “How come?” “Can you give me an example?” “What made you feel like?” “It’s because…”

Questions:

1. How long have you been in your present position?
2. Did you like teaching in your current classrooms? Why or why not? What were the challenges and barriers of teaching young children here?
3. How do you understand cultural differences between you and the Chinese community at the school setting? What about cultural differences between you and your students?
4. If given a chance of learning about Chinese students, what would you want to learn?
5. What would you imagine learning more about your students’ home environment and community benefit your teaching and your students?
6. Anything you would like to add?

Second round (June-July, 2017), Interview Protocol:
To facilitate the note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Essentially, this document states that: 1) all information will be held confidential, and 2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Thank you for your participation.

Note: Similar to the first interview, follow-up questions were added.

Questions:

1. Were there any changes you noticed in the past school year? If yes, how did you feel about these changes? What surprised you, and what didn’t? (Note: if the participant answers no to question one, claiming no changes have been noticed, follow up with this prompt: we did a lot of things together for the research project, such as having Dr. Sana Green’s talk; home visits; the Chinese teacher’s demo and Elsa’s demo on small groups; training on small groups; training on classroom management; add positions like team leaders, what do you think about these activities?)

2. Did the activities/changes we have done make an impact on people in the office? How? What about yourself?

3. How did you feel about the class I observed? Anything different from the class I observed last time (remind the interviewee what she/he did last time)? If yes, how?

4. In general, anything that disturbs/bothers you working at Ming? Any changes in the past year in terms of the things that have been disturbing you?

5. Personal questions

Note: These questions are individually designed based on the initial data analysis. For example, Grace talked about the NESTs made fun of her English accent and pronunciations
in the first interview, and so for her, the personal questions was, “in the previous interview you talked about some foreign teachers would tease you by ridiculing your accent or pronunciations, how is this going on now?” For another example, in the first formal interview, when asked about cultural differences, Lola answered she didn’t know much about it because she had only been in China for a month. For her the questions was, “Now you have been living and working in China for a year. I remember you said you didn’t know much about Chinese culture except that people would elbow each other standing in line. What else have you learned about the Chinese way of doing things in the past year?”
APPENDIX B - FOCUS GROUPS WITH CHINESE TEACHERS

First round (June, 2016), in Chinese

To facilitate our note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. Thank you very much.

Note: the actual discussion lasted more than an hour, and I barely made to question No.3.

1. Could you comment on the benefits and challenges of working with foreign teachers?
2. Is it different from working with your Chinese colleagues? If yes, how?
3. Any cultural differences that you think might have attributed to the challenges or differences you just talked about?

Second round (July, 2017), in Chinese

Please be aware, like we did it for the first time, I will audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

We have planned this interview to last no longer than 1 hour. During this time, I have several questions that we would like to cover. Thank you very much.

The main goal of this focus group is to collect feedback on the acculturation project that the
department of foreign teachers implemented in the past year. You were all informed this project at the beginning of the project and in the middle. Any questions about the acculturation project? Here are the questions. I would greatly appreciate if you could your opinions and thoughts.

1. Were there any changes that you have noticed your foreign teacher or foreign teachers as a group in the past school year? If yes, what were they?

2. How do you understand these changes?

3. Were there any changes that you have noticed of your foreign teacher’s teaching practice? If yes, what were they?

4. Follow up question: Some of you just said the foreign teachers were different from Chinese teachers. How different? Anything else?
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