

EXPLORING THE IDENTITY NEGOTIATION OF EAST ASIAN GRADUATE TEACHING  
ASSISTANTS: A CASE STUDY OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY, SOCIAL IDENTITY AND  
TEACHER IDENTITY

By

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## Abstract

The Council of Graduate Schools received 749,000 graduate applications by international students in Fall 2018. Though the Open Doors (2018) reported international graduate students at the US institutions decreased by 2.1% from last year, the number of students studying at the graduate level remains high. To any graduate students, receiving funding from the institution studied is crucial for their academic study. It is difficult to secure funding for international graduate students than their domestic counterparts. Many international graduate students choose to teach their native languages in US institutions. This dissertation of case studies explores the experience that three East Asian international Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) encountered at a midwestern teaching and research institution in the US. The study exposed the perceptions, difficulties and challenges, and future career choices that constructed the learning, social and teaching experiences of these three East Asian international GTAs. Data were collected through in-depth individual semi-structured interviews, informal chats, and the analysis of relevant documents. Essential themes were generated on academic identity, social identity and teacher identity of the participants; the challenges in each identity category were discussed, and implications were provided for graduate programs.

## Acknowledgments

I found the whole process of writing my dissertation joyful but also painful. The pain comes from long hours of sitting in front of my computer, typing, looking for sources, but also comes from digging deeper into myself, and trying to answer the questions that I have posed for years: who am I? The pain also comes from facing some of the questions in my life that I could no longer ignore digging deeper into my dissertation. Throughout the dissertation, I experienced joy, pain, but sometimes bewilderment, about myself and about the world.

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## Dedication

To my parents, Yuyan Gao and Guiqiu Ma, for providing me the opportunity to study in the US.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Rationale for the study .....	2
Problem statement.....	3
The conceptualization of identity .....	6
Purpose of the study.....	7
Research questions.....	8
Significance .....	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	12
Identity and Identities .....	12
Conceptual Framework: Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex .....	21
Academic Identity of International Students .....	25
Motivation and international student identity. ....	28
Language and coursework learning experience .....	30
Challenges of students from East Asian countries.....	31
Social Identity of International Students .....	34
Teacher Identity .....	41
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	50
Research Setting and Participants.....	50
About the site. ....	50
Background .....	51
Participants.....	53
Genre.....	55

Researcher's Positionality.....	55
Why Interviews?.....	57
Data Collection .....	59
Data Analysis .....	64
Chapter 4: Their Stories and Our Stories .....	67
Pei's Story.....	69
My Relationship with Pei.....	71
Pei's Stories Analysis .....	72
Sadako's Story .....	76
My relationship with Sadako .....	79
Sadako's Stories Analysis.....	81
Yonah's Story .....	86
My relationship with Yonah .....	89
Yonah's Stories Analysis .....	91
My Story .....	96
Summary of this chapter .....	97
Chapter 5: Findings.....	98
Challenges Academically, Socially and as Emerging Teachers .....	100
Academic challenges .....	101
Social challenges.....	117
Challenges as emerging teachers .....	122
Accommodations, Negotiations and Transformations.....	133
Identity Formation .....	140

Chapter 6: Discussion .....	149
Academic Challenges and Academic Identity .....	152
The Case of Sadako: Language use and personal validation .....	152
Social Challenges and Social Identity.....	154
The Case of Pei: I’m a mom of two young immigrant children. ....	155
Challenges as Emerging Teachers and Teacher Identity .....	156
The Case of Yonah: Between teaching TESOL and the native language .....	160
Implications for Graduate Programs.....	161
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	163
Identities are multiple, but can also be hierarchical.....	163
Identities are complex, as new identities emerge .....	164
Identities are intersecting, and the negotiation of identities is discursive .....	164
Appendix.....	167
References.....	169

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Modified Hawke’s illustration of the links between one kind of identity and sociocultural identity.....	20
Figure 2 East Asian GTAs’ identities .....	25
Figure 3 Third Culture .....	40
Figure 4 Language Teacher Identity .....	42
Figure 5 The circle of teaching and learning .....	103
Figure 6 Different ways of problem-solving .....	112
Figure 7 International Student Identity .....	141

List of Tables

Table 1 GTAs’ English Proficiency Scores required by Candi University ..... 27

Table 2 Demographic Information of Participants ..... 54

Table 3 List of Data Collection Techniques ..... 60

Table 4 Participants’ shared institutionally recognized identities and social identities..... 151

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It is not just an accumulation of skills and information,  
but a process of becoming—  
to become a certain person or conversely,  
to avoid becoming a certain person.  
(Wenger, 1999, p. 215)

The Council of Graduate Schools received 749,000 graduate applications by international students in Fall 2018. The Open Doors (2018) also reported that the number of international graduate students at United States (US) institutions slightly decreased but remains high. In 2018, there are 382,935 international students studying at the graduate level in the US. For any graduate students, receiving funding from the institution studied at is crucial for their academic study. Officials reported that it is more difficult to secure funding for international graduate students than for their domestic counterparts (National Research Council Committee, 2015). Therefore, many international graduate students resort to teaching their native language in a US institution (Uzum, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to conduct qualitative case studies to investigate the identity negotiation of East Asian Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in an East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC) department in a Midwestern teaching and research university in the US. East Asian GTAs are defined in this dissertation as international graduate students coming from East Asian countries such as China, Japan and Korea. These students come to the US for their master's or doctoral program (not in EALC department), and, at the same time, have a GTA appointment of teaching their native language of Chinese, Japanese or Korean.

This study focused on East Asian GTAs' identity negotiation, with special interest in studying the intersection of participants' academic identity as second language learners, social identity as international students, and teacher identity as emerging teachers. I chose to study

these three identities based on the nature of the participants. With a clear understanding that there are additional identities in different cases, the three identities chosen to study constructed the major experiences of this particular group: being international graduate students in the US, aliens in a foreign country, and emerging foreign language teachers in US academia.

### **Rationale for the study**

My interest in this dissertation topic was originally driven by personal motives. I had never thought about coming to the US to teach my native language of Chinese. My story of coming to the US started from wishing for a master's degree in Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) after my undergraduate studies in English Language and Literature in Northeast China. With the curiosities and wonderings about the Western world while reading and learning about Western culture during my undergraduate, I came to the US in 2012. And with the intention of trying to be independent, and witnessing other students working as GTAs, I applied and obtained a GTA position in teaching Chinese at the midwestern university where I conducted my graduate studies.

Up until the onset of this dissertation study, I have stayed in the GTA position for almost five years. I met and worked with a group of other sublime international students who have also come from East Asian countries teaching Chinese, Japanese and Korean. They chose to teach their native language based on similar but different reasons, coming from akin but distinct backgrounds, and living in comparable but contrasting situations. Their stories as East Asian GTAs were fascinating, of value, and needed to be heard.

To be specific, I was especially interested in the academic and social challenges of these GTAs as international students, and their experiences as emerging foreign language teachers in US academia. Thus, I decided to conduct my dissertation study on a group of East Asian GTAs

who were teaching their native language as a foreign language in a midwestern teaching and research institution in the US, with the hope of telling their/our stories.

Reflecting upon my own experience as an international student and an emerging teacher in the US, I have always been conflicted among my different identities, striving to adapt to the American culture, and trying to make sense of Western academia. Six years ago, I had the hope of coming to the US to find out who I was as a person. Six years later, this journey still continues. Although the journey was much less confusing to me compared to the time when I first arrived in the country, I still hold the intentional exploration of understanding the different facets of my identities: being an international student, a foreigner in this country, and an emerging language teacher. Lastly, this dissertation came from the interactions that I had with my long-term friends and colleagues during the years in graduate school. Their stories inspired me and confirmed the motivation for this study.

### **Problem statement**

Previous studies have investigated East Asian graduate students' academic identity (Gao, 2014; Kim, 2006; Morita, 2004) and social identities (Li & Gasser, 2005; Yeh & Inose, 2003). There are also numerous studies on teacher identity of teachers from East Asian countries in higher education (Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Sang, Valcke, van Braak, & Tondeur, 2009; You & Jia, 2008). However, it is important to understand that there are multiple dimensions of identities (Jones, McEwen, & Abes, 2007). The discussion of one kind of identity simply cannot fulfill the different facets that are presented by individuals.

For the group in this study, academic identity, social identity and teacher identity inherently represent significant identity dimensions. Postmodernist scholars see identity as co-constructed (Dervin, 2015). A postmodernist view allows me to see the identity boundaries

dissolve (Díaz-Rico, 2008), as I work from a conceptual framework that views identity dimensions as intersecting; therefore, I wish to see how the different facets of identities (Burke & Tully, 1977) are present in East Asian GTAs' experiences.

In order to understand teaching and learning, studies have claimed that we need to understand teachers (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Varghese et al. (2005) makes the following claim in terms of understanding teachers:

...in order to understand teachers; we need to have a clearer sense of who they are: the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them. (p. 22)

This study focused on East Asian international students who undertook a graduate teaching assistantship (GTA) at the university where they pursued their graduate academic programs. Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is a position that prepares graduate students for future teaching positions in universities (Plakans, 1997) and GTAs take this position to gain experience and skills for their professional career (Prieto & Altmaier, 1994).

Studies have investigated the beliefs, practice and *teacher identity* of these *emerging* teachers (Balslev, Vanhulle, & Dieci, 2015; Bang & Luft, 2016), but have failed to understand that a substantial part of GTAs' teaching practice comes from their experiences of being graduate students themselves. In other words, to understand GTAs, we need to understand them as students first before we try to understand their teacher identity.

With the foundational understanding that teaching and learning is relational (Dewey, 1938), and “teachers teach the way they learned” (Dunn & Dunn, 1979, p. 241), how teachers learned when they were students affect how they perceive the practice of teaching; and their “learning tendencies could be important indicators for the teaching scenarios”(You & Jia, 2008,

p. 836). Therefore, while studying the identity formation of GTAs, their experience as students is an essential part that ought not to be neglected.

In reality, since the current curriculum in the US is still largely rooted in Western ideologies (Liu, 1999), the bias is not in favor of hiring international students as their Teaching Assistants (TAs) (Arthur, 2003). This bias still exists in academic departments across disciplines because of institutional forms of discrimination (Arthur, 2003) towards international TAs, international students' unfamiliarity with the US pedagogical norms (LoCastro & Tapper, 2006), and international students' lacking of English language proficiency (Zhou, 2009). ~~Nowadays~~ Many international graduate students resort to teaching their native language to tackle the issue of funding for their academic study (Uzum, 2013). The problem leads to many international students who major in education and social sciences, i.e. linguistics, teach their native languages, which are not what they are majored in (Yang, 2008). Thus, this paradox and mismatch made studying ~~complexed~~ the motivation of teaching their native language, complex, and I intend to unfold this complexity.

For international GTAs, their identity construction come from several different aspects: being international students, possible second language learners, minorities in the US society, emerging teachers in their respective fields, and many more based on the different roles that they take in their lives (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). Their roles are relatively complicated, since they undertake multiple roles mentioned above. This complexity comes from the need to navigate the tensions among different identities (Jones, 2009). The process of navigating among different identities takes the view that identity is *fluid* and *dynamic* (Davies & Harré, 1999), and sees identity development as *becoming* rather than *being*.

As for the current study, since the participants all have been in the US for at least six years, I was interested in how they *become* graduate students in the US, how they *become* foreigners living in the US society, and how they *become* foreign language teachers in the US, and how they navigate among these different facets of identities. The idea of *becoming* is also coherent with the nature of telling their stories (Rappaport, 1995); in other words, I wanted to know their backgrounds, what they had been through, and at what stage they are now.

In the process of *becoming*, the academic coursework that they undertook, their social and teaching experience also challenge the ways that these international students talk and think about themselves (Gomez, Black, & Allen, 2007). The process of *becoming* takes the view that we are continuously becoming (Hallman, 2014) in an endeavor to interact in our world (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015), and our identities are negotiated and constructed by the experience from schools and society (Gee, 2000b). Therefore, from in-depth individual interviews and through informal chats with the participants (explained in Chapter 3) and the analysis of autoethnography (as I am an insider, which was also explained in Chapter 3), I intended to see how East Asian GTAs perceive themselves, their students, their teaching and the different roles that they played in the US society.

### **The conceptualization of identity**

A detailed conceptual framework will be introduced in Chapter 2: Literature Review; however, before I proceed to the research questions and the significance of the study, it is essential for me to briefly explain how I conceptualize identity after the problem statement was posed. I took a postmodernist view on identity development with the mindset of the existence of multiple truths, multiple realities, and thus multiple identities (Helsby, 2000). From a postmodernist view, identity is flexible and multiple (Cummins, 2011; Weedon, 1989).

Rosenberg (1997) proposed the idea of “multiplicity of selves,” which concerns about “how these selves are related to one another” (p. 25). In this dissertation, I built a conceptual framework named *Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex*, which helped me to view the intertwined nature among different identities (Howard, 2000b) and how the complexity of individual’s identities project to their lives. Identity dimensions are multiple, intersecting and complex (Jones, 2009; Jones et al., 2007). A detailed description of this conceptual framework will be introduced in Chapter 2 after a concrete explanation about the understanding of identity. By using the framework of *Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex*, I hope to understand the different facets of identities of East Asian GTAs, how these facets are related to each other, and the complexity of their identity negotiation.

### **Purpose of the study**

This case study explored the experience that international Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) from East Asian countries encountered in a midwestern teaching and research institution in the US. The study explored the identity negotiation of a group of three East Asian GTAs. In this dissertation, I suggest that while studying the identity of groups in this nature, we need to see the multidimensional facets contributing to the East Asian GTAs’ identity construction. As a researcher, I was open to what the participants told me. I wanted them to tell me their stories, and then I worked to (re)tell their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

I chose to study East Asian GTAs who are teaching their native language as a foreign language in the US because this group of people is peculiar in the way that many of the East Asian GTAs take more than dual, triple but multiple roles of being international students, second language learners, minorities in the society, and emerging teachers. There are multiple parts of identities that each different individual possesses. This study focused on exploring the

“multiplicity”, “intersectionality” and “complexity” of these identities (these terms will be defined in the Chapter 2) and analyzed how different facets of identities co-constructed the East Asian GTAs’ identities as a whole.

### **Research questions**

To goal of my research was to understand the identity negotiation of East Asian GTAs; specifically, I sought to understand the motivations, difficulties and challenges that were the factors related to constructing GTAs’ learning, as well as their social and teaching experience (these different aspects will also be attended to in the literature review). Thus, my research questions are:

- 1) What challenges do East Asian GTAs face as students academically, socially, and as emerging teachers?
- 2) What accommodations, negotiations and transformation that East Asian GTAs conduct in dealing with these challenges?
- 3) How do these challenges impact East Asian GTAs’ identity formation as students, social beings, and emerging teachers during their time as GTAs?

To fully understand my participants’ experience, I inquired about their motivations to become students in the US and their experience as second language learners during their academic study. I also inquired about how they envisioned life in the US as well as their social experiences in the US. While referring to GTAs’ teaching practice, I highlighted their motivations to become language teachers, how they perceived themselves in the US classrooms, and what role this played in foreign language classrooms. I asked them about how their previous education, cultural background, and what beliefs shaped their teaching practice in their classrooms.

## Significance

In the field of teacher identity research, it is shown by the literature that teacher identity has been studied by researchers through different lenses (Cho, 2014; Hallman, 2015; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). Since the topic of this study focuses on East Asian GTAs, I understand teacher identity from the viewpoint that they are emerging teachers who are teaching a foreign language while pursuing a graduate degree in the field of *education* at a university in the US. To fully understand these participants' experiences as emerging teachers, it is important to understand that the teacher identity of this particular group comes from their experience as graduate students (Yang, 2008), and their experience as graduate students shapes their teaching beliefs (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994).

In the field of teacher education, previous research has been extensively focused on professional development (Alsup, 2006; Balslev et al., 2015; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Recent focus on teacher identity has diverted the attention to the personal development of teachers. For this dissertation, I endeavored to develop a better understanding of how the larger social and cultural contexts play in East Asian GTAs' identity development. Knowing where they come from and how their cultural background shapes their perception of what means to be a teacher could prove to be important to understand their teaching practices (Sang et al., 2009).

Personally, as I am one of the East Asian GTAs in the US, I have the intention of writing out our stories and letting our stories be heard. Through constructing and reconstructing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) these stories, I would like to confirm that these stories exist and have powerful effects (Rappaport, 1995). The sharing of these stories not only brought more understanding of our experience to one another (Worth, 2004), but also empowered the person who tells the story. "It [stories] tells us not only how we are but who we have been and who we

can be” (Rappaport, 1995, p. 796). In the study of East Asian GTAs, it is important for others to understand where we come from, why we come here, how we are doing and where we are going. Since I am one of this group, as an insider, I understand the struggles, difficulties and challenges that this group of people face during their academic study, social life and professional development in the US. I also intended to bring more understanding to society for this group.

For the field of research on student-teacher identity, it is important to understand GTAs’ roles as both students and teachers. Neglecting to understand either part will result in an incomplete picture of the individuals’ identity formation, thus would not be able to fully understand the identity of this particular group of people. In this dissertation, being able to include GTAs’ roles as students, attending to their stories as students, and their stories of “becoming” teachers provided the readers a holistic view of their identity construction.

Understanding East Asian GTAs’ identity construction is also helpful for educators and policy makers to know East Asian GTAs’ teaching practice in the US classrooms. By exposing a fuller picture of East Asian GTAs’ identity negotiation, I aimed for providing more information on their experience for teachers, educators, administrators in this field for their TA trainings and international faculty development; thus rethinking what resources and support we can provide for future students and teachers.

Chapter 2 includes a review of relevant literature to identities and the different facets of East Asian GTAs’ identity construction: academic identity, social identity and teacher identity. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology that I used for the data collection and analysis of this dissertation. Chapter 4 presents the participants’ stories for contextualizing the findings. Chapter 5 presents the findings in the order of answering the research questions. Chapter 6 discusses how the challenges that participants faced are related to their different facets of identities and

provided implications for the graduate programs. The last chapter, Chapter 7, concludes this dissertation.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

At fifteen, I set my heart on learning;  
 At thirty, I was firmly established;  
 At forty, I had no more doubts;  
 At fifty, I knew the will of Heaven;  
 At sixty, I was ready to listen to it;  
 At seventy, I could follow my heart's desire  
 without transgressing what was right.  
 Confucius (551 BC - 479 BC)

This dissertation study aimed to explore the identity negotiation of three East Asian Graduate Teaching Assistants. With the understanding that different facets of identities are intersecting (Jones, 2009) with each other, I reviewed the literature of the three major identities presented in East Asian GTAs' identity construction separately in the literature. In the meantime, the process of reviewing these three major identities, i.e. academic identity, social identity and teacher identity shown below further demonstrated how they are interrelated, as shown by the overlaps of identities; therefore, these identities should be investigated holistically for the group that I study.

The literature review was structured starting by understanding the basics of *identity* and *identities*; the *multiplicity*, *intersectionality* and *complexity* of identities; and then came to the identity construction of the specific group that I investigated. This order of literature review allowed the readers to see how I conceptualize identity, how I came to the conceptual framework of this paper (Marshall & Rossman, 2014), and how I used the conceptual framework to understand the group that I studied.

### Identity and Identities

Before deconstructing identity into different facets, it is essential to understand what *identity* means as a whole. The nature of identity leads to the challenges of its conceptualization and exploration. Identity has been identified by different researchers using terms like “fluid”,

“dynamic”, “ongoing” to describe it as a process, rather than a stable attribute (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Cho, 2014; Goh, 2014; Hallman, 2007). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) mentioned that a major challenge in understanding identity is to resolve its definition. And many researchers claimed that it is challenging to provide “a definitive explanation” (Erikson, 1968) of identity.

However, as Erickson (1968) stated, the more one writes about identity, the more the word “identity” becomes something “unfathomable” (p. 9). Erickson (1968) understood identity through a psychological lens. He mentioned that identity is something that every individual struggle for. Scholars in the field of identity research have also attempted to understand identity in various contexts. Identity comes from individual’s experience (Clandinin, 1990), including past, present, and future; reflection (Schön, 1983); making choices (Erikson, 1968), and many other processes of identity making (McAdams, 1993). McAdams (1993) started the chapter of *Life and Myths* by:

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know *myself*, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. I must come to see in all its particulars the narrative of the self-the personal myth-that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the course of my years. It is a story I continue to revise, and to tell to myself (and sometimes to others) as I go on living (p. 11, originally emphasized).

This quote and the quote from Confucius at the beginning of this chapter further demonstrated that the finding and making (Erikson, 1968) of *identity* is an ongoing process (Cho, 2014), which is evolving, fluid and dynamic. It is largely shaped by time and space (Giddens,

1991), the members one associated with (Tajfel, 1978), and the context and experience across one's lifetime.

Scholars have conceptualized identity as socially constructed (Gee, 2000b), situational (Hall, 2000), and constantly evolving (Zacharias, 2010). Gee (2000b) laid out four ways to view identity: nature-identity; institution-identity; discourse identity, and affinity-identity; and pointed out that these four ways interweave with each other in a given context. Nature-identity, as named, takes the perspective that identity is determined by the gene, and human beings have no control over it, for example, being a single-child in the family. However, nature-identity is usually not the focus in educational contexts. Institution-identity is usually a calling or an imposition, as named by Gee (2000b); for example, being a professor or a teaching assistant. Professional identities of teachers are studied in many research (Alsup, 2006; McDonough, 2006; Schön, 1983).

Gee (2000b) refers to the third perspective of viewing identity as discourse identity, in which human beings develop their identities through discourse or dialogue with others. Bakhtin's (1981) ideology of becoming has been used by researchers to explore identity through language and experiences (Cho, Al-Samiri, & Gao, 2016; Gomez et al., 2007; Hallman, 2014). Bakhtin (1981) views person as socially determined, and ideologically becoming through values and voices (Gomez et al., 2007). Gee's (2000b) view that individuality only exists "because other people treat, talk about, and interact with (p. 103)" them exemplifies that one kind of identity (i.e. being student or teacher) is deeply rooted in social identity. This contributed to my understanding about the identities of GTAs, and explanation will be further provided in the next section to illustrate.

The last perspective that Gee (2000b) mentioned is affinity identity. Affinity identity focuses on the participation of practices in certain cultures. For example, a group of people who celebrate certain holidays or cultural events, thus have similar lifestyles. However, as Gee (2000b) mentioned, it is important to understand that individuals negotiate among these identities. Therefore, the understanding of identity should not be one kind of definition, as individuals redefine themselves in different ways at different times while seeking “multiple truths” (Helsby, 2000). Therefore, a discussion of identity cannot stay in its singular form as *identity*, instead, seeing it as fluid and shifting *identities*.

The plural form of *identities* does not demonstrate identities are binary; instead, it acknowledges the dynamic potential of identities (Davies & Harré, 1999), and identities are multiple (Rosenberg, 1997). We take various roles in society and our roles are determined by different situations (Sueda, 2014). A dichotomy view on identity “fails to adequately capture the full range of identity modes exercised by contemporary subjects” (Ott, 2003, p. 5). Research also showed that the notion of multiple identities has been acknowledged by researchers since the late 70s (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1980; Turner, 1978). Goffman (1961) mentioned that roles can coexist with compartmentalization. Burke and Tully (1977) further claimed that the self is “multifaceted and rich in content” (p. 881).

I understand identity through a postmodernist perspective via a sociocultural lens. Thus, sociocultural theory and the postmodern view on identity will be reviewed respectively in the following sections. The review of the literature demonstrated that identities are multiple. The perspective of multiple identities also coincides with the outlook that identity is fluid; as Ott (2003) mentioned, how individual performs identity has everything to do with how they perceive the reality at a specific moment.

Similar to Ott, Gee (2000b) proposed that individuals get recognized differently in the exact same setting by different “actors and in different ways in different settings by the same actors” (p.104). The “setting” and the “actor” that Gee mentions is crucial in determining one’s identity. Ewing (1990) also mentions that the multiple selves appear during negotiation “among situationally located actors” (p. 252). This leads us to understand identity through a sociocultural lens. A sociocultural lens on identity stresses seeing how the different social, cultural settings influence the formation of one’s identity. A sociocultural lens on identity comes from trying to understand how different factors (e.g. economic, social, cultural factors) influence the decision-making of teachers (Dickenson, 2014). Dickenson (2014) understands teacher identity from the viewpoint that “identity is shaped by one’s previous experience and beliefs, which influences one’s decisions and choices in the future (p. 62),” as sociocultural theory views a person’s career choices come from their personal experiences. Sociocultural theory and identity will be introduced in detail in the section that follows.

Here, I would like readers to see how I come to a postmodern perspective on identity, and what builds up my understanding on a postmodernist perspective on identity. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) mentioned, the challenge of understanding identity also comes from “reaching a full understanding of identity” (p. 176). I agree that a “full” understanding of identity almost seems impossible, but an understanding that there are multiple facets of identity will be able to move us forward towards a *fuller* picture of identity.

Rosenberg (1997) proposed the idea of “multiplicity of selves”, which concerns “how these selves are related to one another” (p. 25). This intertwined nature among different identities (Howard, 2000b) intrigued me, and I am interested in how the complexity of individual’s

identities project to their lives. The multiplicities of identities led me to take a postmodernist view on identity, which will be introduced as followed.

### **A postmodernist view on identity: Who am I?**

Postmodernists attempt to understand identity and answer the old question: who am I? Tatum (2000) asked several important questions while discussing the complexity of identities:

The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, and store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? What has my social context been? Was I surrounded by people like myself, or was I part of a minority in my community? Did I grow up speaking Standard English at home or another language or dialect? Did I live in a rural county, an urban neighborhood, a sprawling suburb, or on a reservation?

Who I am (or say I am) is a product of answering these questions and is related to many other factors as well (p. 5). As Ott (2003) mentioned, sociocultural factors “create the boundaries essential to identity” (p.57). A postmodernist view on identity first acknowledges the multiple identities one person possesses: a person is a son to his father, or a father to his own children, an American, a professor, a feminist, based on the different roles that the person possesses in the society. Then, postmodernists aim at expanding the boundaries of these possible identities and acknowledging the emergent possibilities of new identities through social interaction and ongoing experiences. This view on identity acknowledges that identity development is a continuous (Hallman, 2014) process, and allows me to inhabit both the postmodern and sociocultural perspectives.

This postmodernist view on identity is also situated in the current economic, social and cultural contexts. With recent terms like “transnational”, “translingual practice” (Canagarajah, 2012) emerged in this globally ever-changing world, predetermined identities lost its place in the market of describing people’s identity. The pre-given categories cannot fulfill their need in newly developing contexts and accommodating to different situations; thus, these pre-given categories will not suffice in categorizing the specific identities that individual possesses. The declining use of categorical divisions on class, gender, and ethnicity calls for new understandings of identities. A postmodernist view on identity allows the growth of identities, and fits the “consumer choice” of the current global market (Ott, 2003).

### **Teacher identity and sociocultural theory**

Teacher identity has been explored by many researchers through the sociocultural lens (Dickenson, 2014; Lasky, 2005). And many researchers are also interested in the “becoming” of a teacher (Gomez et al., 2007; Walkington, 2005). The lens of “becoming” a teacher is consistent with the understanding of identity, that it is “a process of *becoming*” (Wenger, 1999, p. 215). The view on identity development as *becoming* rather than being acknowledges that we are continuously in an endeavor to interact in our world (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015), and our identities are negotiated and constructed by the experiences from schools and society (Gee, 2000).

Sociocultural theory denotes that identity comes from social interaction (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Vygotsky’s works (1978; 1980) play a significant role in understanding identity construction through sociocultural approach. As Penuel and Wertsch (1995) mentioned, Vygotsky’s thoughts provided “conceptual and methodological tools for understanding how sociocultural processes shape individual identity formation (p.84)”. Vygotsky focused on human

action in social activities through a developmental context (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). A developmental context deals with the relationship between individual and the social influence on human beings. As Wertsch (1991) mentioned, Vygotsky focuses sociocultural process on how different forms of social practice become internalized by individuals.

Penuel and Wertsch's (1995) article entitled, "Vygotsky and Identity Formation: A Sociocultural Approach", attempted to integrate Erickson's interpretation of identity formation with the sociocultural approach that Vygotsky supported, and tried to reach a comprehensive view on how sociocultural processes determine identity formation. Their view of identity formation through a sociocultural lens is consistent with the understanding that identity is a dynamic process, as human beings are constantly interacting in the sociocultural environment that they are situated in.

Penuel and Wertsch's (1995) comprehensive view on identity not only acknowledges that identity formation is shaped by action, but also shaping the forms of action itself. This view of identity formation demonstrated that identity formation indeed involves a complex interplay among the different cultural tools employed in the social actions (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 84), and also is combined with what Vygotsky advocates concerning how the context where identity transforms matter.

Drawing the general sociocultural lens on identity into the research on teacher identity specifically, the idea that social interaction influences one's decision of *becoming* a teacher is important (Dickenson, 2014). Therefore, when researching teacher identity, we must know a person's past, present and future experience, especially what they are going through right now, as it bridges individual's past and future. This lens drew my attention to investigating the identity construction of this specific group of teachers throughout this dissertation.

Again, the sociocultural lens on identity construction is also consistent with the view that one kind of identity, teacher identity in this case, is deeply rooted in social identity. The relationship between one kind of identity (in this case, teacher identity) and social identity can be illustrated by the graph that I modified from Hawkes's (2014) illustration on the relationship between academic identity and social identity.

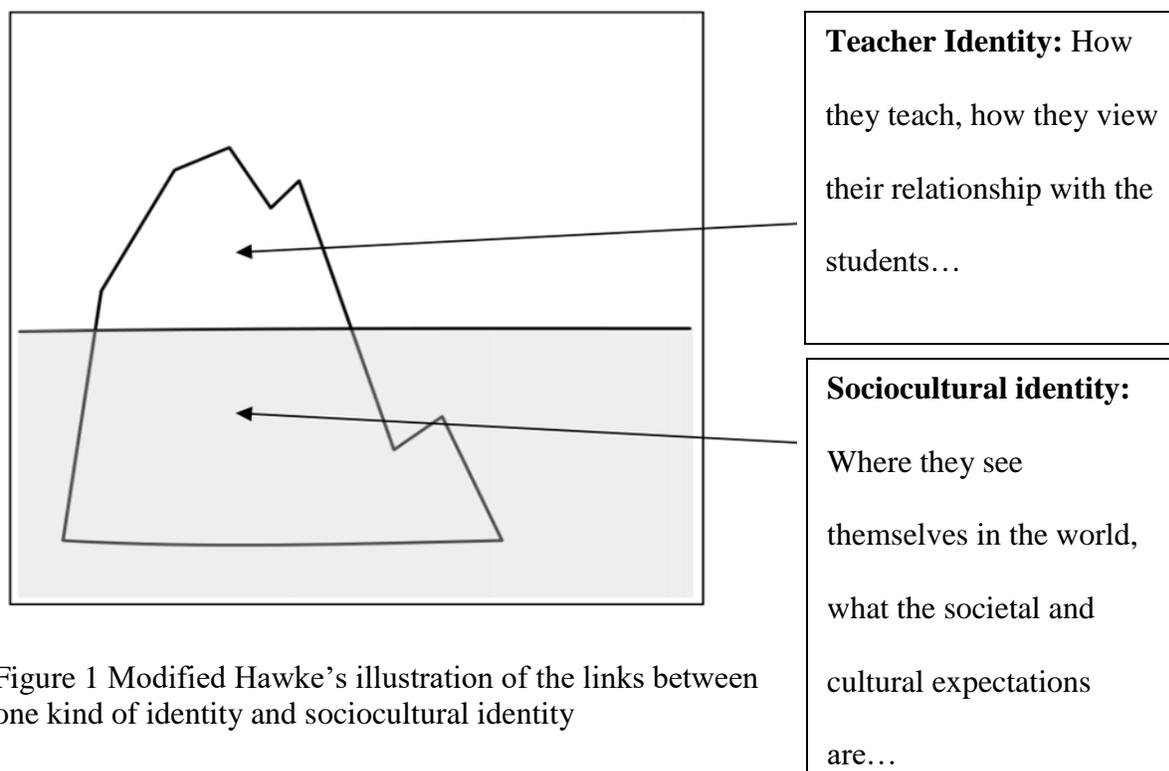


Figure 1 Modified Hawke's illustration of the links between one kind of identity and sociocultural identity

The iceberg theory shows us that teacher identity (the part appears on the surface) is deeply rooted in the sociocultural identity (the gray portion below the sea level), and the sociocultural identity sets the foundation of teacher identity. In other words, any teacher identity that is presented comes from the deep sociocultural factors "unseen" below the surface. This view is further proved by researchers in the areas of language and identity, where researchers discuss that teacher identity comes from the socialization experiences (Dickenson, 2014; Flores & Day, 2006; Lasky, 2005).

The postmodernist perspective helped me to see the different facets of identities, and the sociocultural lens contributed to the analysis of actual actions on the display. The postmodernist perspective and the sociocultural lens have their own contributing functions for the understanding of identity, but also are complementary to each other. Through social interaction and experience, the different facets of identities that postmodernists advocate are able to be revealed. By using postmodernist perspective and seeing through sociocultural lens, it allowed me to not only identify the different facets of identities presented, but also dig deeper into the sociocultural meanings behind. In the following section, I explain in full detail how the postmodernist view and the sociocultural lens helped me to build my own framework, and how this framework guided me to explore the identities of the specific group in my dissertation.

### **Conceptual Framework: Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex**

As a researcher working with the concept of identity, I conceptualize the process of identity making (Erikson, 1968) as fluid and hybrid (Haugh, 2008). The connection among different identities demonstrated the intersecting nature of identities (Jones, 2009). Isolating any single facets of identity overlooks the experience of individuals (Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990), and the studies of more than one devalued identity on people should be promoted (Browne & Misra, 2003).

In order to understand the multiple identities of individuals, we must question what the relationships among different identities are like, how they are related, and how they interact with each other (Garry, 2011). The review on the relationship between different identities demonstrated that social identity, teacher identity, or other forms of identities *intersect* with each other (Jones, 2009).

*Intersectionality* has been used to study multiple identities of minority groups (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Since the participants of this study all came from East Asian countries and are currently studying, living and working in the US, they fit into the group of minorities in this case. Though the idea of *intersectionality* is mostly used in the discussion of *social identity*, GTAs' roles as students and teachers are considered parts of their social identity as students and teachers *in the society*, because the process of learning and teaching cannot be separated from the larger social context (Vygotsky, 1980).

Current *intersectionality* theory on identity acknowledges that isolating any single identity overlooks the experience of individuals (Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990), and promotes the studies of more than one devalued identity on people (Browne & Misra, 2003). The use of *intersectionality* allows me to explore the unique experiences of the group that I investigated, and it allows the readers to see a fuller picture of the identity construction of East Asian GTAs; not just international students, emerging teachers, or minorities.

An intersectional perspective comes from the multiplicity nature of identities (Jones, 2009), and introduces the *complexity* of identities (Reed & Bolton, 2005; Tatum, 2000). Bakhtin (1981) understood human relations as “they are always in the process of negotiating with others” (Hallman & Burdick, 2015, p. 8). Since the dynamics of social contexts are ever-changing (Tatum, 2000), individuals are constantly trying to seek the answer to the old question of: Who am I? However, this simple question demands a complex answer. This complexity of identity construction comes from questioning, resisting (Rodriguez & Cho, 2011), facing up to challenges (Gao, 2014) and stereotypes (Cheng, 2000).

The multiplicity of identities brings complexity (Rosenberg, 1997) and intersectionality (Jones, 2009), which built the conceptual framework for exploring the identity construction of

GTAs. The understanding of identity as multiple acknowledges that teacher identity is not the only one identity that these GTAs possess; other identities also exist. They also possess academic identity as students, social identity as social beings, and many more based on the different roles that they take in their lives (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994).

Through the sociocultural lens, I took a postmodernist view by using the conceptual framework of *Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex* to explore the identity construction of East Asian GTAs in East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC) department in a midwestern teaching and research university in the US. A postmodernist view on identity development allowed me to see the existence of multiple truths, multiple realities, and thus multiple identities (Helsby, 2000).

From a postmodernist perspective, I also acknowledged the nature of identity as flexible and multiple (Cummins, 2011; Weedon, 1989). Lastly, a postmodernist view allowed me to see the identity boundaries dissolve (Díaz-Rico, 2008), as I worked from a conceptual framework that viewed identity dimensions as intersecting; therefore, I wished to see how the different facets of identities (Burke & Tully, 1977) were present in East Asian GTAs' experiences.

Through a sociocultural lens, I inquired about how sociocultural experience influences GTAs' identity formation. As a writer, I helped the participants (re)construct their stories of past (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990); namely, how they came to the US to become a graduate student. I asked them about their present: what the current experiences of being a student, an emerging teacher, a social being in the US are like; and how these experiences shape their views and identities.

I also asked them questions during the interviews to inquire about their future plans: where they are going and what the factors they considered as part of their future career choices.

Especially for this group of East Asian GTAs, since they experience different cultures in their home country and the US, I was interested in seeing how different social and cultural environments shape their identities, how they balance these environments, and how they navigate among different identities.

The navigation among different identities also came from the fact that their identities are situated in different contexts. The East Asian GTAs are experts in the content that they teach. They took an authoritative voice in their language classrooms; at the same time, they were graduate students in School of Education. When they are students in the classes they are taking, they are international students who are considered as the “outsiders,” as discussed in several research studies (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Yakushko, Badiee, Mallory, & Wang, 2011). Palmer (2015) expressed her experience as an isolated international student in the abstract of the article:

“Contemplating my graduate student experience overseas, I constantly viewed myself as an isolate, one who did not belong in the new community of practice. I encountered numerous lingua-cultural, academic and social challenges which led to my lack of community and belonging (p. 541)”.

Lave and Wenger (1991) mentioned that it is important for students to achieve the sense of community to be comfortable in the study environment. The power dynamics of East Asian GTAs change from being classroom teachers to students in class. The power shifts between being a teacher and being a student highlight East Asian GTAs’ identities and the complexity of their identity construction.

The use of *intersectionality* allowed me to explore the unique experiences of the group that I investigated, and it also allowed the readers to see a fuller picture of the identity construction of East Asian GTAs. To be specific, the way I looked at the identity construction of

East Asian GTAs can be illustrated by the Venn diagram in Figure 2. As shown in the diagram, academic identity, social identity, and teacher identity are the major components of East Asian GTAs' identity construction. These multiple constructions of identities are intersecting and they composed the East Asian GTAs' identity altogether (the overlapping section in red). At the same time, this process of negotiating between different identities is not easy. It is a rather complex process.

For a study of international students in nature like the one I conducted, students who came from a different country ask themselves questions about identity every day. As a member of this group myself, I aimed to use a postmodernist view on (re)constructing the storylines about ourselves (Koehne, 2005); thus, readers can understand the multiplicity, intersectionality and complexity of the identity construction of this group.

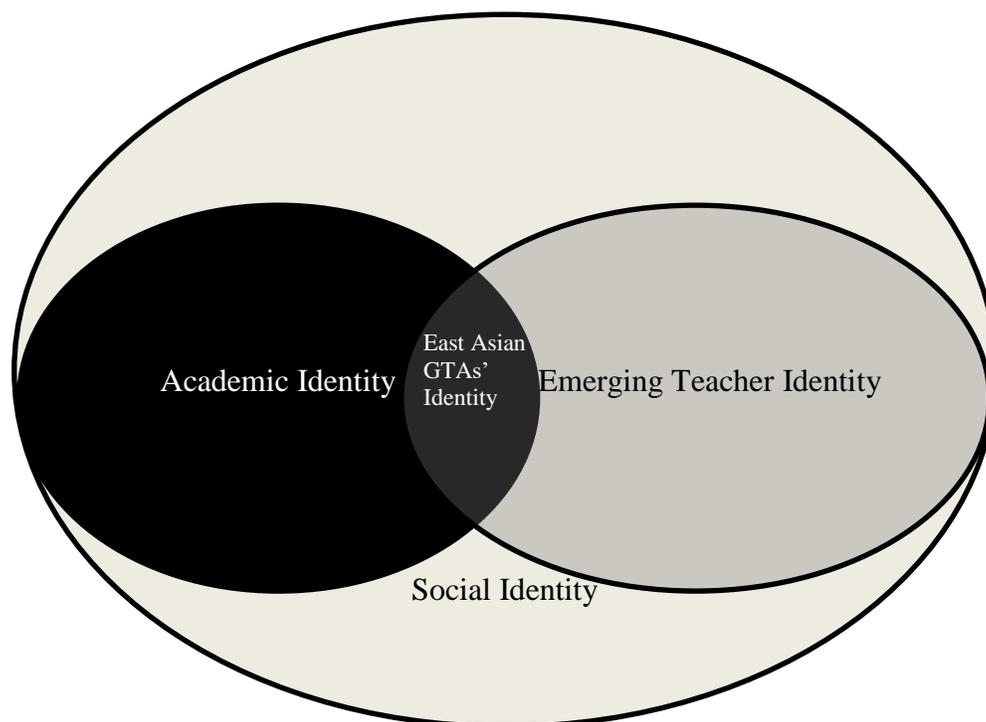


Figure 2 East Asian GTAs' identities

### **Academic Identity of International Students**

The Open Doors Report (2018) showed that the number of international students studying in the United States showed a slight decrease but continues to be high. The enrollment number of international students benefits the universities; however, the value of international students is not often recognized. Most international students travel thousands of miles away from their home country and came to the US to pursue their future study and career. At the same time, they also face language difficulties, cultural barriers and are in the danger of being marginalized. The academic experience that these international students go through constructed their academic identity.

Before going into the specific aspects of academic identity, I wish to clarify some definitions and provide some background information. The definition of international students in this study followed the term Morita (2004) used, as referring to “individuals who study in a language other than their first in an academic setting (p. 574)”. Since the participants in this study are GTAs who all have to pass a language proficiency test before being appointed, students who are only studying in language programs in some cases are not the focus of this study. However, Morita (2004) mentioned about the unique nature of these international students that they are learning a second language and academic content simultaneously, since they are enrolled in regular university courses, but English is not their first language.

International GTAs are often required to demonstrate their English language proficiency by showing a test result from one of the English proficiency tests: TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), or SPEAK (Spoken Proficiency English Assessment Kit). It is required that they demonstrate their English language proficiency by obtaining certain minimum scores for different tests. Table 1 shows the English Proficiency Scores that are required by Candi University to be a GTA.

Table 1 GTAs' English Proficiency Scores required by Candi University

TOEFL (Paper)	TOEFL (iBT)	IELTS	SPEAK test
All part scores at least 53, plus must score at <b>50</b> on SPEAK test	Reading, Listening and Writing part scores at least <b>20</b> , Speaking <b>22</b>	Minimum overall score <b>6.0</b> , with no part score below <b>5.5</b> , Speaking <b>8</b>	50

To get an idea of what a score of 50 on SPEAK test means, here is a description from the test website (Retrieved from CANDI U AEC speak test FAQ, 2019):

The speaker understood the question and answered appropriately. The rater could receive and understand the answer with reasonable listening effort. The rater may have a question about the response (near-native efficacy, generally effective).

And here is a description of a score of 8 in IELTS:

Very good user: The test taker has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriate usage. They may misunderstand some things in unfamiliar situations. They handle complex and detailed argumentation well (Retrieved from: <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/how-ielts-is-scored#sthash.41xxAFek.dpuf>)

Studies have investigated the academic identity of international students from different aspects. The literature review following comes from the questions that I seek answer from the East Asian GTAs: Why they choose to come to the US, i.e. their motivation; their language and coursework experience; their particular challenges coming from East Asian countries.

### **Motivation and international student identity.**

I chose to review the literature on international students' motivation because the decision of moving to a foreign country to study, to work and to live is a "life-changing decision" (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007), and individuals make this decision based on different reasons and motivations. Since the international students I defined are primarily second language English speakers, in this context, the motivation for learning plays an important role in their language learning and teaching experience, yet language learners are still largely understood in terms of North American and European cultural values (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005).

To understand students' learning motivation is helpful to understand specific motivations of students in their local environments (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). Lambert proposed two types of motivation in second language acquisition (SLA): Instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to learners who learn the language for specific purposes: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), or future career choices. Integrative motivation refers to the learners' desire to be affiliated with the members in the second language group (Díaz-Rico, 2008). Díaz-Rico (2008) further concluded that "most students experience a mixture of both types of motivation" (p. 54).

International students come to the US for different reasons. Many of them are attracted to Western culture and want to learn the language in a target language setting (Chen & Zimitat, 2006); they consider the level of Western academia as high-quality (Yang, Webster, & Prosser, 2011); and they think that having a graduate degree from the US will help them find a better job either in their home country or the country where they study if they decide to stay (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Gao, 2014).

Ramburuth & McCormick (2001) investigated the motivation of international students from Asian backgrounds, and found that they have a significantly higher use of motivation than the domestic students. The problem of their study is that the participants clearly have different motivations, which the researchers did not clearly define. Chirkov et al. (2007) mentioned people who are willing to emigrate (referring to international students in this case) normally possess a higher level of achievement motivation in comparison to those who decide to stay (the local students), therefore, comparatively, international students possess a high level of need to succeed.

A later study that Chirkov et al. (2008) conducted further articulated that international students “who initiated the decision to study abroad and stood behind it will be happier, less distressed and more successful in adjusting to a new country in comparison to those who feel they were pressured by other people or circumstances to move abroad” (p. 428). Since they used quantitative methods to inquire about students’ goals for study abroad scale, I, contrastingly, in my study, strived to hear more about the stories of decision-making process of studying abroad.

From the review of the literature on motivation, it can be seen that motivation is a state, which can be altering and evolving; just like identity. Norton (Norton, 1997, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2011) distinguished *motivation* from *investment*, and claimed that motivation is a psychological construct while investment is a sociological one. She further asserted that the term “investment” tailors to the needs of unequal power relations in second language studies, and “sees language learners as having complex identities” (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420). From this assertion, it seems that a study on identity like the one I conducted should have used the term “investment” instead of motivation. However, in this dissertation study, I chose to use the term “motivation” instead of “investment”, which came from the questions that I asked participants: Why did you choose to come to the US? Why did you choose to become a student/language

teacher in the US? In this case, motivation is a more suitable term based on the questions that I was interested in. However, when it comes to the discussion of academic identity and social identity, the term “investment” comes into play. Therefore, the following review on language and coursework learning experience still follows Norton’s (Norton, 1997, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2011) construct of investment.

### **Language and coursework learning experience**

Language and coursework learning experience constitute a major part of international students’ life of studying abroad. Norton (1997) mentioned that learning a second language is not only about learning the grammar and using the language with their interlocutors, but “also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (p. 410). Norton’s standpoint not only bridge the relationship between language and identity, but also further proved that academic identity and social identity are interrelated.

The relationship between language and identity is a frequent topic of debate among scholars in this area (Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Norton, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko, 2003). I follow the critical sociolinguistic view of “language learning as a social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 2005), which further demonstrates the discussion of academic identity and social identity are interrelated. Academic identity is deeply rooted in social identity, and social identity sets the foundation of academic identity. In other words, any academic identity that is presented comes from the deeper sociocultural factors “unseen” (refer back to Figure 1).

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) model of “community of practice” is often used in the field of Second Language (L2) learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) viewed “learning as a socially situated process by which newcomers, including L2 students, gradually move toward fuller participation

(Morita, 2004, p. 576)” in the target language environment by interacting with the members from that community. However, this interaction should not only come from the classroom participation, but also from the social interactions. In this dissertation, I inquired about the East Asian GTAs’ social interactions with their local host not only in academic settings, but also in social settings, and saw how they moved forward in their social life (as shown in the data analysis).

### **Challenges of students from East Asian countries.**

Since the current study focused on students from East Asian countries, it is necessary to review the challenges that students faced. More than one third of the international students studying in the US are from East Asian countries, China (31.2%), South Korea (6.5%), Japan (2%), Taiwan (2.2%), totaling (41.9%). It is extremely lucrative to recruit international students from the US institutions’ perspective; however, international students are also face many challenges while studying in the US, which could be overlooked.

As shown from the research, students from East Asian countries always face the stereotyping of being silent or reticent (Kim, 2006). Studies claimed that some students from China are reluctant in presenting themselves in classrooms, because of the respect for teachers is deeply rooted in the Confucius culture (Miller, 1995). At the same time, studies have also showed that East Asian students are eager to participate in classroom discussions (Cheng, 2000; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011), interact with other students and improve their language skills (Campbell & Li, 2007).

Cultural values also play its role in the difficulty of adjustment for students from East Asian countries. Studies have also shown that students from a collective culture may experience discomfort in Western classrooms (Chen et al., 2005; Chen & Hird, 2006). It is often reported

from the English as a Second Language/English as a Foreign Language literature (Cheng, 2000) that Asian students are reticent and passive learners, and people often attribute students' reticence and passiveness to the culture of these Asian countries. Cheng (2000) argued that it is an over-generalization to say that all the Asian students are reticent and passive learners. The results from the study showed that many Asian students actually do have a strong desire to participate in classroom activities.

Undoubtedly, international students have a lot of adjustments to make regarding the completion of various academic tasks in the US settings. HYOonah (2010) conducted a study focused on the ESL learners' understanding of the effect of Western and Eastern epistemological systems on these students' intercultural learning experiences. They found that participants were highly aware of their positionality as ESLs upon first arrival but "the awareness of positionality as English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) gradually decreased" (p. 340) because of the accumulating university coursework "in light of increasing academic English literacy and competencies" (p.340).

Students of non-native-English-speaking background, especially those from East Asian cultures, have difficulty participating actively in academic group discussions at English-speaking institutions of higher education (Jones, 1999). Many US classrooms promote the use of group work collaboration (Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Johnston & Miles, 2004). Jones (1999) explored culturally based perceptions of silence and reticence, and the nature of group discussion. Students' previous learning styles may vary on an individual basis, and they might need to adjust differently based on the challenges from the academic tasks that they are involved in. Yang (2010) asserts that these challenges for international students in group work is their underdeveloped language conversational ability, as group work requires students' different

collaborative skills with each other. Group work also requires negotiations among the students, challenges in collaboration, and assigning different roles within the group (Gao, 2014), which may be unfamiliar for students coming from a different cultural background.

Kim (2006) asserted that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers might better prepare East Asian students through listening and speaking activities. Students reported that they were most concerned about leading classroom discussions and participating in whole-class discussions. There are also comments about East Asian students' reluctance to adopt active speech roles in classrooms (Liu, 1997). Liu (1997) conducted two large-scale surveys at the University of Hong Kong. The study showed that students gave no evidence of such reluctance. They expressed a liking for communicative work at school and a preference for university classes in which students do most of the talking.

Yang (2011) focused on Chinese students' goals, experiences, and learning outcomes associated with their participation in study abroad. Data were drawn from survey responses from 214 undergraduates of a university in Hong Kong who studied or engaged in overseas internships/volunteer work in twenty countries. To explore the data, an experiential intercultural learning model was proposed. The author used quantitative method in investigating their study abroad as an active learning process.

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) as both learners in universities and emerging teachers, bring certain norms and expectations resulting from their sociocultural backgrounds and previous educational experiences (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005). There are increasing numbers of international students in universities in Western settings now. These students bring a range of benefits to the host country and in return the students gain their education.

However, the choice to study overseas in Western countries may present many challenges for the international students like acculturative stress, and difficulties with adjustment to the environment of the host country. Smith (2011) determines the extent to which these models characterize the acculturation experience of international students. Literature pertaining to salient variables from acculturation models were explored including acculturative stressors encountered frequently by international students (e.g., language barriers, educational difficulties, loneliness, discrimination, and practical problems associated with changing environments).

### **Social Identity of International Students**

Social identity is defined as the individuals' affiliation with their groups (Tajfel, 2010). For international students, their social identity formation comes from their interaction with other groups of international students, and the dominant group of the host culture (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). And they are constantly "reconstructing" (Pavlenko, 2003) themselves in accordance with the US culture. Changes occur in their social status upon arriving to a foreign country (Arthur, 2003). Tajfel (2010) talked about social identity in his book *social identity and intergroup relations* as,

...the effects of the perceived illegitimacy of the existing social arrangements upon people's attitudes towards their own social group and others, the conditions in which members of certain groups become 'depersonalized' by other people, and some aspects of the psychology of historical, ethnic, professional and industrial conflicts or tension (p. 13).

To dig deeper about social identity, the term "agency" always appears in the discussion of identity. Same as identity, agency is an abstract, polysemic idea (Ortner, 2001) which can be defined differently from different perspectives. Ahearn (2001) defines agency as "the

socioculturally mediated capacity to act (p. 112)”. The key to understand *agency* is to understand how the *agent* engages “in the exercise of power in the sense of the ability to bring about effects and to (re)constitute the world” (Karp, 1986, p. 137; cited in Ahearn, 2001, p.113).

Agency has always been a complicated term in SLA research about students from different language and culture backgrounds, as they are learning the “new ways to speak and act for particular sociocultural contexts” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 126). From the viewpoint of “language learning as a social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 2005), this socialization process involves how others respond in social practice, which is backed up by Lave and Wenger’s “Community of Practice”(1991) as mentioned in the previous section on academic identity.

Studies have discussed the mixed feelings from the social group towards international students. Haugh (2008) used the term “cash cows” referring to international students as they are the ones bring universities’ benefits only on the surface of marketing and reducing the financial burdens of universities. He also pointed out that international students are always referred to as “the other (See also: Dervin, 2011)”, as opposed to the local students. What international students have said or done has always been interpreted as a representation of “their culture”, as Baumann (1996) puts, “all agency seemed to be absent” (Baumann, 1996, p. 1). As Dervin (2015) mentioned, this often seems to be the case especially for Chinese students who are studying aboard.

In terms of understanding the international students who participated in my study, I followed Dervin (2011) that the understanding of international students should not be reduced to different cultures; rather we need to “take into account the complexity of individuals who interact with each other” (p.38). Norton (1995) discussed how relations of power affect interactions between language learners and speakers in the target language environment, and

surveyed the opportunities of participants in speaking English. I agree with her conceptualization on the perspectives about social identity from the poststructuralist view that social identity is “multiple, a sight of struggle, and subject to change” (p. 9). When we think about international students as language learners, we need to ruminate about “the social worlds in which they lived” (p.14).

Weedon (1989) explored the power relations between individuals, groups, and communities, which are prevailing in affecting the life chances of individuals to succeed, to grow or even to live at a given time and place (see also Peirce, 1995). Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) pointed out that the social identity construction has always been influenced by the dichotomy between native and nonnative English speakers, and a nonnative speaker is always lingering in the status of a learner. The idea of a learner assumes that the person is socially positioned as marginal (Díaz-Rico, 2008); however, different scholars have also challenged the term “learner”, and argue that they should be called second language *users* instead of learners (Cook, 1999).

In this dissertation, I follow Norton (1995)’s perception of social identity and am interested in how individual experience and social power are represented in the participants’ social identity, i.e. how and how much they interact with American students. Projecting my personal experience as an international student, I thought I could let my “unconscious thoughts and emotions” (Weedon, 1989, p. 32) go, but realized that if I do not construct our stories, the chances that we missed in our academic, social and professional lives will continue, power imbalances in institutions will remain unchanged, and the experience of East Asian GTAs will continue to be affected. Lastly, I took this journey of storying and re-storying to find more possible answers to the question that I posed at the beginning of this chapter “who am I?”; thus,

to help individuals with similar experiences find their sense of selves and their ways of understanding their relations to the world (Weedon, 1989).

Many international students report that they feel “lost” upon their first arrival in the US. Zacharias (2010) described her identity as an Indonesian English teacher “become fragmented and disintegrated” (p. 5) right after her arrival in the US. Similar to Urban (2012), who found that their interaction with the local community was “disturbing”. The problem of English language proficiency not only takes a large amount of effort to overcome in their academic study, but also makes a great difference in their social lives as well. Many students’ original confidence in their native language in their home country completely disintegrates while living in a foreign country. And they found themselves incompetent in expressing themselves in a country where English is spoken predominantly.

Many students also expressed mixed feelings towards their arrival in the US. On one hand, they are joyful, hopeful and have a lot of expectations about their new life in a new country; on the other hand, they also have a lot of worries (Zacharias, 2010) about their study, and their life. Students also experienced different forms of discrimination and injustice based on different reasons: their English speaking ability, their familiarity with the local culture (LoCastro & Tapper, 2006), or even their appearance as a “foreigner” in the target language country.

Many international students expressed their homesickness, loneliness and isolation (Krishna & Charlotte, 2016; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015) while studying in a foreign country, especially because they found no one with whom to express their feelings, not having familiar friends and social networks (Gautam, Lowery, Mays, & Durant, 2016), or found it difficult to express their feelings using the target language (Zacharias, 2010). They struggled between their original identity from their home country, and the ways that people think and do in the target

language culture (Wu et al., 2015). They are always comparing their ways of thinking with how people in the target language country thinks. When it comes to the discussion of the SLA process of international students, Díaz-Rico (2008) mentions,

Unlike other areas of learning, however, prior knowledge of one's own language and culture assists this learning only to a degree, and may actually be counterproductive: What is right at home may be exactly wrong abroad (p. 34).

When it comes to the understanding of culture, I also followed Dervin's (2011) view on culture as a process instead of fixed categories. It is a process we cannot merely swap cultures ("as one changes clothes or oscillating between 'cultures'" (Dervin, 2011, p. 39)). It is also problematic to assume that culture will definitely "'influence', 'affect', or 'change' people's functioning as if they are some kind of physical force" (Dervin, 2011, p. 39). It is even more wrong to make certain predications of people from certain cultures.

Seeing culture as a process allowed me to pay more attention to the long-term dynamics during people's cultural exchange (Lyman, 2007). Evidently during this process, there are conflicts and miscommunications. The postmodernist view that I took in this dissertation also acknowledges that cultural resistance plays an important part in SLA development (Díaz-Rico, 2008). International students' reaction to their target language culture can vary from person to person. Some adapted to the new culture, and chose to think and act as the local people; others might still stick to their home country culture or want to continue carrying the values of their family (Gautam et al., 2016), and struggled in their experience. Learners also struggled with their loyalty to the native language and culture versus the target language culture, and are in fear of "cultural detriment and/or change or loss of identity" (Díaz-Rico, 2008, p. 64). The relationship between *culture* and *identity* can be summarized as follows:

This reified vision of culture is seen as a way of either allowing the Other to be fully 'engulfed 'into the 'host culture', i.e. becoming the Other (Dervin, 2008; Dervin & Dirba, 2008) or helping him to preserve the 'home culture' and being actively involved with the 'host culture' (Bhatia & Ram, 2009, p. 39).

However, this process of cultural exchange is not a simple dichotomy between host culture and home culture. Even for those who choose to adapt themselves with the new culture as much as possible, their struggle continues as they are constantly checking whether they are keeping up with the new culture and whether their acts or behavior coeval with the people in the target language culture. Some of their acts are described as trying to eradicate their home culture from their roots and backgrounds, acting as the past experience had never occurred, so that they can be the "same" with the people in the new culture. Their motivation in learning a second language primarily comes from the integrative motivation that Lambert (1972) proposed, which stemmed from their desire to be affiliated with the members in the target language group.

Clearly, using a language that one did not grow up with can always make a difference in the sense of "belonging" (Haley, 2013). One's sense of belonging is deeply linked to their social life. In international students' social life, many of them are capable of using the academic language, but are unable to conduct private conversations, or "small talks" with their interlocutors. Part of the reason comes from their unfamiliarity with the target language culture, and the vast difference between their native language and the target language.

However, same as the dichotomy between native vs. non-native English speakers, the adoption between target culture and home culture could not be understood as clear-cut. "Third Culture" (Kramsch, 2009) provides a space between these dualities in a dialogic manner.

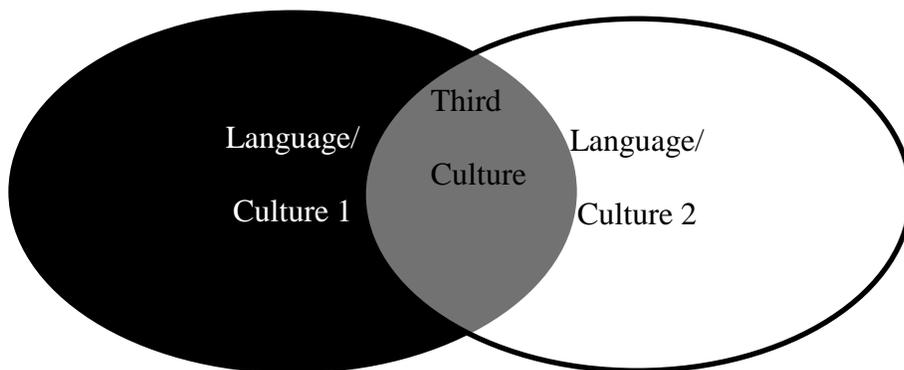


Figure 3 Third Culture

This third culture as illustrated in Figure 3 is where the dialogic process happens.

Kramsch (1995) suggested that we should focus more on the shifting and emerging third space of language learners. Canagarajah (2012) referred to this space as “liminality”, where meanings are negotiated, connections are built between the two parties, whether the two parties are language or culture. This third space allows the learners to “adopt a more flexible orientation toward identity” (Díaz-Rico, 2008, p. 64). It embraces the idea of multiple identities, rather than subtracting identities from the original entity. Students embrace the third space and multiple identities and this, in return, increase their motivation.

Before I conclude this section on social identity, I want to further demonstrate that the interrelatedness of academic identity and social identity. Based on the descriptions about international students’ social identity, it may mislead the readers to think that I understand identity as a “choice”; on the contrary, I hold the point of view that *identity is not a choice*, and international students’ acts of diminishing certain parts of their original identity come from the larger social environment, even for the act of schooling practices. Students who received pressure from professors and school practices where diversity is not welcomed result in their loss of identity (Díaz-Rico, 2008). Cummins (1996) referred to this as “identity eradication.” Thus,

building a supportive social environment is the key for international students' academic success. Teachers' roles are crucial in the process of building a supportive social environment and providing more welcoming classroom experience for international students. This leads to the next section of literature review on teacher identity.

### **Teacher Identity**

The quality of teaching and teachers' life has been the focus of teacher education research and had the attention of policy makers as well (Wubbels & Levy, 1993). Teacher identity has become as an emerging research topic on teacher education (Varghese et al., 2005), as research on teacher's personal development have been noticed by different researchers. Research on teacher identity have an impact on preparing new language teachers (Goh, 2014). As Varghese et al. (2005) pointed out, while researching teacher identity, researchers have been using different theories that are related to social identity and academic identity, including the ones I mentioned in the previous sections: Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory, and Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (COP).

The use of COP on teacher identity is to help conceptualize how GTAs who are working in the same program/department participate in shared practices and how they make a difference in helping each other locate their roles as teachers. How teacher identity is positioned further demonstrated the inseparable nature among teacher identity, social identity and academic identity. And how I perceive language teacher identity can be illustrated by the graphic below.

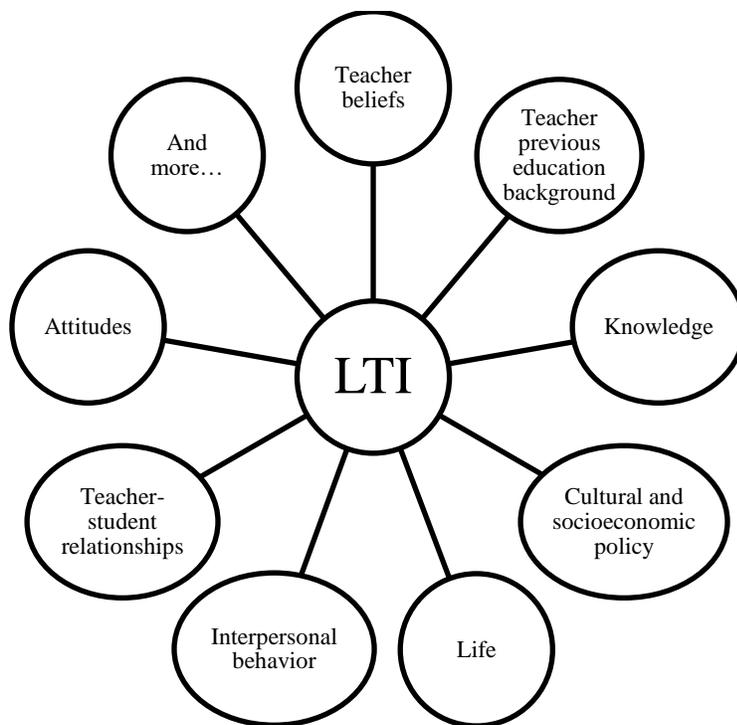


Figure 4 Language Teacher Identity

In this study, teacher identity was understood in the way that it was constituted by teachers' educational beliefs, their culture background, their previous education background, the socioeconomic and geographical perspectives, and how they look at teacher-student relationships. It was seen that these attributes are "related to each other and could not be seen atomistically; it was the teacher's whole identity that is at play in the classroom" (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). An how teachers construct their "selves" were "situated within the social, cultural, and political contexts they are in" (Goh, 2014, p. xii).

This view on teacher identity was also to acknowledge that both teacher's personal and professional lives, experiences, beliefs, and practices are integral to one another, and all have an impact on teacher identity as a whole (Day, Kingon, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). Though all these different aspects are displayed in Figure 4 separately, but are interrelated, in essence. The

purpose of displaying Figure 4 is to decompose LTI, and to show the different aspects that are at play.

Day et al. (2006) investigated 300 teachers in 100 schools in the US and found that teacher identity is not intrinsically stable or fragmented, rather, it might be more or less, stable or fragmented at different times and in different ways based on the different factors in their lives, career and situations. Sang et al. (2009) investigated teachers' educational beliefs in Chinese primary schools from the socioeconomic and geographical perspectives. The authors argued that teachers' beliefs, which they define as "principles of practice" (p.364), affected their teaching practice in the classrooms and how they manage the activities in their classrooms. Comparing to previous studies in the Chinese settings, studies found teachers' educational beliefs differ depending on their teaching experience (Xie & Ma, 2007), while novice teachers are more likely to hold progressive educational beliefs. However, not much information has been given on how the results of a cross-cultural study would be like.

How teachers learned, what learning styles they preferred and what learning approaches they adopted in their previous education are essential questions to teacher identity (Dunn & Dunn, 1979). Learning preferences vary by culture, as argued by You and Jia (2008). You and Jia's (2008) study results showed significant differences between Chinese and American groups in both deep and surface approaches, by which surface approaches mean to know the differences while deep approaches signify not only to understand the differences, but also be able to make connections. There were significant discriminators in the learning approach model and the Chinese teacher education students from the study reported significantly higher in the deep approach than the American students, which means that Chinese students were more likely to be

motivated to learn. The authors claim that underlying cultural backgrounds and social-economic factors are responsible for these differences.

Cultural backgrounds, social-economic factors, the governmental policies and education of the designated countries are related to teachers' pedagogical practices. Teachers being aware of these different policies related to language education and the potential long-term benefits that these policies may have on their students are related to their classroom teaching. Silver & Steele (2005) focused on the immediate results of language classrooms. This belief influences how they give their daily lessons and what emphasis they put on student learning, which leads the findings to a "multidirectional interpretation of language policy" (Silver & Steele, 2005, p. 107). They defined the policy as not only paying attention to the structural priorities, but also paying attention to the social and personal dimensions, teachers' goals and beliefs. They reported by saying that Chinese teachers have a striking similarity across teachers and their lessons, whereas Japanese teachers' roles were more prone to provide extensive explanations. They argued that in Singapore, teachers' teaching is skill-based, while in Switzerland, teachers' choice in selecting textbooks and activities are more apparent. In the US, lessons have an emphasis on the integration of skills, and discussions and group works were common features across all grade levels. Many studies investigated about the implementation of language through education. The findings of this source contributed to the literature in the field of language-in-education policy from the perspective of classroom teachers.

Teachers' culture is also often seen as a key factor in shaping their ideas and decisions about roles, attitudes and approaches of language teaching in classrooms (Palfreyman, 2005). Cultural resistance of pedagogical reforms happening in China are identified by Hu (2002). Hu labeled the potential constrains of adopting communicative language teaching in Chinese

classrooms as “the Chinese culture of learning” (Hu, 2002, p. 93), which he defined as the “whole set of expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, preferences, experiences, and behaviors that are characteristic of Chinese society with regard to teaching and learning (Hu, 2002, p.96)”.

The study of teacher-student relationship is important for the preservice teachers and in-service teachers to be informed of, and it is one of the parameters that may influence teachers’ perception and identity. Zhu (2013) claimed that teacher-student interaction plays an important role in students’ development and is “an important parameter of educational quality (p.399)”. Teacher’s interpersonal behavior is linked to teachers’ and students’ preferences, individual characteristics and styles. Kim and Pei (2008) paid more attention to the relationship between the teacher and the students. They found that how learners master various English skills should make a difference in the way teachers assess their language skills. This source contributed to develop a better understanding of the topic being researched on teacher identity: when looking at teacher identity, perceptions of students should also be examined to validate the data.

The above literature review showed some historical and major contributions of the current research to the research on teacher identity. However, a critique can be raised here: emerging teacher identity has not been researched and seen enough from the viewpoint of students. A full picture of teacher identity must be revealed and presenting a holistic picture of teacher’s perception is an urgent call for resolving the remaining gap in teacher identity research.

Hallman and Burdick (2015) understand teacher identity from Bakhtin’s perspective, that teachers are always “appropriating the vision of others” (Hallman & Burdick, 2015, p. 8), and emphasized on the teacher-student relationship. In the learning environment, teacher-student interaction plays a major role in influencing the cognitive affective development of students.

Providing meaningful interaction in language classrooms (Richard-Amato, 1988) is helpful in coping with foreign language classroom anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) and is important in language learning (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000). It is believed that interpersonal actions have an effect in maintaining a positive classroom atmosphere (Wubbels & Levy, 1993). Teachers' interpersonal behavior is linked to the quality of the educational processes and educational quality.

Verity (2000) described her struggle of losing her confidence and expertise after moving to a foreigner country to work as a teacher. In the new setting, emerging teachers strive to regain their expertise. The power shifting on East Asian GTAs is even more severe. As mentioned in the conceptual framework, they consider themselves as experts in their own language classrooms that they teach; however, their feeling of being novice fell back to them when they are back to their roles as international students in the classes that they take. These conflicting perceptions always lead emerging teachers to feel "fragmented and aimless" (Verity, 2000, p. 183).

This further exemplifies that teacher identity is evolving, emerging and fluid (Zacharias, 2010). As mentioned in the rationale in Introduction, I came to the US for a master's degree in TESOL, with the original thought of going back to China to teach English. I have never thought about becoming a Chinese teacher in the US, but changes occur based on the environment that I was situated in, and the opportunities that arose. As for international students in the US as a group, we observe the new environment, and strive for chances that can boost our professionalism. And ironically, there are not many choices layed out for us as international students.

From observation and communicating with other international students, I came to know that international students are not favored if the department is seeking of someone to teach K-12

education because administrators will assume that since they were not born here then they are not familiar with K-12 education. Before I undertook the position of teaching Chinese, I worked as a tutor, a front desk receptionist, and tried on almost every opportunities possible on campus. Then I saw other international students from East Asian countries taking the position of or are interested in teaching their native language. I took the opportunity to challenge myself as usual, and luckily I got the position. Then I stayed at the position until now and foresaw that my future career would be related to language teaching.

However, undoubtedly my identities have been shifting and transferring during all this time. My identities as an international student., a non-native English speaker, and a new graduate student were the original identities when I first arrived here. Some of these major identities are still with me, either with slight changes, or shifted drastically; other new identities also emerged and added throughout the years of being here. As Omoniyi (2011) mentioned, an individual's identity is determined by the configuration of social context, the appropriate identity in a given context will rise to the top of the hierarchy of all possible identities (p. 260). As later, my identity as a GTA and new language teacher emerged as dominant identities as well, which may not be exactly what I had envisaged before I come to the US Herath and Valencia (2015) used the term "teacher-educators-in-the-making" to refer to doctoral students who are in the myriad of overlapping identities such as being a student, a teacher, a researcher, and other personal and professional identities. The key is to observe how these emerging teachers negotiate their multiple identities towards being an expert as language teachers.

Language teachers are often referred as "language emissaries and mediators; as agents of introduction to the target culture; and as sources of professional knowledge for their colleagues" (Díaz-Rico, 2008, p. 22). As far as international students' experience of becoming foreign

language teachers, a number of studies have examined the lived experiences of GTAs in US classrooms who come from an international backgrounds. The results of these studies show that these international GTAs face many challenges, including language inadequacy (Li, Mazer, & Ju, 2011), poor classroom management skills (Fitch & Morgan, 2003), cultural and social challenges (Cai, 2000). Among these challenges, linguistic issues of language inadequacy has been studied exclusively (Zhou, 2009). However, it is becoming more common for teachers of Chinese, Arabic, and other critical languages, who come to the US to teach their first language (Uzum, 2013). In this case, since the GTAs are teaching their native language, is language inadequacy still a challenge to them? What other challenges do they face? How do their previous language learning experiences impact their beliefs and their teaching? I aimed to seek the answers for these questions by reflecting upon my own experience as an East Asian GTA in the US and “retelling” the stories from the participants, who are my long-time colleagues sharing similar but different experiences.

I am informed by Bakhtin’s (1981) perspective in understanding the emerging teacher identity of East Asian GTAs, that new teachers construct their identity through “voices from multiple discourses and social worlds” (Hull & Katz, 2006, p. 46). A postmodernist perspective helped me to identify the different facets of identities that these new teachers possess, and the sociocultural lens helped me to situate their identities into the larger context that they are in.

Drawing from the literature that I reviewed on *identity and identities*, I see identity as socially constructed (Gee, 2000b). Gee’s (2000) discourse identity informed me using interviews as the main tool of data collection to see how these new teachers develop their identity through discourse and dialogue. Before I end this chapter, it is necessary to point out that I understand very well there are more facets of identities in reality than the three major ones I mentioned. In

fact, other identities like racial identity and ethnic identities were revealed from the interview data and have been exposed to the theme due to the interrelated nature of identities; however, I highlight the three major identities in GTAs' lives. Studies have investigated international students about their racial identity (Althen, 2009), ethnic identity (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010), as discrimination and racism may compose part of their lives during cross-cultural transition (Arthur, 2003). This dissertation focused on the major facets of identities that all East Asian GTAs possess. Other identities were mentioned, but further investigation would need to be conducted in future research to incorporate the study of these identities.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

“We must question ourselves, too,  
regarding how those binaries and paradoxes  
shape not only the identities called forth in the field  
and later in the discovery processes of writing,  
but also our interactions with respondents,  
in who we become to them in the process of *becoming* to ourselves”  
(Guba & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 183-184, originally emphasized)

The design of methodology was based on how I conceptualize identity (Dervin & Risager, 2014). I understand that the literature and methodology on identities are plentiful; however, certain research methods are “better suited than others (Dervin & Risager, 2014, p. 3)”. The research setting, participants, my positionality as a researcher are introduced in detail in the following sections. The genre, data collection and analysis, and how I obtained validity are also discussed in the second section of this chapter.

In the last section of this chapter, I introduced my coding mechanism and the process of my coding, as it is essential for the readers to see the process of how I interpret the data. I also included methodological reflections at the end of this chapter as it is mandatory to lay out what methods I used. However, it is even more important to see how I used these methods, the implementation of these methods, and how the participants and I interacted with the methods.

#### **Research Setting and Participants**

**About the site.** The research site was situated at a midwestern university in the US. At the university, a total of thirteen schools offer more than 400-degree programs in 200 fields (Overview, 2019). The newly founded School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures (SLLC) is the home of five core language departments: Germanic, Slavic, East Asian, French & Italian, and Spanish & Portuguese (SLLC website). These five departments offer over 40 languages in 60 different degrees and concentrations, with 140 study abroad programs. Among the five

departments, East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC) department was where this study was conducted. EALC offers five language programs: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tibetan, and Uyghur. Language courses are also supported by relevant literatures and cultures courses.

**Background.** Before going into detail about the participants, it is important to present some background information about what the courses are like, who the students are, and how GTAs usually teach.

The current study focused on Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in the East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC) department at the university. East Asian GTAs are mostly assigned to teach drill sessions of language courses at different levels (for example, CHIN 104 Elementary Chinese I, JPN 108 Elementary Japanese II, KOR 204 Intermediate Korean I, etc.). In the drill sessions, GTAs as mostly native or near native speakers of the target language, interacting and practicing the target language with the students. Since the drill sessions are designed smaller on the head count comparing to the lectures, GTAs are supposed to try to ask every student in class to speak, and give students more space and time to develop their language proficiency. Meaningful activities, role-plays, and scenarios are given by GTAs for students' engagement.

*About the course.* As mentioned, GTAs are assigned to teach language drill classes at different levels. Most courses are 5 credit-hour courses, which has 3 lectures on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (depending on the program), each 50 minutes in length. The drill sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays, each 1 hour 15 minutes. The lectures introduce new vocabularies and grammatical patterns. In GTA's drill sessions, students review the new vocabularies and grammar patterns with the drill instructors and take a quiz on the vocabularies or recitations. Every week/other week, students take a unit exam on Fridays (varies based on the

level of instruction and program). For the reader's information, most of the classes are conducted in the target language, in this case, Chinese, Japanese or Korean.

*About the students.* Students come from both undergraduate and graduate levels based on the language requirements of their degree. However, most of the students are undergraduate students who take East Asian languages since their freshman year. Some of them chose the target language as a major or minor, others took the classes by interest. Most of the students who continue with their second-year language learning choose to take the language as a minor if they are not majored in EALC. Students develop the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) on different levels during their course of study.

To give the readers a full idea about these language courses, I choose to display some of the information from one of the courses that I am actively involved in. Followed is a description of CHIN 208: Intermediate Chinese II, the homework guidelines for second-year Chinese, and the objectives. This is just to give the readers an idea about these language classes. CHIN 208: Intermediate Chinese II is designed for students who have successfully completed CHIN 204 Intermediate Chinese I or the equivalent as determined by Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures' placement test at the university (description taken from the department website). The homework in each unit of second-year Chinese class usually includes an oral evaluation of reciting the main text (students prepare after class), and a composition based on the content of the unit.

At the Intermediate Chinese level, students should be able to hold a conversation with a medium fluency, understand short dialogues and compose short narratives. Students who have completed CHIN 204 (the preceding course) have finished their first semester of second year Chinese language study, have acquired some basic usage of the written language and

grammatical patterns, and are developing more advanced conversational fluency. After students finish CHIN 204, they still do not possess the ability to engage in fluent discourse. CHIN 208 will continue to help students develop their fluency and introduce them with a greater variety of styles and levels of discourse. The courses that participants in this study teach vary from year-one classes to year-three.

**Participants.** The participants are East Asian graduate students at a large midwestern public research university in the US. Based on their willingness to participate in the study and the selection of the academic programs that they attend, three of them who are all studying in the School of Education (SOE) participated in three rounds of interviews (explained in detail in the data collection section). The selection of students who are in SOE was for the purpose of viewing the power imbalance. Since these students were not able to locate a GTA position inside SOE, and they chose to teach their native language based on different reasons, but mostly to secure their funding.

To be more specific about this power imbalance, most graduate students prefer to have a GTA position in their home department, i.e. students from SOE holding a GTA position inside SOE. However, based on the literature, because of institutional forms of discrimination (Arthur, 2003) towards international TAs, international students' unfamiliarity with US pedagogical norms, these East Asian GTAs were unable to locate a GTA position within the SOE. Though this is likely a large factor but other factors, such as available funding, could also influence these decisions. How this power imbalance showed in the participants will be explored in the Findings section.

The participants in this study were all native speakers of the target language that they teach. For each participant I provided a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. Table 2 provided the demographic information of these participants.

Table 2 Demographic Information of Participants

	<b>Participants</b>		
<b>Name</b>	Yonah	Pei	Sadako
<b>Age</b>	42	38	40
<b>Gender</b>	F	F	F
<b>Native Country</b>	Korea	China	Japan
<b>Native Language</b>	Korean	Chinese	Japanese
<b>Program of Degree</b>	Doctoral	Doctoral	Master's
<b>Area of study/Field</b>	Education/TESOL	TESOL/FL	Education/TESOL
<b>Languages spoken</b>	3	2	2
<b>Years of English Study</b>	25	22	23
<b>Years in the US</b>	10	11	7
<b>Marriage Status</b>	Married	Married	Married

I believe the characteristics, experiences, positions and contexts of East Asian GTAs are varied so that this dissertation will only reflect the specific situation of this group of people (Dervin, 2015). However, as an *insider*, I want to present the representation of East Asian GTAs'

identity construction in this specific setting under this specific program, so that readers can know what the major constituents of identities are like in this group.

### **Genre**

Case study (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) was used based on the choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2000). I used case study because I am only looking at GTAs' identities of this particular group in this specific East Asian Languages and Cultures Department. Creswell (2002) referred case study as studying an activity among more than one individual, and this study explored the identity construction of three East Asian GTAs. For reasons above, the choice of using case study fitted with this dissertation.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

It is vital to introduce the researcher's positionality before getting into the details on data collection. For a qualitative research on exploring the topic of identity and examining the "selves", I realized that it is important for me to view the process of conducting this research as a journey of critically reflecting on myself as a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Guba and Lincoln (2005) referred to *reflexivity* as follows:

It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself.

Reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with our selves and with the *multiple identities that represent the fluid self* in the research setting (Alcoff & Potter, 1993) (p. 183, emphasis added).

I am a Chinese graduate student studying in the School of Education and also teaching Chinese in the EALC department at the university. The selection of the participants in the study

was that they are all my colleagues who are also working in the EALC department; therefore, it was much easier to conduct interviews with them than drawing from participants outside.

I reject the idea of treating research participants as “robots” in qualitative research (Abu-Lughod, 1996); instead, I take an anthropological view while conducting this case study, with the viewpoint that multiple identities of individuals are context-dependent (Ewing, 1990). As Kanuha (2000) pointed out,

For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a nonnative scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied (p. 444).

As a qualitative researcher, I am aware that I bring the “self” to the field (Guba & Lincoln, 2005); therefore, my presence as a researcher makes an effect on the interviews and how participants respond. Besides, I am also cautious on the bias that might exist while I compose and (re)construct their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), as how I construct their (our) stories in writing might be under the influence of how I viewed the world. However, as for a case study of East Asian GTAs, and being an *insider* myself, I strived to bring more understanding for this group of people from an insider’s perspective and provide readers an insider’s picture of how their (our) identities are constructed, what experiences they (we) had, and how these experiences help to shape their (our) identities.

This led to why qualitative interviews were used in this dissertation, and how I used interviews in this dissertation is explained in the sections followed. My long-term relationship with the participants allowed me to sit down with the participants and discuss issues regarding

identities. Maxwell (2013) mentioned establishing research relationships with those you study is crucial for qualitative research. My selection of participants was based on relatively long-term collegial friendship that I have established with other GTAs for years. Therefore, my conversational partnership was not only developed through interviewing, but also my previous relationship with the participants.

I understand that this advantage also posed challenges, and that my previous understanding about the participants might produce biases on the interpretation; that both the participants and I need to shift our original collegial friend roles to interviewer-interviewee roles. I am aware of the Hawthorne Effect (1958) since I know the participants, and potentially have power shifts as the interviewer of this study.

I conquered this challenge by providing enough explanations of this study before the interviews. I addressed this in the informed consent form as “Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without negatively affecting relationships with me or our work in the EALC department”. Overall, the site selection was relevant to my current teaching context and is also helpful in a pedagogical way to our language instruction as GTAs.

### **Why Interviews?**

The face-to-face interviews that I conducted was the most immediate procedure in digging deeper into individual’s experiences and the realities (Peräkylä, 2005). This further exemplified that interview is an appropriate tool to use while investigating identity construction, as the “selves” and “beings” of individuals and social experiences will be revealed through the interactions with the participants. The use of interviews also fitted the nature of the topic on identities. During the interviews, participants and the researchers are given the time and space to talk about their subjective experiences and attitudes (Peräkylä, 2005), as the postmodernist

perspective proposed. Therefore, the research methodology lines up with the research paradigm. Lastly, since my investigation on identity involves the participants' past experiences, interviewing was the right way to overcome the distance in space and time to study the people involved (Peräkylä, 2005).

The use of interviews acknowledges that identity is “co-constructed by interlocutors” (Dervin & Risager, 2014). As a researcher who shares similar backgrounds with the participants, I witnessed how my colleagues and I, as interlocutors in the interviews, perceived ourselves and others. From a qualitative researcher's perspective, I reject the idea that researchers implicate themselves in the analyzing of their research; instead, I acknowledge that researchers intervene in the creation of data (Dervin, 2011).

For research on identity, it is vital that the researcher acknowledges the subjectivity (Ahearn, 2001). Current research also calls for more “focus on the dynamics of the changes in the intersubjective meanings of various culturally constructed realities and study individuals' intrasubjective meanings” that the participants assign to their actions in the new country (Chirkov, 2009). This approach coincides with the view that identity is fluid and dynamic.

There were three rounds of individual interviews on the three participants. The first round of interviews used more open-ended questions. To guide my interviews, I used a semi-structured interview question rubric (Appendix II) that I crafted. Some topical areas included: why they chose to come to the US; why they chose to study their program; why they chose to teach their native language; difficulties as an international student and an emerging language teacher, and their future career choices. All topics of interests were crafted according to the key terms related to the research questions. The second round of interviews attended more to participants' teaching. The last round of interviews concentrated on central questions on identities and identity

formation, the reflections about this process, and how this process of reflecting upon their identity helped them as individuals in general.

### **Data Collection**

The major steps for data collection are listed below. After the dissertation study was approved by my committee members, I applied for the IRB approval. I conducted interviews: first round of interviews was aiming for questions on the *challenges* participants faced academically and socially; second round of interviews were on talking about their *teacher identity*, and the last round of interviews are on reflections about *identity formation* in this process and how it helped them as individuals.

After the first round of interviews on asking about the challenges that participants face academically and socially, I transcribed and analyzed the first round of interviews. I then adjusted the interview questions and conducted the second round of interviews. After each individual interview, I went back to the participants and requested for more responses as needed. The second round of interviews were conducted on talking about their teacher identity with the participants. Then, more information was requested again after the individual interviews. The last round of interviews were several questions on the reflections that GTAs gain from this experience, i.e. how this experience of interviews and self-reflections helped them as individuals. Individual interviews were conducted, and informal chats were requested afterwards. Transcription of the interviews were conducted after each interview. The timeframe of the data collection process is also attached in the Appendix. And a table of data collection techniques used is as following:

Table 3 List of Data Collection Techniques

<b>Rounds of Interviews</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Challenges participants faced academically & socially	Transcriptions/analysis were done afterwards to help with 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Teacher identity	Requested more responses afterwards
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Identity formation	Informal chats were conducted for more responses
<b>Additional Data Collection Techniques</b>	1. Documentation of the process of informal chats	To facilitate what participants did not share in the interviews
	2. Field notes of conducting interviews for understanding the transcription	Distinctive marks were picked out to find the themes
	3. My autobiography & journals of being international student/GTA	To connect the personal aspects to the cultural/social interpretations

I understand that based on the exploration of identity, some of the interview questions could be very personal, since they touch upon topics like loneliness, personal interaction with Americans, discrimination, etc. To be able to obtain quality data, I addressed these questions both in individual interviews and informal chats in case the participants are reluctant to share throughout the interviews. I obtained the basic demographic information before the first

interview: where they come from, how long they have been here in the US, what language they teach, and at what level they have taught so far. There were times afterwards that I sensed there might be information that the interviewees left out in the interviews, I pointed that out in the informal chats, so that the piece of information was not be left out because of the familiarity of relationship between the participants and me, therefore it would not be because they (un)intentionally choose not to share with me.

Responsive interviewing is an effective way to elicit stories about participants' challenges, accommodations, negotiations and transformations that they conducted in dealing with the challenges. I understand that thoughtfully design the interview questions is important (Meho, 2006). Therefore, I took a large amount of time on conceiving those questions so that they are purposeful. The interview questions were based on both existing research reviewed, and the aspects that stuck out after I reviewed their preliminary questionnaire. After finished developing the interview protocol, I made sure that the questions are well-stated. My process of developing the questions was a process that I experience in drafting, evaluating and revising my questions, so that a set of effective questions are generated.

With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded. All interviews were conducted in English. Since the Chinese participants and I speak the same language; therefore, when Chinese was used in the interview, it was translated accordingly. For each of the interviews, the whole procedure lasted approximately sixty minutes, starting from making small talks to build up the atmosphere, and finishing with winding down of inquiring questions from the participants. However, like I mentioned above, the interview questions were drafted to guide my interviews. Thoughtfully design the interview questions is important, but since I am interested in the experience of the participants, and interview is largely about hearing, which

means I adjusted some chronological order of the interview questions based on the participants' responses. I also tackled the interview situations on-site whenever areas of interests come up through the interview. This adjustment was also based on whether I anticipated the interviewee's response might be helpful when I analyze the data. It was proved later that these adjustments were useful in providing responses to later analysis.

Probes of questions were also used to "further explore or clarify statements made by the participants" (Alakaam, Castellanos, Bodzio, & Harrison, 2015, p. 106). Three thematic questions on academic identity, social identity, and teacher identity were posed to start the discussion. The follow-up questions were based on the participant's response. Certain probes listed under each thematic questions in the interview protocol were used to generate more responses and prompt more discussions about the topic. This planning on the interview was to guarantee that the interview questions and responses properly target on the research questions posed.

After asking the questions, I listened to the interviewees tentatively, as the interviewees may say something that might help me to tie to some other questions that I was going to ask later. Therefore, follow-up questions like, "you mentioned xxx, could you elaborate more about that?" and open-ended questions like "tell me how you tackled with the difficulties of not feeling confident to speak in class?" were asked to elicit more data from the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). To be able to help the interviews run smoothly, I was also very familiar with all the questions on the protocol, and I was able to use them flexibly. Based on my past experience in qualitative interviews, in my opinion, the best way to obtain quality data is by having the first interview done and not conduct the second interview before reevaluating the interview questions.

Though interviewing was an appropriate method for answering my research questions, after finished conducting the first round of individual interviews, I conducted informal chats with the participants to address the questions that I felt the need for more response. More data were elicited to address certain questions that I wished the participants had told me more about them. After the informal chats, I documented the whole process for the purpose of thematic analysis. By using individual interviews and informal chats, I obtained a clear picture of East Asian GTA's past and present experience as students, social beings and emerging teachers.

Lastly, my own field notes while doing the interviews were also re-read to facilitate my understanding about the transcripts. Distinctive remarks were picked out, and some common features and trends were presented. My own autobiographies and journals related during my graduate studies as an international student and an emerging teacher were also being used. Autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Denzin, 1997; Ellis, 1997, 2004; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) is a qualitative research genre that connects the personal aspects to the cultural and social interpretations (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The use of autoethnography is able to "make the researcher's own experience as a topic of investigation in its own right" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As a person who is keen on making the researcher and researcher's personal experience as the focus of research, autoethnography truly allowed me to incorporate my own account into interpreting the experience as an insider.

The use of autoethnography also came from my intention of "writing out our stories," as personal narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) involves how people try to give meaning to their lives across time (Pavlenko, 2007). Autoethnographic descriptions of the scene from my notes included: office set-up, displays on the participants' office desk, artifacts of participants, and they are included when it is necessary for readers to have a mental

image of how the things described above are like, thus, to acquire a reified picture of the life and experience of these participants. This autoethnographic description was necessary in the way that it provided another proof to the conceptual framework that I proposed on the intersecting and complex nature of identities, which were showcased by these surroundings, artifacts and displays.

To be able to understand the individual's identities, we cannot subtract these portions out of individuals' lives, as it also served as an evidence of participants' responses in interviews. From these descriptions, we can tell a lot about the participants: their interests, activities, habits, personalities, etc. And through personal narratives and artifacts, I am hoping to tell the hope and disappointment, joy and despair that international students face during their academic study and life in the US.

### **Data Analysis**

Based on the research question and the nature of the data in this study, I used thematic analysis for coding the general themes, and identifying and exploring the deeper meanings and power relations hidden behind the text. How these methods were understood, why they were used, and how they were used in analyzing the data are explained as followed.

As a form of content analysis, thematic analysis has been used as an analytical framework for analyzing the situated meanings of identity construction (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Thematic analysis is useful in revealing the person's experience (Gibbs, 2007). By using content analysis, I tried to thoroughly address the research questions in this study. I listened to the recordings and transcribe the interviews verbatim (Alakaam et al., 2015). The transcription of the first interview was important in the sense that not until I have one of the interview recordings fully transcribed, I would not be able to have a chance to find if there

were any problems that my interview questions posed. Because while I was transcribing, I started to listen to the interactions between me and the interviewees, instead of imaging the interviewee's response while I was drafting my interview questions. The actual interview transcription helped me to revise my questions to be more effective.

I went through the transcripts of the interview recordings and tried to find the information that most participants share or divert. I used color-coding to highlight those statements that were related to my research questions, and then group the same colors into the same group. In this way, I generated the themes of this study. Through synthesizing the information, some common features, problems and challenges, and the different patterns in GTAs' identity construction in relation to their teaching practice were revealed and presented.

Thematic analysis is helpful in picking out the general themes, patterns and features. Besides, since I positioned identity construction as co-constructed, and interview as the main method of data collection, a focus on the analyzing of the Talk and Text (Marshall & Rossman, 2014) was placed. In other words, to understand the deeper meanings that participants present in their interviews, and how identity is constructed through my interactions with the participants, and to satisfy the objectives of digging into deeper meanings and the power relations behind text, I tried to detect through language and communication, and see how participants reproduce power as emerging teachers, and the inequalities that they experienced as international students in the US academia and society. I intend to contribute to the expected change for the problems that East Asian GTAs experienced as international students, foreigners in the US society and emerging teachers in the US academia, and I am in the hope of searching for possible solutions.

Based on the different country origins, cultural background, educational background, and past experiences, people as social actors see and represent themselves differently in their social

lives, thus they talk about themselves differently (Fairclough, 2013). I intended to see how participants represent themselves in the US academia, social lives, and as emerging teachers. I am also keen to understand the deeper meaning of certain actions, for example, participants' choice of teaching their native language in the US, and to see whether this seemingly personal choice comes from the social practice of the current US academia, i.e. the employment and recognition of international students, the existing bias in hiring international students as teaching assistants; which might be able to project to the larger social atmosphere and attitudes towards international students as a whole. In summary, by using thematic analysis to analyze a combination of interviews, informal chats with participants and autoethnography, I hope to understand the experience of East Asian GTAs and make sense of their (our) experience.

To achieve trustworthiness, I listened back and forth while transcribing the data to make sure that I type out every word that the participants uttered. Participant's responses in the informal chats and autoethnography were also used to triangulate the data on East Asian GTAs' identity construction. Through different methods of data collection, I hope to be able to study the East Asian GTAs' identity construction in-depth, and I aim at representing their experience in this specific setting.

## Chapter 4: Their Stories and Our Stories

### *- Participants' Case Narratives with Individual Analysis*

This chapter aims at describing the three participants' narratives to provide a more meso-level context in which the participants in the dissertation were situated. It served as a transition from the methodology to the findings, as the findings of the research relied on this chapter to be situated and contextualized. Instead of confining the participants' individual information in the previous chapter on methodology, I chose to have this separate chapter which independently present the participants' stories for presenting and contextualizing the findings. It is also essential to have this chapter separated from the research context in the methodology as it unfolded specific background information, experiences, stories, and quotes from the participants.

This chapter followed a particular structure. For each participant, it provides a detailed narrative of their stories, and of experiences of past and present. This portion of the information was obtained through the initial interviews that I conducted with the participants at the end of the 2016 fall semester. After each case narrative of the participant was presented, I introduced my relationship with each of the participants. Lastly, each case was finished by an individual analysis. By having this structure, it allowed me as a writer to integrate the analysis into the narratives and weave the analysis within the stories.

The source of each description of participants came from the interviews, and my journals of recording the previous and current experience with the participants at personal, academic and social levels. The data of this research was gathered over more than one-year period. During and after the obtainment of data and after the transcription of recordings, the descriptions of participants were presented to the participants to verify the trustworthiness, and modifications were made based on participants' feedbacks, either in person or through email. Moreover, as the

participants are my colleagues who share adjacent office spaces, they were able to voluntarily conduct member-check while checking in with the progress of my dissertation. Some of the participants also offered to provide member-check before I presented some of the findings at TESOL and AERA conferences during the 2018 year.

I titled this chapter “Their Stories and Our Stories” because not only it is important to show the readers where the participants come from and their experience. It is also my understanding that in order to truly understand each participants’ experience from my lens, it is necessary to trace back to the very beginning of how we formed our relationship, starting from when, where and how I met these participants, what we have been through as classmates, friends and colleagues together, to where and what steps of these participants are at present.

Additionally, as my individual relationship with each participant varied from person to person, it is important for me to lay out how I met each participant and how our interpersonal relationship formed, developed, evolved, as it is helpful for interpreting the participants’ response to the interview questions. Without the knowledge of the interpersonal relationship between the participants and me, it is difficult to understand the underlying webs that piece all the information together, and to tell why participants choose to share certain information or not based on different cases. This becomes even more important when it comes to the interpretation of silence (Jones, 2009) and non-verbal cues of the participants, whether it means (dis)agreement, or whether the participants behave introvertly or extrovertly, and how this is different from my observation of our relationship during my time with the participants.

These pieces of information are essential before I present the outlooks across cases in the following chapter. Both my interpersonal relationship with the participants, and the interpersonal relationships among the participants are important for the interpretation of how the participants

share their information with me. From presenting information in this chapter, it is also easier for the readers to understand what the findings in the next chapter means in the context that I studied.

### **Pei's Story**

Pei is a thirty-eight-year-old female born in Zhengdong City, Qinan Province in southwest China. Born during the one-child policy period in China, Pei received a good education in China, and majored in English in Foreign Studies University (pseudonyms are given), which is a second-tier university about four to five hours drive from her hometown.

Based on Pei's education experience in China, she described some of the professors in China as they "don't really care that much about your study" (Pei, 1st Individual Interview, December 13, 2016), and their attitudes toward teaching was not very positive. After graduating from college, Pei started to teach English in China to K-12 students, especially from kindergarten to primary school grade six.

At the same time, Pei had several friends who came to the United States (US) for graduate study. In the desire of improving her teaching methods, and learning "theories to back up my (her) teaching methods" (Pei, 1st Individual Interview, December 13th, 2016), Pei chose to come to the US to study TESOL at Candi University in Lance City, KS in 2005. Until this dissertation was composed, Pei has been here for eleven years.

As mentioned, Pei came to the US for getting a master degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Upon her arrival at Candi University, Pei considered herself adjusting to the environment quickly, but still with some cultural shock, both in the way geographically Lance City (where Candi University is located) looks compared to the cities in China, also the

ways that professors in the US interact with students. Pei immensely enjoyed the various campus activities that she could participate as an international student, and gradually liked Lance City.

Pei described herself as very motivated for the first two years during her master's study and was very interested in learning since she had been away from learning by teaching and working in China. She described herself as a goal-oriented student who "was just absorbing all the new things" (Pei, 1st Interview, December 13, 2016). After Pei finished her master's degree, she had trouble finding a job at college level. The specific troubles that she was having including since she planned to teach at college level, most of the job at that time prefers candidates with a Ph.D. degree rather than a M.A. degree.

Therefore, Pei decided to continue to pursue a doctorate degree to work in universities and colleges in the US. However, starting from her years of being a Ph.D. student, she gradually understood how the university and education works in US, and had some experiences of encountering professors, whom she described as "just like some of the professors in China", that their attitudes toward teaching were not very positive, and were irresponsible to students.

However, Pei made the initiative of going into another department that she was interested in, and she received a lot of help. She felt the professors in the other department were always willing to help students, and "even reach out to students, and ask them if you (they) need this" (Pei, 1st Interview, December 13, 2016). Pei claimed that all her trainings during her Ph.D. study contributed to the other department, instead of her home department.

Pei graduated in 2017 with her Ph.D. in Foreign Language Education. She was married to an American and has young kids. Pei met her husband while he was doing a study abroad in China. Her husband doesn't want to live in China. Moreover, before she met him, she have already decided to come to study abroad.

Pei applied to three different universities for a master's degree and received the admission from Candi University. Candi University has comparatively lower costs than many other universities. Taking financial situation as the most important reason while selecting universities for her, Pei chose to study at Candi University instead of the other two universities by the coasts.

Pei divided her social life into "before marriage" and "after marriage." Before marriage, Pei made all sorts of friends, including both other international students from China, Japan, India and Europe at Candi University, and local Americans. Pei had potluck and get-togethers at different friend's house, but after marriage, her focus is mostly on her kids. Professionally, Pei is currently still applying for positions of Chinese assistant professors and lecturers at university level. She enjoys teaching adults mandarin Chinese.

### **My Relationship with Pei**

The Chinese program at Candi University organizes orientations for new graduate teaching assistants. In Fall 2013, it was my first year of being appointed as a GTA in the Chinese program. My first-time meeting Pei was at the orientation meeting. Her statements of having been working in the department as a GTA for the longest time comparing to other GTAs brought up my respect for her as a new GTA myself. We ended up sharing the same office based on the assignment from the program, and we stayed at the same office till she left for another position in 2018.

Being in the same office with Pei has provided us an abundant amount of time to communicate and bond with each other. As I quickly got to learn from her that she is from the same home department where my academic study is located in. Coming from the same

department and similar major has given us many things to talk about: our study, the courses that we took, different professors in and outside the department, etc.

Consequently, our topics of discussions started to touch upon more personal level as our relationships deepens, which provides me opportunities to dig deeper as the topic of identity can be personal and sensitive. As we got to know each other better and better, and started to share more time of both personal and at work, we started to share more personal stories. Same as the other participants, the personal chats that I conducted with the participants became more valuable and rewarding than the formal interviews that we conducted.

### **Pei's Stories Analysis**

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the analysis of each story is presented after each case. And the conceptual framework: *Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex*, which was discussed in Chapter 2, informs each analysis. The three adjectives in this framework: multiple, intersecting and complex, are the foci of each analysis. To be specific, I look at each participant what their multiple identities include, how their identities intersect, and why their identities are shown as a complex manner.

The postmodernist view on identity (Gee, 2000a; Ott, 2003) and sociocultural lens (Dickenson, 2014; Lasky, 2005) allowed me to both look for themes within the stories themselves but also brings themes from theory to bear. While participants trying to answer the question of “who am I”? at the same time keep pushing and expanding the boundaries of all different possible identities, postmodernist view acknowledges this continuity; focusing on the process of becoming a graduate student in the US and as an emerging teacher, sociocultural lens discern how the identities of participants are negotiated through the experiences of school and society (Gee, 2000).

Throughout all interviews and informal chats, participants and I tried to answer three essential questions regarding negotiating identities: Negotiating Identities: What do you think it means to be a student in the US classrooms? What do you think it means to be a social being in the US society based on your background and experience? What do you think it means to be a teacher in your field?

In general, as a participant, Pei freely speaks about her experiences. Our conversations were both similar and different comparing to our daily meandering. It is similar in the way that since our mutual understanding about each other was deep, and on an almost daily basis, many of the content in the interviews were emerged from our daily conversation; different in the way that it felt more formal with my structured questions and both speaking in English rather than our mother tongue.

While analyzing her words, since I have a deep understanding about her, I was constantly comparing the experience she described in our interviews with my own experience that I had with Pei for the past several years. Besides interviews with her, her experience as a family-oriented mother was also exemplified by the photos with her kids on the desk of our shared office, and decision to discontinue her research career, rather focusing on her family, kids and the traditions led by her family.

It was certain that Pei's decision does not fit into the projected trajectory of being a doctoral student and following the path of conducting research; however, it also breaks down the traditional notion of what means to be a graduate student, and the different identities that a person shall possess as a whole: being a student, a mother, a daughter to her own parents, and the different obligations that her various identities imply.

From both the interviews and the informal chats in-between, the conversation with Pei was largely focusing on responsibility for the children, daily routines, family chores, healthy diet for the family, etc. The identities of being a mother to two young children and a wife who takes care most of the family chores take the priority of being a Ph.D. student and teaching. At the same time, Pei's enjoyment in teaching Chinese was able to connect herself as an international student and the only person in the family who was born in a different country at different levels.

As a former English learner and English teacher in China, Pei explained her transition to Chinese teaching as followed,

So, I think I got into the Chinese program the second year I got here while I was still very motivated. And very original reason I came to the department to teach Chinese is because the financial support that it can give me. Because if I teach here, I don't have to pay tuition. I don't have to give the financial burden to my parents, and I can make some pocket money, like that. So, it's just decreases of pressure on the finance. And that was the very first purpose. After a few years of teaching Chinese, I feel like, hey I enjoy this, you know, teaching the adults at college level. I feel there are more different interactions. Another reason is that, I guess when you are away from your mother country, you know, you are away from you culture, I think this is a way, to keep you connecting. (Pei, Interview, December 2016)

Pei's plan after working at Candi University further exemplifies the complexity of her multiple identities. At the time of her first interview in December 2016, Pei was just finishing her Ph.D. and was applying for positions as a Chinese lecturer, assistant professors at university level. However, while searching for jobs, Pei's restriction was not only limited to her husband's

job relocation, but also focused on whether her children would be able to access good education in the place where she choose to move:

If we move to somewhere, mainly I would look at now is whether they have a good public school system. (Pei, Interview, December, 2016)

In regards to Pei's relocation, it seems like her children's education would be the determiner. However, as referring to Pei herself, her personal future aspirations shift throughout Pei's encountering and experience in my following informal chats with her subsequently, though some of the alternatives presented an ephemeral pattern.

This tension exemplifies in everyday of Pei's life. One example starts from my initial interview with Pei. As her daughter was having stomach flu, she had to make lunch for her daughter, conduct interview with me, make phone calls to the cake delivery services for her daughter's birthday party the next day, and go back home in two hours after the interview to deliver the porridge to her daughter's school.

Pei also divided her social life by before she had kids and after. As she responded in one of the interviews:

So before kids, I still hang out with a bunch of people, young or old, doesn't matter... So right now I think life is more focusing on marriage and kids. Of course, my job. I love my job, I love teaching at the same time, but I would like to keep sometime in my hands just for helping my kids at this age, coz by the time they are in high school, they don't really need me any more. (Pei, Interview, December 2016).

The tension continued while Pei started to teach a summer intensive course at a primary school which is about one hour away from home. As she had to worry about picking up the kids, feeding them, responding to feedbacks from program directors, which seemingly sound like the

life of many others. However, the point that I am emphasizing here is that Pei's significant identity dimensions (academic identity, social identity and teacher identity) not only intersects with each other, but also intersects with her other identities (including the emerging identities). Besides teaching and taking care of the kids, when this dissertation data gathering was finished, Pei was in the midst of moving to another state to become a lecturer at a university.

### **Sadako's Story**

Born in YaCandi Ushima (pseudonym), Japan, Sadako had been an English teacher in one of the Junior High Schools which she described as "not well-disciplined" (Sadako, 1st interview, December 14, 2016) for six years before coming to the US. During the years of teaching in the junior high school, Sadako had many students who have discipline problems, which served as a trigger for her wanting to know how the school could be managed effectively.

Therefore, she decided to take a sabbatical and spent one year to earn a master's degree in Educational Management and Leadership from a university in Australia. After she finished her master's degree, she went back to Japan and continued with the job of being a teacher at the original Junior High School.

Sadako met her husband in 1995 while he was in Japan as a teacher. They became friends for many years before they got married about six years ago. Since her husband has been living in the US for a long time, she decided to move to the US "to start a new life with him" (Sadako, 1st interview, December 14, 2016). And Lance City is the place where her husband has been living for a long time.

Sadako described herself as a socializing and outgoing persona back in Japan. Since she came to the US four years ago, she had not worked for two years and stayed at home as a housewife. Sadako found the lifestyle of being a housewife did not suit her well, and she needed

to go out and meet people. For the desire of being more active and involved in the society, her first decision was to go back to school.

When I interviewed Sadako about the reason she came to Candi University to study, Sadako responded, “because...Lance City is the place I came to. I didn’t choose to come to Lance City apart from (wanting to be with) my husband, so there was no choice, and Candi U is the only choice (since Candi U is the only public university in town)” (Sadako, 1st interview, December 14, 2016).

Sadako recalled in the interview that she was not quite sure whether returning to school would be a good idea based on her situation. She was interested in TESOL but wanted to know whether it would be worthy of doing a second master’s degree since she already had one master’s degree in education management. She was also not certain how this new degree would help with her future career.

With all these uncertainties about obtaining a new degree, Sadako actively approached to one of the professors in the TESOL program before applying to Candi University. She visited the professor’s office and asked about the course she was thinking about taking if she was admitted. As she recalled, she regarded her experience of meeting with the professor to be very nice, and she felt the action of actively approaching to the professor before her admission was helpful and beneficial.

Sadako claimed that the professor’s response to her questions, such as the prospects of teaching positions in the US, the current situation of TESOL, and the course descriptions, tremendously helped her make the decision of going back to school again. Anticipating utterly positive outcomes of procuring another advanced degree, Sadako decided to apply to Candi University and received admission.

Sadako started school at Candi University in Spring 2014. Her first semester started with two courses offered by the same professor, whom Sadako regarded as being very pleasant; this was the same person as the professor that she spoke to before application. But Sadako struggled with the amount of readings, which she described as overwhelming. Extremely aware of the drawbacks as a nonnative speaker of English, she spent a lot of time on reading the course materials, which Sadako thinks helped with her understanding about the content of the course.

However, as classes in the US context require not only reading assignments, but also in-class discussions. Though spending a very great amount of time in reading, Sadako still found herself struggling to answer the questions posed by the professor in class, especially responding to spontaneous questions and joining the class conversations and discussions.

As Sadako recalled, the semesters go on. Things got better after she took a class from the professor who she approached at the beginning. She described that knowing the professor and taking the class helped her a lot on improving her English-speaking skills and talking in front of people, as she felt that she could contribute to the class conversation.

After she got back to school, she had an opportunity, which her Japanese friend told her that a position of teaching Japanese drill classes at Candi University was available. She applied the position, got hired, and started her first semester of teaching Japanese in 2016. This experience of teaching her native language as a foreign language improved her confidence in general, especially in terms of speaking English in the public.

Even though she was instructing in her native language, the teaching position involves explaining Japanese grammar in English, office hours with students, interacting with co-workers, etc. Being able to meet other people every day, as opposing to sitting in the house and doing chores, pushed Sadako to speak, and it also pushed her to improve her English.

She stressed that the experience of teaching made her more confident as a student at school, and as a person in general. As she could express her thoughts and ideas much better comparing to the time when she first started, she gradually became more active. The effect of the teaching experience on the participants' identity negotiation will be further discussed in the following chapter. Currently, Sadako is on her last year of finishing her master's program and planning to apply for the doctoral program in the near future.

### **My relationship with Sadako**

I can still remember clearly the first time when I met Sadako. We met in one of the courses that we took together in the School of Education. As classmates, we sat next to each other throughout the whole semester while taking the course together with other twenty-one graduate students at different levels. As it happened to be her first course for her master's degrees, she was very conscientious and careful the whole time while taking the class.

Personally, I was intrigued by Sadako's kindness and manner while first talking with her. Sadako kindly introduced herself when she met me for the first time and asked about my experience here at Candi University. At that time I had just finished my master's degree and it was my third year at Candi U. Being at the place longer and actively involved in many activities offered by the department and university, I was able to share my experience throughout past years with Sadako.

Interestingly, our conversation was not only limited to the group discussions in every class period that the professor assigned to us, but also during class recess. During class recess, the topics of our conversations extended to our personal life, past experiences, the similar experiences of coming from East Asian countries, the shared culture experiences, similarities and

differences between Japan and China, the different language systems of Japanese and Chinese, etc.

Our friendship was developed from sitting next to each other as classmates. Since the class was held in the evenings, we started to bring snacks of Chinese and Japanese for each other to share, which became a tradition of Sadako and I now almost every time when we meet. Through sharing snacks, our discussions and bond of friends keep developing.

Our connection was also able to go beyond the classroom settings. Since we are majored in the same department, we have attended the social gatherings that the department and TESOL club organized. During these gatherings, I started to communicate with Sadako in social settings, for example, I got to know that she is vegetarian, and was able to meet her husband, her travel plans for the summer and holidays, etc.

After she knew that I am teaching Chinese at EALC department, we started to talk about teaching. And I extended the idea of encouraging her to take her friend's advice and apply to be a Japanese GTA in EALC department. As I knew her conscientious in acquiring the knowledge and her past teaching experience, I kept persuading that she will be a great fit for the department.

My encountering with Sadako definitely increased since she started to work as a GTA in EALC department. As mentioned in the context session in Methodology, all East Asian GTA offices are located next to each other. And coincidentally Sadako's office was just next door to mine. Therefore, we see each other at least on Tuesdays and Thursdays during the time that we teach, and we always chat briefly when we have the time.

I still bring some Chinese snacks for Sadako to share, and every time, if I bring something, Sadako always finds something to return the favor. Our relationship extended from solely being classmates to being friends and colleagues. The settings that we encounter are not

constrained only in the classrooms anymore and are extended to offices and various social settings.

### **Sadako's Stories Analysis**

The conceptual framework of Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Howard, 2000a; Jones, 2009) keeps informing my analysis of Sadako's case. In Sadako's case, multiple identities are exemplified through her experience as a school teacher in Japan, a graduate student seeking a second master's degree, a wife who came to the US to live with her husband, a new teaching assistant who was trying to improve her teaching, and many others as demonstrated through her story.

These seemingly separate identities inevitably intersect with one another as it was making a difference in her decision-making, internal battles and negotiating her needs. Being in the US first without working and going to school urged Sadako wanting to work. As being positioned as a housewife at home while being endowed with the ability of teaching as a former teacher in Japan exerted difficulties in balancing her internal feelings and desires to work.

I wanted to work. Because I have been working as a teacher for long time in Japan before I move to the States. And I hadn't work[ed] for two years since I came here. And I really wanted to, like, how to say, wanted to have the life which I had in Japan. And more, I wanted to be more active, I wanted be more involved the society, and I felt like staying at home as a kind of housewife, it didn't suit me. And I needed to go out and meet people. So, first of all, I gotta went back to school again (Sadako, interview, December 14, 2016).

The excerpt above are composed with simple words but demonstrated deep and profound psychological desires and social integration needs as a new international student and someone who had just relocated to a new country. To Sadako, clearly working is not seen as a means of

earning the bread, and there are several layers here that could be interpreted. The following section unfolds these interpretations.

Firstly, it is to assimilate her past life in Japan. To dig deeper into this and link to her previous statements of coming to the US in the first place, Sadako did not make her own choice of coming to the US; instead, she came here because of her husband. As she was already working as a teacher in Japan, there was an intention of her identity as a teacher not being disrupted by her social identity - being a wife in a different country. However, her original teacher identity was inevitably affected.

Sadako's negotiation of identity coincided with the deeply rooted nature of one kind of identity as relation to social identity (Hawkes, 2014). As Hawks (2014) mentioned, students are often unprepared for the challenges presented by the cross-cultural arrangements. And the case becomes even more complex when the student did not move to the new country alone and had to balance the life with significant others.

As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) pointed out that the negotiation of identities take place every day and "all discursive practices may position individuals in particular ways or allow individuals to position themselves" (p. 20). Besides having a disconnected feeling towards her teacher identity, Sadako was seeking a validation of her past career experiences and skills (Sinacore, Park-Saltzman, Mikhail, & Wada, 2011).

When it comes to what counts as successful cultural transitioning for new comers, not only the typical sociocultural and psychological adjustment matter, successful employment is vital to connect individuals to society at large (Sinacore et al., 2011) and how they can participate in the new society in meaningful ways. Dean and Wilson (2009) studied the under/unemployed highly skilled new comers in Canada in their article named "Education? It is

irrelevant to my job now. It makes me very depressed”. Their study reiterated the assertion that employment is directly linked to life satisfaction, high self-esteem and happiness. Sadako’s statement of “wanting the life back in Japan” demonstrated her aspiration of fulfilment in life.

The one question that I wish to consider further is: Do international students, or teachers who have previously taught in the home country share the desire to have the life as their home country? As there is a reminiscence of previous experience? My assumption would be it varies based on their experience. My intention is to point this out for future related use and further study the experience of international students and teachers.

Secondly, though employment seems to be a major component that Sadako intends to recreate upon her arrival in the US, it is not the only piece as her whole identity development was affected. She comes to the realization that reducing her identities to solely being a housewife conflict with her personality, as she also claimed herself as being a very socialized and outgoing person in Japan when she answers questions regarding her social identity, only holding the role of “housewife” was depriving her identity development to the fullest potential.

Märtsin (2018) emphasized the importance of sociocultural context when she studies the becoming and identity development of individuals and highlighted the importance of developing supportive cultural resources. The theoretical links that she made in the paper is in accordance with the conceptual framework that I used in this dissertation. Same as Zittoun et al. (2013), Märtsin summarized the theoretical stance of sociocultural influences in the paper:

...we need theories that take seriously the sociocultural influences on development and focus on examining the unique developmental trajectories of individuals in their messiness and complexity in order to reveal similarities and commonalities in the basic underlying developmental processes...they call for the indepth engagement with the

idiosyncratic developmental trajectories that emerge as unique configurations shaped by specific socio-cultural conditions, and suggest that developmental theories should focus on identifying and revealing general developmental processes that underlie this uniqueness and idiosyncrasy (p.11).

All of these theoretical bases are guiding us to the understanding that when we interpret an individual's account, we need to understand it in its specific socio-cultural context. For Sadako's case, being in Japan and working as a teacher for a long time, as mentioned at the beginning of this second point, does not only mean employment for Sadako. Apparently as she mentioned, it is also a lifestyle; and a lifestyle of not working exerted emptiness and feeling of deviant on her trajectory of personal identity development.

Lastly, as Sadako mentioned further in the interviews,

G: ...you want to get more involved.

S: Involved, and to show my ability. And I use my ability and skills I had before, and yea, I just wanted to be more useful. Haha, to the society, and to make me feel better (Sadako, interview, December 14, 2016).

As an international student, Sadako felt the need to connect with the society. Barnett (2016) mentioned that involvement not only help with international students make sense of their experiences studying in the US but also bridges gaps and establishes connections for people. As Fischer (2014) mentioned that the discussion on international students in the US should be changing from recruitment strategies to how to best serve their students' needs.

As to serving students' needs, interestingly, in the book, Fischer (2014) mentioned one of the three major factors contributing to a positive effect on international students is on-campus employment. And the reasoning of it would be that it makes students feel more of being a part of

the institution. This further demonstrated the point that employment for international students cannot be solely regarded as the only and ostensible facet that students yearn for during their study in the US. An indispensable viewpoint when considering the overall satisfaction of international students' employment is the sense of belonging that comes with it.

Although, I would like to point out, and will divulge again in the conclusion section is that the overgeneralization of the term "international students" is problematic. International students come from different places and undertake different trajectories. International students in the US to be understood in the most narrow but also the most common sense is that these students come to the US for the prime purpose of studying. The academic identity seems to come before the social identity as the social arrangements come after student's decision of becoming a student in the US.

Lee and Ciftci (2014) mentioned that international students (ISs) may consider their stay in the US to be temporary, thus they may choose to maintain their traditional roles in their home country. As mentioned in the section of *Social Identity of International Students* in the literature review, the postmodernist view recognizes the importance of cultural resistance: international students may choose to adhere to carry the values of home culture and seek a balance with their adjustment to the new culture.

US culture is conventionally recognized as highly individualist. Besides the challenges reviewed in Chapter Two, it is never enough to emphasize the critical effect of cultural distance. The difficulty exerted by cultural difference could be eased by extending interactions with hosts and increase the participation in American life; at the same time, it is also related to the open-mindedness of adopting American traits and practices (Sewell, 1961).

For Sadako, teaching Japanese in US counts as one of her way of participating in American life and interacting with the locals. As she mentioned in the interview,

...after I started to teach Japanese here, my confidence in terms of speaking English, I think, improved a lot. Because before I started to teach, I didn't go out. Yea, most of the time, I stayed at home, study or did housework. But since I started to teach, I just came to campus every day to meet people. And I need to talk every day, so that helped me a lot to improve my English, I guess. So now I think it's the same kind of effect, I feel more confident in school as a student, because I know I could say many things, and in many ways now than before (Sadako, interview, December 14, 2016).

Besides the fact that Sadako was troubled by not able to make the best use of her experience as a teacher back in Japan, as an international student in US, she was overwhelmed and found it difficult to answer questions in English in the classes that she takes as a student. Her nervousness and pressure as an international student was greatly changed since she became a teaching assistant in Japanese, and her desire of being a teacher in US in the future emerged from her experience. This emerging teacher identity will be further explored in the next chapter.

### **Yonah's Story**

Yonah was born in Seoul, South Korea. While in college, her major was French linguistics and sociology. She started to work at the LG Electronics company as the secretary of the chairman, but quickly quit because of the boredom of work. Later, she worked as a staff member for the Christian missionary organization. She always wants to be an English teacher in South Korea as teaching English has always been her dream since college.

After she got married, she worked as a part-time English teacher at a private institution, teaching students from elementary schools and middle schools. She decided to go back to school

to earn the TESOL certificate as she intended to be trained more professionally to teach English, and started working full time at some after-school language programs nearby her apartment so that she can take care of the house chores at her spare time.

Yonah's decision of coming to the US started from travelling with her son's English language camp in California ten years ago. The experience of being in the US with her son made her realize that her English skills are not as good as she expected, and she felt she should be better in English as an English teacher. Besides, studying in the US is very popular comparing to studying abroad in other countries.

Therefore, after she went back to Korea, she decided to come back to the US to study English language teaching. She applied the master's program at five schools in the US and got admitted by all five, but she decided to choose Candi University as it was the largest university at Division I level of all.

Yonah came to the US in 2008. She started to study in the TESOL Master's program at Candi University since Spring 2008 and finished in Spring 2010. Another reason that made her chose Candi University is because of the affordability. As she has two sons coming to the US with her along with her study at the same time, she regarded Lance city as the safest and most affordable among all.

During Yonah's master's study, she found that the five semesters that she spent at master's level were not enough for her to learn a lot. As an international student here in the US, she did not have much experience and knowledge about the local schools here in America. She desired to learn more about teaching English and education.

In the meantime, after about two years of study in the US, Yonah still felt that she was not quite confident and proficient in English to teach, as in South Korea, most of the schools

require teachers to teach in English. Therefore, she was not ready to go back to Korea, and chose to continue to study TESOL program at the doctoral level and graduated in Spring 2017.

The other significant reason for Yonah to continue with the doctoral program at Candi university and not others was because she has a son who has just started high school during that time, and her son wants to go to college here in the US. As a very responsible mother, she decided to support her son's decision. Yonah claimed that to make the decision of staying here for the Ph.D., half of the reason is her own desire to learn more in school, and the other half is to support her son.

Furthermore, in a following interview while being asked about her one and only application to the doctoral program at Candi University, Yonah solely mentioned that she applied to the doctoral program here because of her son wanted to go to Candi University. And added that if she was not admitted, she would go back to South Korea.

When Yonah first came to Lance City in 2008, Yonah saw this place as a midwestern, white-dominant town, as there were not many students of color, let alone students from East Asian countries. Her experience in the classes was that most of the students and professors are white, and she was being overwhelmed as a person from a different country and spoke a different language. Yonah mentioned if a student is very introverted, and not social, it was difficult for the student him/herself to live at the time.

Luckily, Yonah is a very outgoing person and determined to survive in the new environment. She became emotional when talking about her coming to the US with two sons, and recalled herself as a forty-year-old mother with two kids, though challenging, she strongly survived (Yonah, Interview, December 30, 2016). Yonah furthered explained her difficult

situations in both academic and social settings, which will be explored in detail in the Findings chapter.

Getting an assistantship in teaching Korean at Candi University was a very competitive position, as there were quite a few numbers of students interested in few positions. As the first time when Yonah applied, even though she had an extensive teaching experience in Korea, she was not hired. She waited for one more semester, and there was a vacant position. The person who left the position recommended Yonah, and Yonah got an interview with the professor who was in charge of hiring and got hired.

After the completion of doctoral program, when asked about the readiness to teach English in Korea, Yonah became confident saying that she can teach at college level now. And now she is also equipped with the experience of teaching Korean to students in other countries, besides the original choice of going back to South Korea to teach English, now she has the option of teaching Korean in other places. Therefore, Yonah left Candi University in Spring 2018, and took a new position of teaching Korean as a lecturer on central coast in California.

### **My relationship with Yonah**

I would have to admit that the relationship between Yonah and I was the freshest among all of the participants. I have heard and known Yonah from one of my former advisers during graduate study and encountered Yonah a couple of times in the hallway as we both serve as teaching assistants in the East Asian Languages Department.

Yonah shared the same office with one of my close Korean friends who was also a GTA in Korean program during my years at graduate school. When I first approached to Yonah about participating in this dissertation study, Yonah was indecisive since we do not know each other

very well, but she eventually kindly agreed to help after hearing that this is related to my dissertation, and the participants are limited to specific settings.

Again, since our relationship is the newest amongst all participants, we met more often comparing to other participants in this study. We chose to meet on the Friday afternoons while we are both at the office and have time. What was surprising and encouraging for me is that our personal friendship developed further because of conducting the interviews with her and talking with her through this dissertation. Though we had known each other for about four years, not until conducting this dissertation have we known each other better.

Marshall and Rossman (2014) explained the interpersonal considerations to take while conducting successful qualitative research and emphasized the importance of building trust and maintaining good relations with participants. To build relations with Yonah, reciprocity was established through the form of Friday afternoon talks as friends catching up afterwork, in a form more of socialization than the feeling of being interviewed.

As an expertise in Korean language, teaching and knowing an expansive array of Korean culture, Yonah was invited by me to be one of the guest speakers for events and workshops that I organize related. Our interpersonal relationships continue to develop through further working with Yonah and being on trips together. As she started to get to know that my interest in Korean food, she lent me Korean cooking recipe books, and we also texted and greeted each other from time to time.

To restate my relationship with Yonah, the further encountering led our relationship to be reciprocal rather than the one-sided interviewer-interviewee relationship, and expanded our relationship to personal, social and collegial levels. As a result, my relationship with Yonah was able to reach almost the same level as the other participants and I in this dissertation.

### **Yonah's Stories Analysis**

Yonah's story demonstrated the intersecting and complex nature of her identity-making involving some of her kids exploring the life in the US together. Multiple identities of Yonah include being a mother with two sons, a new international student, a former English teacher finding her way of teaching Korean in the US, a middle-aged woman trying to live her life in a foreign country, and many more as her stories unfold.

It was also very clear to see to the extent that Yonah's identities intersect, even just from the descriptions of her stories at the beginning of this section. Her work choices are always intertwined with her identity as a married woman, as she stated in the last round of interview that she kept doing some part-time job as her "main job was housewife" (Yonah, Interview, December 7, 2017).

Märtsin (2018) described the transition into employed motherhood as "a complex, ambivalent and messy experience" (p. 11). Duarte and Gonçalves (2012) also characterized this negotiating experience as a discursive construction for its complex and diverse nature. Evidently, as a mother, Yonah made sacrifices to support her sons, which blended into Yonah building her new identity as a Ph.D. student at Candi University. Since her son determined to go to Candi University, the only choice for Yonah was to become a student at the university.

To accentuate the prominence of Yonah's identity as a mother, I specifically asked her how she sees her identity as a mother:

(The identity of) mother comes first definitely. I am education major, I have two teenagers while I study here. So, the theory or the practice I learnt in class apply to raise my children very well. The Korean schools and American schools are very different. So sometimes it helps me to educate. Because I had different standard and expectations for

my son, but they are now here, so I have to modify my expectations to raise my kids. Otherwise there'll be many conflicts between children and parents (Yonah, Interview, December 7, 2017).

Besides placing the identity as a mother first, Yonah also made adjustments of her expectations for raising her children in the US context based on what she had acquired in her own academic settings. Literature on international students shows that international students make adjustments and modifications of themselves while studying in the foreign countries (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Chirkov et al., 2007; Hawkins, 2005; Morita, 2004). From Yonah's case, it is clear to see that the modifications do not only apply to the international students themselves, but also have a bearing in the process of educating their children in the foreign country. This part of the information has a gap in the current literature of researching on international students, as the study of international students should not neglect their family and friends surrounded.

Ho (2018) investigated six international graduate students who are also parents of school-aged children and found that the challenges of these parents included unfamiliarity of the schooling system and cultural differences between their home country and the US. For Yonah, majoring in education compensated some of the novel and different ways of educating students in the US; in the meantime, assisted her in holding different vision of guiding her own children comparing to the Korean ways of teaching.

Yonah's prior identity of being a mother further demonstrated when recalling her choice of coming to Candi University:

And then here, it's affordable for me. It was not that expensive to live. And the tuition was, compared to other schools, it was not much expensive than other schools. And then I think for my son I have to raise my sons, my two sons with me, and at the same time I

have to study. So living here I think it's the safest place for them to go to school (Yonah, Interview, December 30, 2016).

Again, for international students who came to the US with their family members, when they are making decisions, they are not only making the decisions for themselves, they also have to include their family members when it comes to making choices of their graduate schools, career, relocation. The similar situation not only showcased for Yonah, but demonstrated similar patterns for the other two participants, Pei and Sadako, as well. Further analysis will be conducted in the next chapter of emergent themes.

The identity of being a mother should be counted towards the social identity of the participants. In this case, it also makes sense that the participants place this aspect of identity as priority since it is seen as the foundation of the other identities. Yonah also "ranked" the other major identities as an East Asian GTA: academic identity vs. teacher identity:

**Excerpt 1:** Yonah's academic identity vs. teacher identity

Y: But if I know more, I can teach better. If I study some Korean linguistics, probably that makes me a better teacher, but that's not my problem. My problem [major] was TESOL, so I have to study that for my degree.

G: So as a GTA studying TESOL and also teaching Korean, you do want to put most of your attention TESOL?

Y: That's my major. That's the purpose I came here. Besides as a student assistant, I'm a student first. I'm a student at the TESOL program, that's why I have to focus more that contents.

For the past four years, Yonah has been having two different assistantships from two separate departments: a teaching assistantship for online TESOL program at the Department of

Curriculum and Teaching, and Korean language drill instructor at the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. Yonah's self-identification of putting the identity as a student first also further demonstrated when the Korean language program asked her whether she can teach two classes instead of one, meaning that she would have to quite working for the TESOL program:

**Excerpt 2:**

“So, I was thinking, oh, what should I do, you know? That’s my major, so I can’t ignore the chance for working with the teachers, the actual public school teachers getting ESOL endorsement through the online program. And also at the same time, I don’t want to lose this position [of teaching Korean] because it makes my life more interactive with the students, you know? When you have interaction with the students, you feel like I’m learning from them as well, at the same time I’m learning, you know, what should I do better, to teach better? So it’s hard to keep two position, you know? Work at the same time, but I did it, because I want to learn more. I want to learn more from both side. So GTA position is very, how do you say, sometimes it’s easy, sometimes it’s not. So you always have to, try to learn something from that teaching experience. If you don’t learn from that teaching experience, I think you will become less motivated, why should I do this, you know? And also, that makes me to write better resume? So I can apply to the broader job market. So I can apply for Korean teaching, or I can apply for the English language teaching. So the teaching assistant position makes me more qualified for the job market later. So it’s good to teach both. So that’s why I did, even though it was hard. And then the research fund end, so from last semester, I taught here for two classes (Yonah, Interview, February 3, 2017).

On one hand, it is clear to tell Yonah's desire of learning more in both TESOL and foreign language teaching; on the other hand, it is not difficult to tell her struggles and complexity of different identities of being a student majoring in TESOL and a teaching assistant in teaching Korean. Throughout the excerpt above, Yonah kept introspecting herself with the question of "who am I?" and intelligibly not limiting herself to all different possible roles and identities in life. From later analysis towards her current career choice, it can be seen that it was influenced by this process of becoming a graduate student in the US and as an emerging teacher, and the experiences of being in the graduate school.

To conclude highlighting Yonah's case and also complementing similar traits of the two participants above, Pei, Sadako, Yonah and I are all students in the TESOL program at the university. As Yonah mentioned in her interview, the Korean program prefer to have students who are in the TESOL program to work as GTA. As Yonah mentioned,

This is all about language teaching, so whether you teach English or you teach Korean, the methodology is similar. And also, when I was at TESOL, they have linguistic classes, which I have to take. So, I took 3 courses of linguistic class. That helped me to teach the Korean language because you can compare the difference between English structure and the Korean language structure when you teach (Yonah, Interview, February 3, 2017).

As Yonah thinks coming from a TESOL background while instructing Korean did not bring any difficulty, instead helped her a lot. Moreover, Yonah also mentioned that the TESOL program at Candi University does not focus overwhelmingly on the teaching of English, and made many adjustments towards obtaining ESOL certificate and becoming teachers who knows culture, methodology, and how to embrace the diversity of ESL learners. Therefore, Yonah does not think that it was hard to transfer some of the knowledge in TESOL to teaching Korean.

## **My Story**

Though I am not the focus of this dissertation, having my background introduced is important for the following reasons. The most important reason comes to that my notes, diaries and reflections were also used in analyzing my experience and identity negotiation during my time in the US since the participants and I share similar experiences. How I interpret and highlight participants' experience is also based on perspectives and angles of viewing the world, and all these have been impacted by my past experience and story.

I was born as a single child in 1989, Yin City, Lan Province (pseudonyms), Northeast China. My mom is a Chinese language teacher in a local middle school and my dad is an entrepreneur since he was laid off from a small size state-owned factory during the economy recess. My parents have realized the importance and cruciality of educating me, and they did everything to lead me towards a better education. I graduated from the key high school in my hometown and went to a different city nearby for college. I chose to major in English language and literature when I was in college.

Though my parents have been finding less and less in what they can help regarding my education, they never stopped trying all their efforts for helping me to obtain a better education. Owing to their support, I became a graduate student at Candi University. I enrolled in Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) M.A. program at the University in Fall 2012. Different courses at Candi University provided me with valuable and necessary background knowledge in the language learning and teaching subjects. I first worked as a Chinese history tutor in the University Athletic Tutoring Program and then became a Chinese language Graduate Teaching Assistant in the East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC) department at the University in Fall 2013. I graduated from my master's degree in C&I with an emphasis on TESOL in Spring 2014.

I have enjoyed learning and living at Candi University and in US in general, and was reluctant to stop my journey as a graduate student in the US. While completing my master's thesis at Candi University, I applied to the Ph.D. program at Candi University, and received admission before the date of my master's thesis defense. I continued working with professors in the department and resumed the teaching assistantship at the EALC department. Upon conducting this dissertation, I have been teaching as a Chinese GTA for almost six years at Candi University. I am actively involved in different roles at Candi University. I have been GTA/Graduate Research Assistant for the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, mentor for international programs, outreach coordinator for a research center, translator for various activities, etc., and still working on finding my most ideal position in the different settings after graduation in the near future.

### **Summary of this chapter**

The existence of this chapter aimed at facilitating the understanding of the participants' experiences as international students and language GTAs. With the understanding that each participant's story is unique, their understanding about their experience is different, further analysis and findings are presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5: Findings

When the interview becomes part of the reality of experience  
because our contemporary lives are being interpreted,  
both to ourselves and to each other, in interview-like terms,  
then the interview becomes subject matter itself.  
(Gubrium & Holstein, 1997)

This dissertation of multiple case studies used a narrative approach to understand the experience of East Asian GTAs, and how they negotiate their identities in the US academically, socially and as emerging teachers. To obtain the following findings of this dissertation, I conducted three individual interviews, several informal chats with observation notes, starting from December 2016 to December 2017, with three East Asian Graduate Teaching Assistants who are international students from China, Japan and Korea, and have been living in the United States for at least six years.

At the same time, as a researcher who shares similar experience myself, my researcher's notes, diaries, reflections were also saved as a source for analyzing my experience and identity negotiation during my academic study and teaching in the US, in addition to the experience that participants shared with me. The previous chapter provided the demographic information and stories of participants, my relationship with them, and highlights about each individual's stories. This chapter focused on the emergent themes across and presented the findings from the data analysis.

As mentioned in the Methodology section, thematic analysis is used as the analytical method for this dissertation. That being said, I am not solely identifying important themes in each participant's stories; in addition, I also listened back and forth the recordings, and analyzed their responses in accordance with the themes regarding identity negotiation, the deeper

meanings underlying the texts, and how participants construct their identities as international students, emerging teachers, and foreigners in the US.

While inquiring about these different aspects, my initiated questions were: Tell me about your experience at the university? Tell me about your friends? Tell me about your working experience at the university? And topics generated include but not limited to language, country, culture, friends, teaching, their students, family, class experience, English language difficulty, program studied, life in church, etc.

The process of composing these findings started at the same time while I collected the data. As I positioned this study in the postmodernist perspective, acknowledging the “concurrently constructed” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 489) nature of the stories of participants is important for understanding the findings. To be specific, instead of “finishing collecting ALL the data” and then conducting the analysis, my analysis was ongoing as the participants’ stories proceed. In the meantime, since participants’ life proceed, and stories may go back and forth, revisions were conducted along with member-check.

In general, all participants in this study recalled their experience in the US being generally positive but reported themselves experienced some form of culture shock upon their first arrival. In the meantime, they gradually built up their own communities of practice through a longer time of contact with local friends, families and communities. The newly formed communities improved with their socialization experience in the US. And the ameliorated socialization benefited East Asian students in this study to overcome the challenges in the academics and assisted them in constructing their new identities in the US.

Students from East Asian countries always face the stereotyping of being silent or reticent (Kim, 2006); at the same time, studies have also showed that East Asian students are

eager to participate in classroom discussions (Cheng, 2000; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011). Palmer (2015) reflected that she was able to transform from a powerlessness state to one of empowerment. This dissertation showed that most participants were able to go through their personal transformation from being silent to feeling valued and validated by other members in different settings.

Though coming from a TESOL background might have some difficulty in explaining the linguistic features of the target languages that participants teach, participants were able to make use of their own unique background in their home country and their knowledge that they gained from graduate TESOL courses to better their teaching in the field of foreign language instruction. They gradually built up their new identity as foreign language teachers in the US by having a background in TESOL.

Detailed findings, examples and excerpts are presented as followed. In terms of ordering the following sections, I still chose to mostly follow the same order that I introduced the participants, with some intercepts when comparing and contrasting, and finish each section by summarizing the commonalities and differences in order to answer the research questions.

### **Challenges Academically, Socially and as Emerging Teachers**

This section reported the findings in relation to the first research question: what challenges do East Asian GTAs face as students academically, socially, and as emerging teachers? Research shows that international students face many difficulties in the US (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Lowinger, He, Lin, & Chang, 2014; Zhang & Mi, 2010) including personal problems such as finance, housing and food; academic and social problems such as understanding the American norms and cultural differences (Xu, 1991). However, the pressing

challenges are academic and social challenges (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Urban, 2012; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015).

Academic challenges including English language proficiency (Daller & Phelan, 2013; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015; Xu, 1991), international students' motivation (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007), and their adjustment to the new country (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005). Social challenges refer to the fact that many international students expressed their loneliness while studying in a foreign country, especially because they found no one with whom to express their feelings, not having familiar friends and social networks (Gautam, Lowery, Mays, & Durant, 2016), or found it difficult to express their feelings using the target language (Zacharias, 2010).

### **Academic challenges**

Several academic challenges exist for international students. One challenge is financial and the limited scholarships. This resulted in constant parental support. Other challenges including the desire for more opportunities. As there are many on-campus activities, for students to participate in these activities, international students need many adjustments on their own end in order to assimilate. Besides, the different ways of lecturing and interacting with students between the US and their home country exerted challenges as well; and students' motivation decreases with the years passing by and are lacking of support from professors. Details are as follows: "Culture shock" presented in all spectrums in the participants' lives: academically, socially and as emerging teachers. The following section will be focused on the academic challenges that participants faced.

### *Challenges in lecturing and interaction*

The different ways of how professors lecture and interact with students compared to their home country required many adjustments from the students. Most students from East Asian countries are more comfortable with teachers conducting the lecture and students note-taking rather than the US interactive discussion format.

“Every students [here in the US] seem confident, and then didn’t seem to take it seriously. Because for their educational life, they have been doing that long, for long time. And then, I didn’t have that experience (spoken quietly). Probably I just like to write the paper and submit for the midterm or final. But we don’t have that [kind of interaction in home country]...I’m an old school woman, haha (starts to laugh)” (Yonah, Interview, December 17, 2016).

Participants’ understanding about the classroom format comes from their past experience in their home countries. However, the feasibility of these different ways of classroom interactions come down to the size of the class, meaning that a classroom in Asia could have sixty to seventy students, comparing to the rather smaller sizes of classes in the US, which allows the possibility for more interactions between teacher and teacher and between student and student.

Participants reported that the different ways of classroom interaction are closely linked to the culture traditions of Asian classrooms, and what ways of instruction the teacher is most comfortable with. All of the participants had their previous education in their home country, and were mostly taught by teachers who had their education in the same country. Unless the professors had overseas experience, their teachers do teach in the way they learnt and were

taught (Dunn & Dunn, 1979, p. 241). Therefore, the ways of teaching and learning revolves in a circle (see Figure 5).

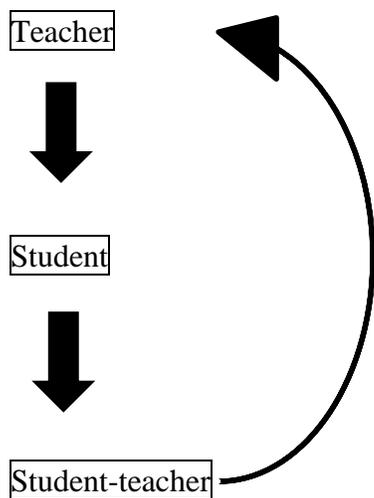


Figure 5 The circle of teaching and learning

So when students come to the US to study, they are in need of taking the time and effort to adjust to the different ways of lecturing and being able to interact with their professors, staff, and fellow classmates and friends from both local students and other international students. Besides, participants mentioned that different teaching styles are also oriented towards the different educational policies and assessments that are being used in their home country. For example, as one of the participants, Pei mentioned in the interview:

“The majority of my major course teachers or professors at my undergraduate were all nice and professional. However, for elective courses teachers, they didn’t really care about students’ attendance.... (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

In most East Asian countries, high-stake assessments control and drive the purpose of education. Under this type of cultural influence, the goal of education and teaching twisted the attitudes of the parties involved in attaining quality education, for both the teachers and the students. When teachers are preparing their lesson plans, what they choose to teach and how they

carry out their teaching methodology is under the influence of considering what the students are going to be tested in the high-stake assessments. Therefore, most teaching and learning also revolves around the content of high-stake assessments, which had been criticized by many researchers (Shah et. al.,2014; Floris, 2011)

### ***Speed of adjustment and personality***

It is evident that one's personality makes a difference in the speed of adjustment in the classrooms; likewise, personality also affects students in their social adjustment. Findings are shown in the next section. Participants who claimed themselves as outgoing reported that they adjusted themselves relatively fast and enjoyed themselves in the process of adjustment.

Pei regarded herself as a student who adjusted quickly. Despite the shock of her first impression about the geographical look of this midwestern city, Pei was surprised at how the university itself was different from the universities in China, including the different sorts of on-campus activities that international students can be involved in. Pei commented, "the more I stayed here, the more I started to like this place. And I think this place sort of grows on you (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016)".

However, there were participants reported themselves revealed different patterns of personality during their time in the US comparing to how they were like back in their home country. Different from Pei, Sadako's initial academic experience was overwhelming to her for different reasons. First is the amount of readings that she has to do in the first course that she took as a master student in the US. She read all of the readings but still found it difficult to answer the professor's questions in class and also joining the class discussions.

Sadako claimed herself being a person of “very socializing and outgoing in Japan” (Interview, December 14, 2016), but unfortunately fell into the common stereotypes of Asian students being reticent and silent upon her arrival in the US.

I think I still remember that one day, I was asked [about] something, and he [the professor] wanted me to say something from the Japanese point of view. And I got stuck, I got silent, and I couldn't say anything, and I felt I was dumb ((giggled)). Something like that. And that happened [a] couple of times in my first semester. And when I compare studying here to studying in Australia, the teaching style and education systems are still different, so it took me a little bit to get used to the American way [of teaching] (Sadako, Interview, December 2016).

In this excerpt, the participant described her difficulty in answering spontaneous questions and joining the classroom discussions. Having most of her education in Japan and having studied in Australia for one year, Sadako felt uneasy and difficult to express herself in class, and she struggled in participating classroom discussions. The taste of “failure” had devastating effects particularly on the participants' perception of herself.

Though Sadako had many years of English study in Japan, and studied in an English-speaking country like Australia, her difficulty in communicating her ideas to the class resulted in herself putting all the blame of being reticent to her being “dumb”. It is clear that experiences like this led to profound loss of confidence and the feeling of not worthy for international students.

Cheng (2000) argued that it is dangerous to overgeneralize Asian students, and in defining Asian students are being reticent. The fact is that Asian students have an even stronger

desire to participate in classroom activities than their American counterparts. If students are observed to be quiet, it may be “culturally pre-set” rather than being not motivated.

I agree that the evidence presented by Cheng’s article, and some of the evidence coincide with the findings of this dissertation. First of all, interaction is unique to each classroom, therefore it is impossible “to identify a shared learning behavior of a number of groups of people who range over a wide geographical and cultural landscape” (Cheng, 2000, p. 438). This dissertation illustrates that besides the internal differences within individuals, the external factors, such as the composition of student population in each class, students’ demographic information, and how diverse the campus is affected students’ initial perception of the US campuses, which results in international students react differently, and showcase different personalities and participation in classrooms.

### ***Group Work Challenges***

How students engage in group work varies widely, and it is related to their personal history, background, and cultural differences. In the case of Yonah, her challenge comes from the group projects and the adjustments to the American individualism vs. collectivism in Korea. Yonah came to the US in 2008 while the epidemic of East Asian students studying abroad was not as popular as present, especially in the Midwest She reported in the interviews that there were not many students that came from East Asian countries at that time. In fact, she pointed out that there were also not many African American students, nor other minorities, meaning that Candi City, where this research is conducted, was a very white dominant town.

During my informal conversations with Pei, I reconfirmed this piece of information with her as well. Pei came to the US in 2007, and she reported similar information. During the earlier time when both of them came to the university, most of the students and professors in the classes

were white. Therefore, coming from East Asian countries where they (we) speak different languages from English, though like Pei, Yonah claimed herself as a “very outgoing” (Yonah, Interview, January 2017) person, she stressed that her past experience in US as an international student was “definitely hard” (Yonah, Interview, January 2017).

Yonah described her feelings as overwhelming because of the differences between US and Korea. Although she was strong-willed, she recalled several difficult and challenging situations, not only in the class, but also “wherever you (she) go (es)” (Yonah, Interview, January 2017). To be specific, academically, Yonah mentioned her biggest challenge was conducting presentations and group work in class.

Group work, as a popular collaboration among students, is promoted in most classrooms in the US (Burdett & Hastie, 2009). Researchers have explored the complicated relationships between the perceptions of reticence of Asian students and the nature of group work itself requires in the US classrooms, and acknowledged that students coming from a different culture need to make certain adjustments in order to succeed in group work in the US classrooms (Jone, 1999; Yang 2010).

As in the previous research study, participants in this study reported group work and group discussions in English were difficult for them. Yonah elaborated her struggle in group discussions and its relationship to her home culture.

... I was so nervous. Speaking, I mean, presenting something in English that was so hard. And, what else ... what else ... eh ... depends [on] the class, when professor, for example, when we have a discussion, you know, you have to read, and then you will have the big group discussion. So, you know, English is not my language, and also, I'm not ...

I'm not speaking aloud in front of people. You know, I'm a woman, in Korea, in our Asian culture, you should be quiet, you know? (Yonah, Interview, January 24, 2017).

When it comes to the analysis of participants' responses like this, previous researchers were largely focused on the uneasiness of second language speakers of English in academic settings. To be able to operationalize students' response and make use of it, I would like to push forward on the reflections of the response from the participants. This response coincides with the central questions Norton (1997) pointed out: Under what conditions do language speakers speak?

More questions come along with this one for language teachers, educators to ruminate: How can we facilitate interactions between language learners and the target language speakers? And how can we try to help language learners avoid shutting down in the communication with the target language community? On appearance, this excerpt seems like it is just an Asian female student being silent in class. However, it comes from the deeper sociocultural background of the participants, the expectations of females in certain culture, and how participants view themselves in accordance to the current circumstances, thus affect how they act.

As in most East Asian cultures, females are expected to be quiet, gentle, and obedient. Therefore, presenting oneself and speaking up in public settings are not suggested or encouraged under this cultural influence. How Koreans in Korean society talk about what it means to be a woman: what is thinkable, what is sayable at any one time. What does being a woman means in this society? And how about in America? There is a geographical change of the participant. Similar findings also showed when participants report their social challenges.

In the excerpt, speaking and presenting in English was another issue that Yonah focused on, as she also specifically mentioned that English is NOT HER language. Norton (1997) illustrated the relationship among language, identity, and the ownership of English. Norton

touched upon the issue of whether English belongs to the white native speakers of Standard English or to all the people who speak it, irrespective of linguistic and sociocultural history. From Yonah's response above, the ownership of English is directly linked to who they identify themselves are, and how they construct and negotiate their identity within a society. Meaning that she clearly identifies herself as a native Korean "whose language" is Korean, and she sees herself as an insider of "our culture," rather than the American culture.

Meanwhile, despite the previous research on students' problems in group work largely focused on how international students' language proficiency affects the outcome of group work (Yang, 2010; Gao, 2014), participants in this study reported their problem with group work places more on what kind of learning style they were accustomed to. Since all of the participants had their undergraduate study from an East Asian university, many of them are used to the "one-way teaching in Asian countries" (Yonah, Interview, January 2017) rather than the traits that group work activities require: speaking, presenting and discussing with other classmates.

Besides, many of the group work tasks at graduate level in the school where this study is conducted require students to conduct a final presentation in front of the whole class. Unlike Americans students who feel very comfortable doing group presentations in front of the class, many international students feel intimidated and nerve-racking when it comes to group presentation. Yonah described the American students and professors feel "it is just natural" (Yonah, Interview, January 2017) to do a group presentation in graduate classes, and her observation of all other students is that they all seem confident.

However, as Yonah mentioned, she regards group presentations to be very serious business; and lacking previous experience of doing group presentation certainly did not help with the worries and nervousness that Yonah carried. Therefore, the participants in this study reported

that compared to having group presentation for their midterm or final exams, they prefer to write and submit papers in “old-fashioned ways” (Yonah, Interview, January 2017).

### *Difficulties in writing and presentations*

Though the participants claimed that they prefer writing papers, the different ways of writing in the US and back in their home country are still difficult for international students. To be specific, there are conventions of how to carry out a conversation in academic settings; and the same rule applies to writing. When English Language Learners (ELLs) write in academic settings, it is expected to follow the conventions in the academic genre. For example, how to use punctuation, how to start a new paragraph, how to do citations, so on and so forth, will depend on the genre. These are important aspects to know, and they are helpful for ELL students to improve their writing skills.

An additional academic challenge is a lack of professional development. Participants claimed that they did not received professional training on how to write a research project back in their home country. Pei recalled the difficulty that she experienced as an international student in terms of academic writing and making presentations.

I didn't even know how to make a PowerPoint presentation when I was in China. I learnt all of those when I came here, okay? From Scratch” (Pei, Interview, December 2017).

Here, the participants described the different ways of academic writing and presenting research projects as graduate students. Different from undergraduate students studying abroad in the US educational programs, graduate students have their different requirements in academia. For example, making research presentations, participating in research activities and discussions. Many students who had their undergraduate study in an East Asian country have not encountered experiences related to research in a Western context before they come to the US Therefore, there

is a significant gap in their transition from their undergraduate study to graduate programs in the US.

In a different aspect, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) evolved from the situation where traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) was largely focused on reproducing the text materials instead of using English in various context. For example, writing emails to professors, note-taking skills in lectures; therefore, when students are in the situation of professional writing or public speaking, they are unable to use the language (Chand & Chaudhary, 2015). This also calls for more support and instructions on academic writing, research skills, techniques on how to prepare for presentations. Suggestions including provide workshops, seminars for international students in graduate programs in the US in order to ease their transition and accommodate their needs during their study in the US. More suggestions will be listed in the implications of this research.

Additionally, what makes this transition at the graduate level more complicated is the different ways of writing and how their home culture plays a part in this. The graph below illustrates an example of how the American way of thinking and writing differs from the Chinese perspective.

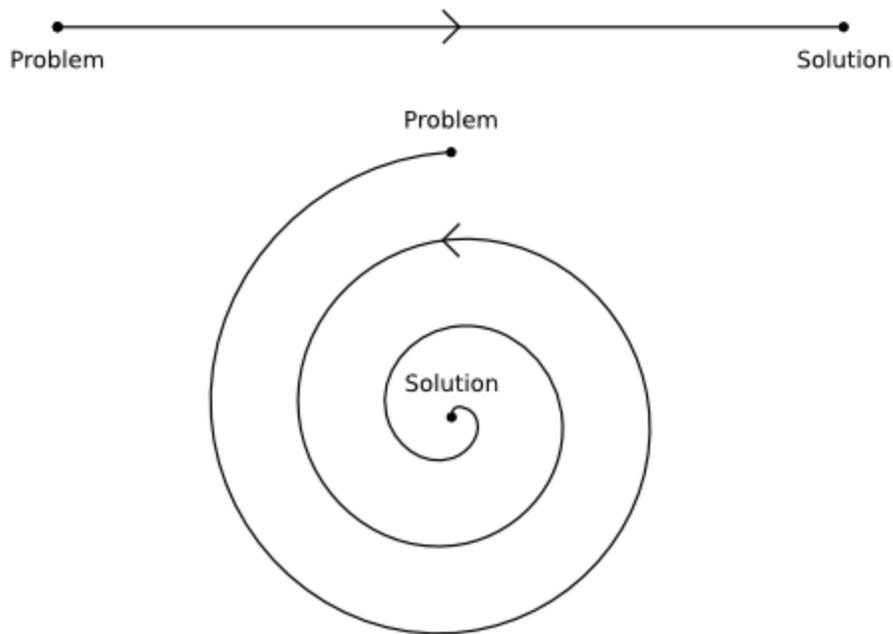


Figure 6 Different ways of problem-solving

Like the graph illustrates, the Chinese mindset has a peculiar way of thinking in the problem-solving process versus the Western ways. The Western way, which is illustrated on the top as a direct line, is more focused and goal-oriented. Comparing to the Western ways of thinking, the Chinese approach loops around the solution until the final solution is obtained (dot in the center) (Cai & Nie, 2007). Pei reported how the Chinese way of thinking impacted her academic writing:

So, the Chinese way of writing a good essay is to embed your good thoughts or critical thinking in the lines in-between, you know, like it is within the words, but you do not say them directly. You know, you don't want to expose your very important part of thinking until the very last of the passage, okay? Here, at American universities, I learnt to write a research paper, or final project, that you have to give very clear statements of your perspectives and your thoughts. And, to express your own statement, or your own critical

thinking skill in your research paper, that is really really important (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2017).

Pei's illustration on what is considered a good essay in China is evidently different from the criteria of a good essay in the US academic system. Therefore, students from a different background who experienced dissimilar past trainings from the host institutions need to meet the new expectations. And these current criteria need to be reached in order to survive and succeed in the unaccustomed academic environment. Casanave (2008) mentioned that "in the context of graduate study, it is during the master's degree where the transition from novice to expert begins to take place" (p. 84). The notion of academic writing practices that students brought from their prior academic learning background at the undergraduate level differs from the similar notion and socialization in the current graduate level's community of practice. Their writing, which is affected by previous learning patterns, does not help them to quickly grasp the new and different academic expectations in graduate programs (Andrade, 2008; Campbell & Li, 2008; Wong, 2004).

Another problem when it comes to academic writing is the use of target language for second language speakers of English. Since English is the primary language of instruction in the US academic system, second language speakers of English always encounter different problems in their academic writing, such as spelling and grammar. Sadako expressed her lack of confidence when it comes to academic writing and she resorted to reaching out to her husband (who is a native speaker of English) for proofreading.

### **Excerpt 3**

S: ...he corrected my grammatical errors. But, he doesn't change expressions or anything.

G: Do you feel that it is necessary?

S: Yes, I think so. Because I don't have enough confidence about my writing. And it's hard for me to describe things, uh, in English. Yea, first of all I have to understand the content of the articles, then, I have to understand [reflect upon] it. And I have to write things down. But it's hard for me to compose proper English sentences.

Research have problematized the notion of "proper English" (Canagarajah, 2012), and advocated practices like "translingual", "global English" which introduces new ways of looking at the use of English in a global context. However, participants reported what is considered "proper English" still resides in the decision of native English-speakers.

### ***Challenges in support and opportunities***

As far as opportunities and choices on American campuses, students reported that they had more choices of selecting majors, focuses and areas of interest; thus, they were able to explore their interests in the US higher education comparing to their home country. Pei, recalled her excitement about the different university systems between the US and China,

... the campus, the academia, the environment is a lot more liberal and open to students... if you want to take whatever class you are interested in, you are welcome to... But in China, it is very different ... if I'm an English major ... I'm interested in Business English, I want to go study in a different department, I was not allowed. Also, not to mention, if I'm interested in Law, or would I [am] interested in Psychology, the teachers wouldn't even care about what you are interested in. You know, you've already chose your major, this is what you're gonna study for four years... but here (in the US) ... there're more options, more opportunities for the students to explore. So, I think that's the biggest difference that I feel (Pei, Interview, December, 2016).

As a result, the different opportunities between what the US education system and their home country provided motivated students to be very goal-oriented and willing to absorb all the new things upon their first arrival in the US. Pei claimed that she “was just absorbing all the new things, so I (she) was very motivated, goal-oriented” (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

Participants also reported some common challenges for students from the field of humanities and education; for example, the limited scholarships from the universities that they applied resulted in constant parental support. This limitation resulted not only stress and worries which significantly affect students’ academic performance, but also overlaps with the social challenges that brought to both the students and their families.

Though as various reports show that the US campuses provide many opportunities for international students (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2018), the participants in this study called for more opportunities. They acknowledged that there are many on-campus activities, but also pointed out that many adjustments were made by themselves while participating in these activities. To be specific, participants reported that coming from a different country and a different cultural background, sometimes they feel difficult to blend in with others while participating these activities, or they may have trouble in understanding the rules of certain activities. More importantly, based on their observation, the organizers of the events were also not aware of or being neglect of their situation.

Returning to international students’ academic challenges in a strict sense, research have shown that students from a different culture experienced difficulty in adjusting themselves in the US classroom participations (Miller, 1995). The participants from this study affirmed that the different ways of lecturing and interacting with students might cause some difficulties in adjusting but is also subjected to different individuals.

Above academic experiences showed that students had more choices of selecting majors, focuses, areas of interests; thus they were able to explore their interests in the US higher education comparing to their home country; different ways of lecturing and interacting with students requires many adjustments from the students. Besides challenges, these differences also motivated the students to be goal-oriented and willing to absorb all the new things. Students' motivation decreases with the years passing by. Reasons include: the fresh taste of new adventures faded away; the familiarity with the ways of doing in the US academia lead to boredom; lacking of support from professors.

Lastly, as international students might not only come to the US by themselves, instead, they came with their family members. When they are making decisions, they are not only making decisions for themselves, but also they have to include their family members. Yonah expressed her difficulties in balancing life and study when Yonah was asked about why she chose the university at the beginning, she responded.

And then I think for my son. I have to raise my sons, my two sons with me, and at the same time I have to study. So living here I think it's the safest place for them to go to school (Yonah, Interview, January 2017).

When Yonah was talking about her coming to the US with her two sons, she became very emotional.

I thought it was okay, because I came here, I came here, I was not that young, I was forty, so with my kids, so strong mother (giggling). As a strong mother, you have to survive wherever you go, right? Even it was very difficult situation in the class or wherever you go, it was hard, it was challenging, but I survived. But definitely it was hard (Yonah, interview, January 2017).

Though Yonah showed strong determination to start a new life in US with her two sons, the difficulties revealed not only in classes, but also in her social life. The social challenges faced by all participants are as followed.

### **Social challenges**

Social challenges among the participants include but not limited to: sense of belonging increased after having kids, more friends and access to the community; personal personality makes a difference in the speed of adjustment. From participants' social experiences, students who adjusted well in classrooms do not guarantee their social experience. All of the participants in the study found it remote to understand the different ways of thinking and talking with other Americans despite all of the participants have been in the US for at least seven years.

Participants reported that it is easier to interact with other students (both American and international) than people from outside of campus.

I think it was a little bit weird. Coz mainly those are senior Americans. You know, they are Americans. I think the way of their thinking and talking, is different from all the younger Americans and other international students that I have contacted here on campus (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

First of all, I didn't like them very much, haha. en...because...because my husband is like 10 years older than I am, and most of his friends...all of his friends are much older than I am. And what they talk about is very difficult to follow...in English (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

Because of the language, to me I still feel I am not collected with them (Yonah, Interview, May 4, 2017).

Participants reported they found conversations with people outside of campus were boring.

To me, their conversation [in church] was boring. And I even went to a few meetings.

But with all the other, like everybody looking at us would be very weird (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

I couldn't, like, follow what they were talking, and I couldn't say something like very nice, yea, occasionally. So, every time I went out with them, I felt like I was dumb. So that's why I didn't like to meet them, yea, haha, very much before (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

However, personal personality makes a difference in the speed of adjustment. All of the participants regard themselves as outgoing person, at least while they were residing in their home country.

Yeah, I don't think I have any difficulty of adjusting my life here. I think I'm a very easy, out-going person. So, I make friends quickly (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

I was very socialized and outgoing person in Japan, and, yea...I could be like that (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

So, at first I was very overwhelmed by different people different languages, so it was not easy if you're not outgoing person, if you're very introverted, and then not much social, it must be very hard. But fortunately, I'm very outgoing (Yonah, Interview, January 24, 2017).

At the same time, it is clear that the reason for adjustment comes from many deeper sociocultural differences. The following excerpt: Excerpt 4 serves as an example of Pei's experience.

**Excerpt 4**

P: We also explored churches ... I feel weird, you know, not just because we are young, and also, I'm an Asian looking, black hair, brown skin, and you know all other, you know, older people are white, and Caucasians, so it's a little bit strange for me.

G: How would you act in those settings?

P: I was very quiet... I would just listen to their conversation, about, like votes, you know, or community service, or they talk about some roads constructions. I will just nod my head, and you know, sort of be quiet, and just say hi and bye. So...I can't get into the conversation, I have no enjoyment, sometimes just no interest of what they are talking about, yeah, anyway.

G: And do you continue to go to those events?

P: If I have a choice of not going, I wouldn't go. (Pei, Interview, December 2016, emphasis added)

Though it is a very short excerpt, there are many different aspects to discuss. First is how an international East Asian student is portrayed, racial differences in the social context, and the reaction in the social settings in Western society. Though Pei claimed to be an outgoing person in the classroom, turning to the social setting made her become non-communicative. She became very quiet, and a passive listener in the conversation.

On the other hand, we can also reflect upon the topics that Americans talk about in certain settings and reflect how international students react and why they react passively in these settings. Coming from China and being married with a white husband here, Pei appeared to be an outsider in the social interaction, whereas her husband was comfortable. The self-silencing wasn't a choice; however, it comes from the sociocultural pressure exerted to the norms of having a different appearance in the social setting. In this specific social setting, the voice of the

participant being from a different ethnic/racial group was diminished. Pei's salience can also be a reflection of how minorities felt in the social climate like this, and how their self-construal defines their relationship with others in social settings.

What's more critical is as ESOL teachers and educators, we need to consider ways to prepare students for all kinds of settings. And even though we might be able to conquer the challenges in the classrooms, how about social settings? And how can we help students avoid shutting down completely in these conversations, especially because they are outside of the classroom? And how can we transform students from being an outsider in these conversations into insiders. Because in the end, the student just said that she will never go to those events any more. And how can we help with these kinds of situations?

Some suggestions will be given at the end of this dissertation from the perspective of a teacher, at the same time, from the data of this dissertation, it is shown that participants were able to go through their personal transformation from being silent and reticent to contribute to conversations and find the in-group sense of belonging.

When I was with them, because I couldn't follow what they were talking, and I couldn't say something like very nice, yea, occasionally. So, every time I went out with them, I felt like I was dumb. So that's why I didn't like to meet them very much before. Yes. And what they talk about is very difficult to follow...in English. So the topics they talk about are the topics which are difficult even in Japanese. So I felt like I was a little girl (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016, emphasis added).

They invite us to like dinner, and events, like Thanksgiving dinner. And gradually I'm getting to know them. And the more my English improved, the more I could say, so now

I can find some mutual topics, which we can talk about. So, right now, the things are better (Sadako, Interview, January 24, 2017, emphasis added).

I don't feel pressure, or I don't feel uncomfortable to meet them either, like I used to. Because I could understand them more, I could say about myself more (Sadako, Interview, March 24, 2017, emphasis added).

The data also shows “identity as a social construct”, how social identities interacts with other identities and help individual constantly “reconstructing” (Pavlenko, 2003) themselves in accordance with US culture. Students’ social status change with important notions of Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as they navigate among different intergroup relations. Longer duration of time and contact with the locale provided more opportunities for formed communities.

I think I gradually feel like in the past five to eight years, I feel like the more I stayed here, the more I started to like this place. And I think this place sort of grows on you, especially after I have kids. For my kids, they all have their friends to grow up with, and finally, you know, we have some families that are close to ours, friends, you know that, so you have your own little community. You feel like more belonging to here than before (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

It can be seen that the newly-formed communities improved international students’ socialization experience and sense of belonging. And in return, the improved socialization in return benefited international students to overcome some challenges in academics. Sadako stressed her confidence in speaking English and how her language skills improved significantly compared to when she solely stayed at home and did not have many people to talk to.

I need to talk every day, so that helped me a lot to improve my English I guess. So now I think it's the same kind of effect, I feel more confident in school as a student, because I know I could say many things, and in many different ways now than before. Because I have met many nice people here, and just interacting people make me feel much better and improved my English better (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

This socialization improvement also comes from her becoming an emerging teacher in the field of teaching Japanese, which will be presented in the next section of the challenges as emerging teachers in general.

### **Challenges as emerging teachers**

This section aims to explore the effect of native Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language teachers' beliefs and experiences on their teaching in the US, and to expose the perceptions, difficulties and challenges, that constructed the teaching experience of Graduate International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). In the literature, a number of studies have examined the lived experiences of graduate ITAs in US classrooms. The results of these studies show that the graduate ITAs face many challenges, including language inadequacy (Li, Mazer, & Ju, 2011), poor classroom management skills (Fitch & Morgan, 2003), cultural and social challenges (Bresnahan & Cai, 2000). Among these challenges, linguistic issues of language inadequacy has been studied exclusively (Zhou, 2009).

However, it is becoming more common for teachers of Chinese, Arabic, and other critical languages, to come to the US to teach their first language (Uzum, 2013). In this case, since the ITAs are teaching their native language, is language inadequacy still a challenge to them? What other challenges do they face? How does their previous language learning experiences impact their beliefs?

To understand these ITAs as language teachers, Language Teacher Identity (LTI) (Figure 4 in Chapter 2: Literature Review) made it clear that these attributes could not be seen atomistically but that it was the teacher's whole identity that was at play in the classroom. As this is a case study about East Asian international Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), while studying them, it is important to understand their perceptions and teaching practice as teachers. I asked the participants what their expectations as teachers are and what challenges that they have encountered as GTAs regarding their future career. For example, Pei mentioned that she "had trouble finding a job at college level (Interview, December 13, 2016), or explaining the target language grammar to students in English (Sadako); and strive to keep up two positions at the same time (Yonah).

Participants started the position for various reasons, including the financial support that the position of GTAs provide (Pei), the desire to work (Sadako), and the joyfulness and interactive opportunities that it provided (Yonah).

And very original reason I came to the department to teach Chinese is because the financial support that it can give me. Because if I teach here, I don't have to pay tuition. I don't have to give the financial burden to my parents, and I can make some pocket money, like that. So it's just decrease of pressure on the finance. And that was the very first purpose (Pei, Interview, December 12, 2016).

First, in short. I needed a job. Yea, I feel like I wanted worked. I wanted to work.

Because I have been working as a teacher for long time in Japan before I move to the States. And I hadn't work for two years, since I came here. And I really wanted to, like, how to say, wanted to have the life which I had in Japan. And more, I wanted be more active, I wanted be more involved the society, and I felt like staying at home as a kind of

housewife, it didn't suit me. And I needed to go out and meet people. So first of all, I gotta went back to school again. Yea, and then so I had an opportunity, yea, one of my Japanese friends told me, yea, there was a position. So, I thought that would be great (Sadako, Interview, December 20, 2016).

If I don't teach Korean language, my life would be very boring... this position because it makes my life more interactive with the students, you know? When you have interaction with the students, you feel like I'm learning from them as well, at the same time I'm learning, you know, what should I do better, to teach better? (Yonah, Interview, February 28, 2017).

This is an example of the interconnected nature of academic and social identities. Social identity encompasses academic identity, though it seems that participants vary in the reasons that they get into the position, they also overlap as time continues. Pei expressed similar feelings towards teaching Chinese as Yonah teaching Korean,

After a few years of teaching Chinese, I feel like, hey I actually enjoy this, you know, teaching the adults at college level. I feel there are more different interactions. Another reason is that, I guess when you are away from your mother country, you know, you are away from you culture, I think this is a way, to keep you connecting (Interview, Pei, December 13, 2016).

As far as challenges, Pei reported that there were no challenges for her in teaching, but more of a shock to herself while researching cultural materials for the students,

Before I came to United States, I have no idea about some part of the history that happen in China. Let's say the June 4th, okay? And Tiananmen Square thing, okay? I mean, we heard of it of course, when we were in China, but was very brief, you know. Historical

moment, like two-three sentences, in my high school history book. And mainly it was talking about the riots, you know, they said the students start the riots, you know, the police came and keep the peace, and you know, help the people. But then, when I came to United States, and I found that there are different voices to talk about the same thing, okay? And that really shocked me. So, I did, I remember there was a few months, you know, of the time, I was just binge reading a lot of books, and watching a lot of documentaries about the history in that time period. And I think I got more complete picture of what really happened (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

Though Pei did not provide explicit statement like “my challenge is that I am lacking of knowing the history of the target language culture” or “ I do not know enough about the culture to teach even though I am a native,” it can be seen that the position of serving as a GTA pushed her to accommodate the deficiencies that she discovered on herself. As Pei continued to elaborate,

While I was in China, I don't care about Spring Festival that much, I don't care about what is “Nian”, okay? But I came here, I start teaching Chinese, I feel like I have this responsibility, of introducing my own culture, to any people who are curious about my culture. So that helps me to understand more about my own culture. Okay, so I know Nian is actually a beast, you know, the reason we need to celebrate is we wanna scare it away. That's a culture connection, I would say, to help me understand my own culture. That while you are in the culture itself, you don't really care that much about it. This is the broad sense of helping myself making the connection (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

Sadako expressed her challenge was that even though she was teaching her native language, while teaching the language in class, explaining grammars are still in English, and she found it difficult to explain the grammar clearly to the students.

I have to study a little bit more, yea. I should be more professional. I need to, I need to, I need to, be capable to explain all of the grammatical points very clearly, and precisely, and very instantly. Yea, that's what I did when I was in Japan. Yea, so that's why, if I continue to do this job, I need to learn, like how to teach Japanese more (Sadako, Interview, December 20, 2016).

Grammar, and how to teach grammar to nonnative Japanese speakers. Yes, because I think teaching language, foreign language, like I need some skills, special skills, and this is my belief, foreign language should be taught systematically, and logically, yea, that's easier for nonnative learners (Sadako, Interview, February 20, 2017).

I knew how to teach a language, but Japanese is my native language, and I can speak and I can use it naturally. So I had never thought about the Japanese language logically and systematically. I enjoy teaching to college students, but at the same time I feel like I need to learn more about how to teach Japanese effectively. Because when students ask me some grammatical things, I sometimes can't explain exactly how it should be explained. Through my experience, when teachers explain things, it should be short, clear, and easy to follow. But to me, I have to explain one thing in many different ways, because I'm not quite sure which way is the best way to explain, so in that sense, I feel I need to learn, to spend a little bit time to do that (Sadako, Interview, March 7, 2017).

Majoring in TESOL, Nadako knows the language teaching methods. Being the native speaker of Japanese, she knows the language. However, when it comes to explain the grammar

of her native language, it is a combinational challenge of the knowledge of Japanese grammar, her English language proficiency, plus a very good understanding of working with American students on Japanese language learning. Though the TESOL curriculum could equip students with some knowledge about teaching the language, when it comes to ITA teaching their native language, much is to learn by the students themselves through time and experience.

It can also be seen that as a GTA, Sadako starts to consider what means to be professional in this position, and her perception of being professional as a Japanese language GTA relies on the capability of explaining grammar in English. As she compares to her experience of being an English teacher in Japan, that she could explain English language grammar to her students clearly, it can be seen that her understanding of being a language teacher in general is to be able to explain grammar to the students by freely using the language that the learners speak.

Besides, improving specific instructions like grammar, Sadako also mentioned that she wants to improve her teaching method professionally in general, and her challenge in understanding the students in the US.

I had education which was teacher-centered. And traditional way of learning, and memorizing and something like that, just translation, but since I studied TESOL course, and I learnt the Communicative Language Teaching, like I wanted to, right now, so my expectation of students' performance is based on what I did in Japan as a student and teacher. But I haven't figured out what kind of expectation college student have toward Japanese, like language learning, so I just don't know, I haven't known, what kind of balance, the communicative, and traditional, like the way of teaching. And how I should adopt, and what kind of strategy I should use to make learning Japanese fun, and also very effective. That's something I have been thinking about, because what I'm doing

right now is, just the traditional way of teaching, but they seem to like to have fun during the class. So, fun is right, but how can I, how can they learn, as well as having fun, so that's something I have been thinking (Sadako, Interview, December 13, 2016).

Lastly, as a GTA she also desires more interaction with the students and more time in preparation.

My class was interactive, and I interacted students a lot. But I think I need to have the students more interaction among students, not teacher-student, and student-student (Sadako, Interview, December 13, 2016).

I should spend more time to prepare for the class, lesson plan, and to create my own teaching plan (Sadako, Interview, February 20, 2017).

Yonah expressed resembling feelings as being a GTA and graduate student at the same time, her time is scarce.

The only problem is I don't have enough time, to teach them. You know what I mean? I only teach three hours a week. That's too short for me, because I have a lot of things to teach. But I only have three hours a week. And I don't want to spend extra time with them because I have to work on my dissertation (Yonah, Interview, February 13, 2017).

At same time, Yonah also mentioned that if she knows Korean linguistics better, it will help with her teaching, as all of the participants are from a TESOL background, instead of majoring in the field of target language.

But if I know more, I can teach better. If I study some Korean linguistics, probably that makes me a better teacher, but that's not my problem. My major was TESOL, so I have to study that for my degree (Yonah, Interview, February 20, 2017).

Lastly, for Yonah's case, since she kept two different GTA positions in both Korean language program in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and the online TESOL program in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, keeping two positions which both inquiring her to work more (meaning teaching two classes instead of one in each program), and she expressed her dilemma in the situation,

So, I was thinking, oh, what should I do, you know? That's my major, so I can't ignore the chance for working with the teachers, the actual public-school teachers getting ESOL endorsement through the online program. And also, at the same time, I don't want to lose this position because it makes my life more interactive with the students, you know? When you have interaction with the students, you feel like I'm learning from them as well, at the same time I'm learning, you know, what should I do better, to teach better? So, it's hard to keep two position, you know? Work at the same time, but I did it, because I want to learn more. I want to learn more from both sides. So GTA position is very, how do you say, sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's not. So, you always have to, try to learn something from that teaching experience. If you don't learn from that teaching experience, I think you will become less motivated, why should I do this, you know? And also, that give me better, makes me to write better resume? So, I can apply to the broader job market. So, I can apply for Korean teaching, or I can apply for the English language teaching. So, the teaching assistant position makes me more qualified for the job market later. So, it's good to teach both. So that's why I did, even though it was hard. And then the research fund end, so from last semester, I taught here for two classes (Yonah, Interview, February 13, 2017).

This excerpt deserves a close analysis on Yonah's teacher identity, and it is a good example of the idea that teacher identity evolves as the teacher interacts and negotiates with the students (Williams, 2011). Teacher identity is a crucial component in determining how language teaching is played out (Varghese, Morgan, & Johnson, 2005). Language teacher identity is associated with their beliefs, previous education background, their multicultural education knowledge, the cultural and socioeconomic policy that they are associated with, their own life, their interpersonal behavior, and how they see themselves in the teacher-student relationships (Sang, Valcke, van Braak, & Tondeur, 2009; You & Jia, 2008; Jeon & Hahn, 2006; Silver & Steele, 2005; Wu, 2004; Zhu, 2013; Kim and Pei, 2008). A study of teachers' identity is closely associated with their educational beliefs and their previous education background, etc.

Teacher identities are defined in this dissertation as how teacher's beliefs are related to the socioeconomic and geographical perspectives in the designated context, how teachers' educational beliefs, their culture background, their previous education background, the socioeconomic and geographical perspectives, and how they look at teacher-student relationship. It is seen that these attributes are related to each other and could not be seen atomistically but that it was the teacher's whole identity that was at play in the classroom.

From the excerpt, it first demonstrated Yonah's dilemma as a graduate student who is majoring in TESOL and working as a GTA who takes both positions in TESOL and Korean language program. As an international student herself, she really values the opportunities of working with the local teachers. As early as Liu (1998) mentioned that international TESOL students will return to their home countries to teach at some point, many students also have the desire of staying in the US after finishing their program (which is the case for all of the participants in this dissertation study).

While discussing the teacher identity and agency of these international TESOL students, their identity and agency is co-constructed with the interactions and engagement with the native speakers in professional contexts (Ilieva & Ravindran, 2018). Therefore, if Yonah has the intention of working in the US in the field of TESOL, the opportunity of working with public school ESOL teachers is extremely valuable.

In fact, it appears that the opportunities that the US institutions provide for international TESOL students vary (Cho, 2005), and international students have to compete with their native peers for opportunities like this. However, TESOL classes always require working with students who are interested in K-12 education in the US. International students like the participants do not have much experience in the US K-12 education. Besides, not teaching in the native language could always be harder in terms of delivering messages clearly and accurately to the students.

At the same time, from the responses of all three participants, it seems that as a foreign language GTA, they all enjoyed the interaction with American college students. Similar as Yonah, Pei commented on her impression of teaching Chinese in the US colleges,

After a few years of teaching Chinese, I feel like, hey I actually enjoy this, you know, teaching the adults at college level. I feel there are more different interactions (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

So, I enjoy teaching to college students, but at the same time I feel like I need to learn more, to how to teach Japanese effectively (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

Because I have met many nice people here, and also undergraduate students who are taking Japanese classes are very nice too, and just interacting people make me feel much better and improved my English better (Sadako, Interview, February 13, 2017).

My class was interactive, and I interacted students a lot. But I think I need to have the students more interaction among students, not teacher-student, and student-student (Sadako, Interview, March 1, 2017).

From the quotes of participants above, it is clear to see that all of the participants enjoy interacting with American college students, at the same time, they desire more interactions in different ways. Besides, as mentioned in the section of social challenges, the interaction with American college students by using English also improved the GTAs' confidence and given the GTAs more opportunities for speaking English. Therefore, we can say that for these international TESOL students teaching their native language to the English-speaking students, it is a reciprocal process as far as the language exchange, creating opportunities for interactions, and building up confidence. As Yonah mentioned in the excerpt, she was learning from them as well. The process of learning also encouraged the GTAs to improve their teaching and establishing their teacher identities as foreign language teachers in the US coming from a TESOL background.

Therefore, as difficult as it was for Yonah to maintain both positions in TESOL and teaching Korean, she continued until the research funding in TESOL ended, though she really valued the opportunity of learning from both positions and thinks ahead for her future career choices. Literature regarding career preparation tend to focus on how to prepare American students in an international society

It is clear to see that even though Yonah struggled to keep two GTA positions, she chose to maintain both positions, as she valued both the interaction with public school teachers in the ESOL endorsement program and the interaction with students learning Korean. On the other hand, the constant problem reveals that international students benefit universities in terms

economic, cultural, and academic aspects but are lacking support in not only academic life but also in social life.

### **Accommodations, Negotiations and Transformations**

This study finds that though cultural values continue to play a role in the difficulty for students' adjustment to the US, through self-initiation, support from family members and the local community, East Asian graduate students were able to make accommodations, negotiations, and transformations in dealing with these challenges. In return, these challenges impact their identity formation as students and social beings in the US. The study suggests a new understanding of East Asian graduate students based on the change and power shift in the sociopolitical environment.

The accommodations that the participants made in encountering these challenges include self-initiation in accommodating the situation, combination of self-effort and help from family members, and socializing with members in the community. These different aspects will be explained with examples in the following paragraphs.

This self-initiation refers to students make the initiation and accommodation by themselves when problems occur. As a Ph.D. student, Pei felt that she did not get enough help on the professional training and research skills from her home department.

Supposedly, if you are a Ph.D. student, you are gonna do research. However, you know, very sadly, I feel like all the past six years at my home department, I really think I don't [didn't] get any, like solid, professional training on that aspect. All of my trainings will be contributed to (the other) department. This is also because **I initiated the first step**, you know, **I went to the other department ask for help**, because I know that at

my home department, I cannot get help. You know, I did ask, but I cannot (Pei, interview, December 2016, emphasis added).

Besides studying more by the participants themselves, participants also reached out to their close family members for help.

So actually, like my husband helped me a little bit, but that's ... that's ... I don't know, I asked him to...to...do proofreading, but that's all I asked about him, but most of the time, I studied by myself in the first semester (Sadako, Interview, December 2016).

Though Sadako claimed that she had reached out to her husband, who is a native English speaker for proofreading on her writings, she asserted that the help from her husband was only on writing and grammar corrections. Thus, to be able to deal with her overwhelming experience in class, her choice is to study more by herself and try to understand everything before class.

To continue with Sadako's case, as semester goes, Sadako started to see changes in her third semester when she took another professor's class, which helped her tremendously in improving her English, consequently gave her more confidence. It was also Sadako's first time giving a one-hour presentation, which she described it as the "turning point" (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016). As a matter of fact, she took a good amount of time in preparation, though she was still very intimidated to present, she regarded herself doing very well. When Sadako recalled this experience, she commented,

I think I did very well, because I prepared a lot, and that experience gave me, how to say, made me think, and made me see things in a different way. It just gave me confident (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

Further implication of this will be presenting in the last chapter. In the meantime, it is necessary to critically reflect upon students' participation in class and its effect on students'

confidence. From Sadako's comment, it is not only the overall evaluation of the presentation that was very positive, but also she spent a great deal of time in the process of preparation, she expected and desire the presentation to be successful. As a result, the turnout was rewarding to her. Despite her negative experience from her past participation in class, this experience made her think and see herself and her participation in class from a different perspective. It is more of a feeling of "I can do this! I can do it!"

It can be seen that when students are given the opportunity to present and the time to prepare, the experience itself could flip students' impression about themselves and how they can participate in class. This is helpful to teachers, educators, professors who are working with international students from different backgrounds, as this is closely linked to their identity construction as well. Kamara (2017) conducted a qualitative study on international students' social and academic interactions and found out that these interactions are not only mediums for acquiring sociocultural and academic norms, but also stages for expressing identities (p. 7). The result shows that when language competency affects their ability to present their identity, they either choose to withdraw these interactions or reclaim their power of expressing.

Straker (2016) published a study in the *Journal of Studies in International Education* suggesting that when it comes to international students' participation in higher education, we should change the focus from "international students" to "participation" and called for a holistic view on participation in educational contexts. All these literature provided great theoretical support for understanding international students and their participation. However, when the reality comes to international students participating in an English-medium institution where learning and teaching practices are predominantly conducted, what should educators do? And how do we make sure that international students are participating on an equal basis as the local

students? For Sadako's case, and same as most classes that international graduate students attend, it is certain that these classes are not offered only for international students. It is evident that the first approach from Sadako's case was providing the opportunity.

As a researcher, I try to dig deeper into what deep down Sadako really feels differently between the semester which she sees changes, differences, and things are getting better, and the previous semester when her experience was not very positive. Sadako confirmed that there is a clear difference between these two semesters and how she sees things,

If I think I'm good enough, I can do things very well. But if I don't see, and I'm not quite sure what I'm doing and I cannot, I don't do things very well. And also, what else, there are 18 students in Dr. Cho's class: Identity and Language. And they are very interesting people, from different countries, and they are very good students, and good listeners, and somehow I felt I found a place I could be... I could be... I contributed, a little bit to the class, and something like that, kind of feeling made me change a little bit, I think (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

In other words, she confirmed that confidence makes a difference as mentioned. Then she commented that the composition of student population in the class weighs as well. And when students are in such a diverse classroom environment where they feel free to share their ideas and contribute to the classroom discussions. I reconfirmed with Sadako that besides she sees herself differently in these two semesters, she also feels that the class environment was different.

As mentioned in the literature review, Morita's (2004) multiple case study on L2 learners' academic discourse experience has been influencing my research and study; and Lave & Wenger's (1991) "community of practice" has always been very useful in analyzing the experience of L2 learner's participation in classrooms. Morita's study pointed out it is necessary

for the learners to “be recognized as legitimate and competent members of their classroom communities (p. 573)”.

From the analysis above for Sadako’s case, it can be seen that the major challenge was to negotiate her competence and identities thus she could participate in classroom discussions (from being silent, the transformation of succeeding in presentation, to actively participate). Her story exemplifies that positive experience will transform students from being silent and feeling incompetent to feeling valued and validated, and recognized as a legitimate competent member of a classroom community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Morita, 2004).

Participants were also able to enhance understanding through socialization experience. Coming from Korea and having her classmates as in-service teachers in the US, Yonah found herself being lacked the knowledge and experience about US education led her not being able to build relationships with American students in class. However, as a mother of two sons and a faithful Korean Christian who determines to go to American church only, her understanding and experience about education in US was enriched through socializing with other American children’s parents who go to the same church.

I ask questions to my friends, and then I got a hint, and then, oh yeah, they [the Korean and education systems] are so different. And then I’m learning, the new ways of their doing at school, not just learning something in the classroom. I learnt so many things about American school systems by life, you know, by living with my sons (Yonah, Interview, January 2017).

Yonah’s understanding and experiences of America was enriched through raising her sons in America and socializing with the other children’s parents. For other participants, as TESOL students, they also developed better understanding about their own culture, and more

responsibilities were cultivated for them as teachers to show and represent the different aspects of culture in their teaching.

And I think I got more complete picture of what really happened in China after I came to the US. So, I think it's connecting me and my own country, me and my own country's history, and m and my own country's culture. I think these are really important for me to find myself in a way. And this seems also very important to share, you know, I share what I found with my husband, maybe in the future I can share that with my kids, and also share that part with my friends in China, who have no idea what really happened during that period of time. So basically, I think, looking at your own culture and your own country from another angle, another perspective will help you, will deepen your understanding of your own country (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

Reading, connecting with their own country's history and culture from a Western perspective really helped the participant to find herself. And Pei stressed the word "sharing" for a couple of times, as she developed a responsibility to deliver the message and represent the culture to others and throughout her foreign language teaching.

To deal with the challenges as emerging teachers, from the data we can see that these international TESOL students' innovation and improvisation in foreign language teaching. Participants reported that many of the foreign language teachers may not come from a background of language teaching, as many of them have a background of linguistics, or foreign language literature; the joining of TESOL students brought the language teaching knowledge that they possess into the field of foreign language teaching and helped other foreign language teachers improve their teaching and curriculum. The TESOL graduate students improvised in the

field of foreign language teaching, as coming from a TESOL background, there are also adaptations and changes they need to make in order to play with the environment.

I think my deepest feeling about teaching Chinese is it helps me as a learner. Especially for my master's degree was teaching English, I have a comparison. I feel like coz teaching English as a second language, there are whole sets of theories, practicums, lots of research, you know, like teaching strategies, teaching methods, you know, all surrounded by one that topic. But at the same time, just talking about United States, okay? When people are talking about teaching Chinese, which is very different language from English, totally different. They belong to the different groups of the language. People here mainly are still using the same method that you teach English to teach Chinese, which I have a very strong feeling that I don't think everything work for English will work for Chinese. That's what I think I'm still exploring. I want to do research about that (Pei, Interview, December 13, 2016).

The data also showed how TESOL graduate students utilize the knowledge that they learnt from TESOL courses during graduate study into the teaching of foreign language. And how TESOL students bring their expertise and background from TESOL into the field of foreign language teaching. The international TESOL graduate students utilized the knowledge they learnt in graduate TESOL courses and helped improve the field of foreign language teaching.

But since I studied TESOL course, and I learnt the Communicative Language Teaching, like I wanted to, right now, so my expectation of students' performance is based on what I did in Japan as a student and teacher. But I haven't figured out what kind of expectation college student have toward Japanese, like language learning, so I just don't know, I haven't known, what kind of balance, the communicative, and traditional, like the way of

teaching. And how I should adopt, and what kind of strategy I should use to make learning Japanese fun, and also very effective. That's something I have been thinking about, because what I'm doing right now is, just the traditional way of teaching, but they seem to like to have fun during the class. So, fun is right, but how can I, how can they learn, as well as having fun, so that's something I have been thinking (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

Lastly, participants reported that they were able to use some of the content that they learnt in TESOL courses into their foreign language classrooms. For example, in English for Academic Purposes classes, students learnt the use of authentic materials. Through the TESOL courses, not only students were able to have a better understanding about authentic materials, but also, they were able to select materials for their foreign language classes. For example, using road signs in the target language while teaching the unit on transportation; showing students pictures of real business card while talking about courtesy, etc.

### **Identity Formation**

I conducted a graphic model (Graph 2: International Student Identity (ISI)) for analysis before gathering the data to answer this last research question: How do these challenges impact East Asian GTAs' identity formation? The analysis adopts the understanding of identity as "identity-making as a communicational practice" (Hall, 1996). Seeing identity as being or having (Sfard & Prusak, 2007), the qualitative data were coded to generate themes.

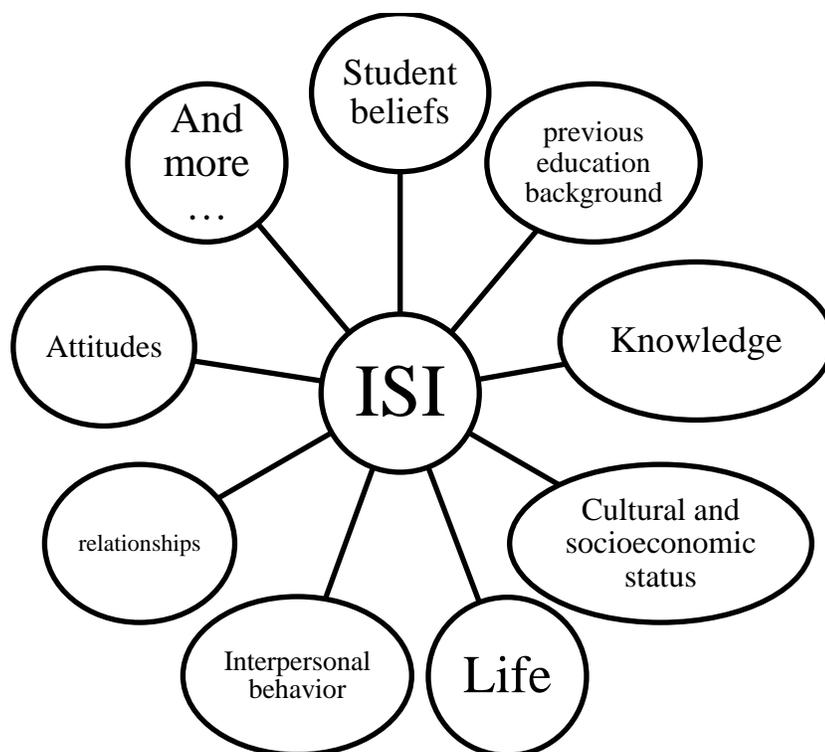


Figure 7 International Student Identity

Rosenberg (1997) proposed the idea of “multiplicity of selves,” which concerns “how these selves are related to one another” (p. 25). In other words, all the different bubbles in the graph above are related to one another. Projecting to the political context (Fine & Sirin, 2007), change and power shift in the sociopolitical environment suggest a new understanding of international students. The larger social context calls for inclusive education across institutions (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013).

...before I came to United States, I have no idea about some part of the history that happen in China...but then, when I came to United States, and I found that there are different voices to talk about the same thing, And that really shocked me...I remember there was a few months... I was just binge reading a lot of books, and watching a lot of documentaries about the history in that time period (in China). And I think I got more complete picture of what really happened. So, I think it's connecting me and my own

country, me and my own country's history, and me and my own country's culture. I think these are really important for me to find myself in a way. And this seems also very important to share, you know, I share what I found with my husband, maybe in the future I can share that with my kids, and also share that part with my friends in China, who have no idea what really happened during that period of time. So basically I think, looking at your own culture and your own country from another angle, another perspective will help you, will deepen your understanding of your own country (Pei, Interview, 2016).

Relating this to my own experience: before I came to the US and started school, took a position to tutor Chinese history for athletic students. While reading the course materials for the class, I discovered the Western ways of depicting the Chinese history are from completely different angles comparing to the Chinese way in the Chinese textbooks. For example, when authors and scholars talk about Chinese history, they start with the folklores of ghost and all that, which was not in my history textbook in schools in China, and it was fascinating to me.

Therefore, coming to the US and reading and knowing my history from a different perspective was eye-opening to me, and enabled me to know more about the history and culture of my country from different perspectives. Things like this taught me to think about things from different perspectives. This is also an exemplification of the crossroads of culture, and how these crossroads help people deepen their understanding about the different languages and cultures.

And I think this place sort of grow on you, especially after I have kids. Kids, they all have their friends to grow up with, and finally, you know, we have some families that are close to ours, friends, you know that, so you have your own little community. You feel like more belonging to here than before (Pei, Interview, December 2016).

As an international student who came from China 11 years ago, Pei was shocked at the differences between universities here and in China, and the different ways that professors interact with students. However, Pei's identity as a single international student was transformed into an immigrant children's mother who found her new place in this new community.

This new community is neither the one that Pei grew up with in China, which was distinctly different from the US; nor the community that Pei was heavily shocked when she first came here as an international student; it is this third space where she was able to build new relationships and make new conversations. The journey of getting into this third space is also a path of Pei's self-transformation, creating her sense of belonging. For Pei, this new space comes from long time of contact with local friends, families and communities.

As shown in response to the second research question, Yonah's lacking knowledge about the American education system resulted her silence in classrooms. However, her knowledge was enriched through socializing with the other parents whose children go to the same school with hers. This socialization does not require Yonah to be at the same level with Americans on the understanding about American education systems, it does not leave her only knowing Korean education rather than the US education either. Through this socialization, Yonah built up her own understanding about US education systems, and the different ways of doing at school.

Participants were also able to conduct identity transformation through teaching, ...actually, after I started to teach Japanese here, I, my confidence in terms of speaking English I think improved a lot. Because before I started to teach, I didn't go out, yea, most of the time, I stayed at home, study, or did housework. But since I started to teach, I just came to campus every day, to meet people and I need to talk every day, so that helped me a lot to improve my English I guess. So now I think it's the same kind of

effect, I feel more confident in school as a student, because I know I could say many things, and in many different ways now than before (Nadako, Interview, December 2016).

As an international student in the US, Sadako was overwhelmed and found it difficult to answer questions in English in class. Besides, she was also troubled by not being able to make the best use of her experience as a teacher back in Japan. Her nervousness and pressure as an international student were greatly changed since she became a teaching assistant in Japanese, and her desire of being a teacher in the US emerged from her experience. As her new identity as a teacher in the US requires her interacting with students tremendously, this experience helped ease her tension as a student in some way. This new identity as a teaching assistant in the US enable her different identities in a dialogical manner, created a new space which was able to bridge the gap between being an international student and an emerging teacher.

Previous sections tackled this group of East Asian International Graduate Teaching Assistants on their teacher perception, teaching practice, expectations, and challenges, and provided the story of how they came to their position. To answer the third research question, I also asked the participants what do they envision about their future?

All of the participants have the intention of staying at the US college level teaching their native language as a foreign language (two of them already are teaching at universities in other states in the US when this dissertation is completed). And all of the participants enjoy their teaching and do not have the intention of going back to their country in the time being,

While conducting interviews with Pei, she was applying for different positions of Chinese lecturers, assistant professors at different universities in the US, as she really enjoys

teaching adults Chinese. Sadako demonstrated an indecisive attitude towards teaching Japanese after finishing her GTA time in the department,

because job market is so small. Yea, and so, if I teach, how to say, if I continue to teach Japanese as a profession, I have to study a little bit more, yea. I should be more professional. I need to, I need to, I need to, be capable to explain all of the grammatical points very clearly, and precisely, and very instantly. Yea, that's what I did when I was in Japan. Yea, so that's why, if I continue to do this job, I need to learn, like how to teach Japanese more (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

Besides realizing the size of job market, through the experience of being a GTA, Sadako was also able to understand what being professional means in the field of foreign language teaching. This not only enabled her to realize the areas that she needs to improve on if she wishes to continue with this profession, upon her realization of areas of improvement, as an emerging teacher in a foreign country (the US referring to Sadako), since she had previous teaching experience in her home country, she was also able to compare her teaching here in the US with her teaching in her home country.

Sadako continued to explain her understanding of what being professional means in terms of teaching Japanese,

grammar, and how to teach grammar to nonnative Japanese speakers. Yes, because I think teaching language, foreign language, like I need some skills, special skills, and this is my belief, foreign language should be taught systematically, and logically, yea, that's easier to nonnative learners. Besides, I had education which was teacher-centered. And traditional way of learning, and memorizing and something like that, just translation, but since I studied TESOL course, and I learnt the Communicative Language Teaching, like I

wanted to, right now, so my expectation of students' performance is based on what I did in Japan as a student and teacher. But I haven't figured out what kind of expectation college student have toward Japanese, like language learning, so I just don't know, I haven't known, what kind of balance, the communicative, and traditional, like the way of teaching. And how I should adopt, and what kind of strategy I should use to make learning Japanese fun, and also very effective. That's something I have been thinking about, because what I'm doing right now is, just the traditional way of teaching, but they seem to like to have fun (pointing to some other Japanese teacher's office) during the class. (Chuckle). So, fun is right, but how can I, how can they learn, as well as having fun (chuckle), so (chuckle) that's something I have been thinking (Sadako, Interview, December 14, 2016).

From the excerpt, it can be seen that there is a gap between the experience and knowledge of the language teacher's teaching, and how classroom teaching should be carried out. And as an emerging teacher, Sadako started to establish goals and objectives for her own teaching standards and expectations towards students based on the US context. However, Sadako mentioned that she does not think that she will teach Japanese after graduation,

I was an EFL teacher in Japan, so that's why I'm taking TESOL class. So, I came back to school again, because, I want to help immigrant people, how to say, because they came to the States, to start their life again, and I wanted to do something like, I wanted to do the job which helps those people. Like, it could be, maybe language assistant, language teacher to help them study English (Sadako, Interview, December 13, 2016).

Sadako's career choice is clearly based on her experience as an immigrant to the States, which is also related to how she categorizes the stages of her life as followed,

Because I'm old enough, and I have already, this is kind of my "third life", "third stage" or something. Just like first stage is just from the graduation of the university, the second stage ...yea, I have some stages, like, I'm not thinking about working hard, like I used to do as a teacher, and I feel like I've had enough. Like enough working already. So, I'm not seriously thinking about having another career, just kind of, teaching part-time would be good for me (Sadako, Interview, December 13, 2016).

Lastly, for Yonah, besides her currently taking a position in teaching Korean in another state, her comments on her identity and her children's identity is worthy of presenting and would be a good closer for this chapter.

"[The kids'] their identities are changing. But my identity does not change. But their identities are more like Americanized. But my identity not gonna EVER EVER Americanized. I mean, a little bit. But I came here, you know, very late. I came here at 40, but they came here at 10. So, it's big difference. So, the class I took in School of Education actually really helped me to how to raise my sons in this context, in this American society. I'm culturally Korean. I mean, my sons are teens. So, they are making their identity. So, my identity is already fixed. I try to, I mean, I kind of try to assimilate to American friends and American culture, that means what, kind of middle-class culture. But I can see the difference between Korean culture and American culture. And then, they are so different. It's kind of impossible to embrace everything together, because I was born and raised in South Korea" (Yonah, Interview, April 29, 2017)

The next chapter will address the underlying themes regarding L2 academic identity, social identity, and teacher identity. The broad categories of themes with important notions as

Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), language and power shift between different contexts, identity as a social construct, and identity transformations will be further discussed.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

What we meant by unity is the union in a particular person in a particular place  
and time of all that the person has been an undergone in the past  
and in the past of the tradition which helped to shape the person ...  
(Connelly & Clandinin, 1987, p. 131)

I especially enjoyed Bauman (2004)'s book on *identity*. In the introduction, Benedetto Vecchi described "as the material he provided began to build up, I became increasingly aware that I had entered a much larger continent than I had previously expected and one whose maps were almost useless when it came to finding directions." The more I read and write about East Asian Graduate Teaching Assistants' experience, the more I feel that there are stories to be told, and writing these stories out can assist teachers, administrators to consider these emerging teachers' practices in context.

Before I go into the details on the discussion of identities of the individuals, I still want to emphasize the context-dependent view on identity research (Ewing, 1990). It is vital that we understand identity as multiple, intersecting, and complex as the conceptual framework that I defined in Chapter 2. The complex nature of identities enables the proposition that identities may shift rapidly, as Ewing (1990) mentioned,

At any particular moment a person usually experiences his or her articulated self as a symbolic, timeless whole, but this self may quickly be displaced by another, quite different 'self', which is based on a different definition of the *situation*. The person will often be unaware of these shifts and inconsistencies and may experience wholeness and continuity despite their presence (p. 251, emphasis added).

The participants have experienced identity development and identity negotiation on an individual basis. It is faulty to assume that international students go through the same identity development and negotiation, and this highlighted the importance of conducting qualitative

research like this to expose the individual experiences that participants go through. In the meantime, based on the analysis, there are commonalities among participants' shared institutionally recognized identities as mentioned in the findings.

Coming from the postmodernist framework that I built: *Multiple Identities as Intersecting and Complex*, this dissertation reinforced the existence of multiple identities. Previous research have identified teaching assistants coming from an international background having at least two identities, the identity of being a teacher and a student (Jenkins, 2000). This dissertation rejected the idea of limiting identities of GTAs inside academia, extended and further pushed the exploration of individuals' identities in the social context.

To understand identities and its deeper meanings, and referring to the understanding that academic identity and teacher identity are deeply rooted in social identities (Norton, 1997, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2011), it is important to acknowledge that each individual has its own unique and different experiences, various encountering, thus different social identification of roles. From this dissertation, participants have not only presented their institutionally recognized identities inside academia as being a graduate student, an emerging teacher, researcher and scholar, but also placed a significant amount of attention on their social experience, and strengthened the importance of being a family member, a wife in an interracial marriage, a mom of two Asian immigrant children; and shared their struggles and negotiation of these social identities while trying to function their institutionally recognized identities. A list of participants' shared institutionally recognized identities and social identities are listed in the Table 4.

Table 4 Participants' shared institutionally recognized identities and social identities

<b>Shared institutionally recognized identities</b>	<b>Participants' specific social identities</b>
Graduate student	International students
International student	University instructors
Graduate teaching assistant	Daughters of parents residing abroad
International graduate teaching assistant	Moms of immigrant children (P&Y)
Emerging teacher	Wives in interracial marriages (P&S)
Emerging researcher and scholar	Freelancer (P) religious believer (Y)...
...	...

The shared identities are commonly researched in the fields of graduate students, international students, ITAs, etc. As shown in the last chapter, these participants coming from different places demonstrated different beliefs, and hold different values and attitudes towards learning, living and teaching. The findings showed how participants bring their own beliefs, values, and attitudes into their experiences as international students in the US academia, society, and their new teaching career.

The findings on the participants' experiences challenged the predominant assumptions on international students' identities as homogenous; instead, as shown, participants' multiple identities as emerging teachers, family members, and other various social identities are recognized. Sueda (2014) mentioned in her book regarding negotiating multiple identities, that individual has many role identities that are loosely yet hierarchically ordered depending on

prominence (p. 3). And participants in this study demonstrated that their social identities (being a mother, a wife, etc.) comes before their institutionally recognized identities.

The rationale of understanding this hierarchy of identity comes from the conception of identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), that these three participants are positioned by familial, social and cultural understandings, and their education and social experience shape their identities as well. This hierarchy contributed to the aim of the study, as it is to understand the multiplicities, intersectionality and complexities of identities.

This study investigated various aspects of East Asian GTAs' identity negotiation based on a small group of people. As a GTA myself, I aimed to provide some insider perspectives. In general, participants demonstrated positive attitudes about their experience. Most participants were able to go through their personal transformations from being silent and intimidated to feeling valued and validated by others both in the classes that they take or teach, and the social context that they are situated in.

### **Academic Challenges and Academic Identity**

Participants desired for more academic writing and research support and expressed their uncertainty and difficulty in creating desirable social relationships in different settings. However, they generally demonstrated good student-student and student-professor relationships. It can be seen that international students face many challenges, and a large portion of dealing with these challenges is solely by themselves. Though they were able to see help from their peers and family members, they were the ones who initiated to ask for help.

### **The Case of Sadako: Language use and personal validation**

...there are 18 students in Dr. C's class. And they are very interesting people, from different countries, and they are very good students, and good listeners, and somehow I

felt I found a place I could be... I could be... I contributed, a little bit to the class, and something like that, kind of feeling made me change a little bit, I think (Sadako, Interview, February 23, 2017).

Here is the case where Sadako went through this personal transformation from being a silent student in class to being able to feel valued and validated. It traced back to Norton's central question: Under what conditions do language speakers speak? How can we encourage language learners to become more communicatively competent? It seems that different class environment contributes, and international students need to feel validated in the settings, no matter it is classroom environment, or the social settings as shown in the last chapter. The sense of belonging triggers international student to contribute and voice themselves in these settings. And in return, this process of personal validation resulted in the personal identification of a member in the community.

This personal validation also comes from the power dynamic shift between different settings. From the findings, in the classes that Sadako takes as a student in the School of Education, she found it difficult to answer spontaneous questions in her classes. And when she was asked to explain something in English, she would get stuck and felt that she was dumb. However, the power dynamics shifted in the classes that she teaches,

... Japanese is my native language, so I could be very confident to teach my language to the students. Because although I cannot explain the grammatical points very clearly at the moment, but what I say is, 100% CORRECT. So that kind of makes me feel very, like how to say, easy. And that gives me some strength, so that's like an advantage for me (Sadako, Interview, December 2016).

East Asian GTAs regard teaching their native language as an advantage to them. This advantage comes from being native speakers of the language, which brings them power, and makes them feel that they are valued. As Sadako is a native speaker of Japanese, in the classes that she teaches, as a native speaker, she claimed what she says is 100% correct, and that gives her strength and advantage.

Through examining the language use of the participants, it can be seen that their language use appears in different forms. Whether it appears as a form of “silence” (case of Pei in the church, and Sadako in class and with her husband’s friends) or “improper English” considered by the native speakers, their language use is a reflection of the social context and how language speakers view themselves and are viewed by others under the sociocultural conditions of the society.

The use of language does not only convey meaning within the language itself, it can also be used as a tool to trace how individuals perceive themselves by using the language, and how they negotiate their identities through using the language. It is important for teachers and educators to understand the meanings of silence so that we can understand the challenges and struggles faced by international students academically and socially. In order to make international students feel validated, teachers need to provide the classroom environment where students can feel their opinions are being valued. The notion of what is considered being “proper English” needs to be further problematized in order to facilitate more dialogues and interactions among the language learners and language users.

### **Social Challenges and Social Identity**

To understand participants’ social challenges, this dissertation mostly focusses on how participants represent themselves in the US academia (overlaps with social life as the participants

are students) and social lives. Using a language that one did not grow up with can always make a difference in the sense of “belonging” (Haley, 2013). One’s sense of belonging is deeply linked to their social life. In international student’s social lives, many of them are capable of using the academic language, but are unable to conduct private conversations, or “small talks” with their interlocutors. Part of the reason comes from their unfamiliarity with the target language culture, and the vast difference between their native language and the target language.

Norton (1997) mentioned that learning a second language is not only about learning the grammar and using the language with their interlocutors, but “also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (p. 410). Norton’s standpoint not only bridged the relationship between language and identity, but also further proved that academic identity and social identity are interrelated. This study further proved that international students’ interaction and community of practice do not only come from their classroom participation, but also social interactions.

Kramsch’s (1993) third culture has been used “to elicit students’ narratives of their experience crossing linguistic and cultural borders” (p. 239). This third culture is “made of a common memory beyond time and place among people with similar experiences” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 235). The telling of these experiences makes participants become aware of the relationships between language and power, how language gives them power, and how they try to make themselves at home in a culture of “third space”. This third space allows the learners to “adopt a more flexible orientation toward identity” (Díaz-Rico, 2008, p. 64).

### **The Case of Pei: I’m a mom of two young immigrant children.**

Pei freely spoke about her experiences. Our conversations were both similar and different comparing to our daily meandering. It is similar because our mutual understanding about each

other was deep, and on an almost daily basis; it is different because the interview makes it formal. It is also different from our daily communication as the interviews were guided with my structured questions, and we both spoke in English rather than our mother tongue. While analyzing her words, since I have a deep understanding about her, I was constantly comparing the experience she described in our interviews with my own experience that I had with Pei for the past several years.

Besides from the interviews, her experience as a family-oriented mother was also exemplified by the photos with her kids on the desk of our shared office, and the decision to discontinue her research career. Her focus was on her family, kids and the traditions led by her family. It was certain that Pei's decision does not fit into the projected trajectory of being a doctoral student and following the path of conducting research. However, her choice also breaks down the traditional notion of what means to be a graduate student, and the different identities that a person shall possess as a whole: being a student, a mother, a daughter to her own parents, and the different obligations that her various identities imply.

### **Challenges as Emerging Teachers and Teacher Identity**

TESOL students developed better understanding about their own culture, and more responsibilities were cultivated for them as teachers to show and represent the different aspects of culture in their teaching. Their emerging teacher identity enabled the dynamics of other identities, i.e. academic identity, social identity; and allowed participants to transform from solely being international students to the different roles that they undertake in US society. This coincides with Bakhtin's (1981) ideology of becoming while exploring identity through language and experiences (Cho, Al-Samiri, & Gao, 2016; Gomez et al., 2007; Hallman, 2014), and

acknowledges that social interactions influence the process of “becoming” a teacher (Gomez et al., 2007; Walkington, 2005).

At the same time, these participants are all students of TESOL. These TESOL students’ understanding of their own culture leads to their growing interest in teaching their native language as a foreign language. As mentioned in the research context, the participants in this study mostly came to the US for the purpose of getting a master’s degree in TESOL. However, based on various reasons provided by the participants, they were drawn into the teaching of their native language as a foreign language in the US. Participants claimed the following reason for them to teach their native language as a foreign language: the financial support that it provides; the desire of being a teacher in US; and the opportunities to interact with American students.

And very original reason I came to the department to teach Chinese is because the financial support that it can give me. Because if I teach here, I don’t have to pay tuition. I don’t have to give the financial burden to my parents, and I can make some pocket money, like that. So it’s just decrease of pressure on the finance. And that was the very first purpose. After a few years of teaching Chinese, I feel like, hey, I actually enjoy this, you know, teaching the adults at college level (Pei, Interview, December 2017, emphasis added).

As for most GTAs, finding a TA position at the university where they study is to cover their tuition. Coming from China to learn TESOL in US, Pei gradually found her interest in teaching Chinese, and plans to continue to teach Chinese in the US after graduation.

I feel like I wanted to work. Because I have been working as a teacher for long time in Japan before I move to the States. And I hadn’t worked for two years since I came here.

And I really wanted to, like, how to say, wanted to have the life which I had in Japan (Sadako, Interview, December 2016).

Having the experience of six years of Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Junior High School in Japan, Sadako moved to the US to live with her husband. Not satisfied of being a housewife, Sadako missed the life of being a teacher, and going back to be an active person in education.

This experience of teaching their native language increased their own sense of ownership, and also enhanced their understanding about their own country and their culture. As most of the participants majored in English in college or were English teachers back home, coming from the field of TESOL, the participants did not find a lack of knowledge in linguistics and foreign literature hinders their progress of being a foreign language teacher; instead, their sense of ownership was increased in teaching their native language. This ownership comes from being able to connect themselves with the language and culture that they teach, the advantage of being a native speaker of the language, and the background that they possess as a person who grew up in the target language country.

I guess when you are away from your home country, you know, you are away from you culture, I think this is a way, to keep you connecting (Pei, Interview, December 2016).

Pei's interest in teaching Chinese comes from her experience of binge reading a lot of books and watching documentaries about the history of China since she started to teach advanced level Chinese. Many of these resources from the Western perspectives are not available in China, while reading of these connected Pei, her country, and the history and culture of the country.

Though coming from a TESOL background might have some difficulty in explaining the linguistic features of the target language, TESOL students were able to make use of their own

unique background in home country and in TESOL courses to better their teaching in foreign language instruction. They gradually built up their new identity as foreign language teachers in US.

...if I continue to teach Japanese as a profession, I have to study a little bit more, yea. I should be more professional. I need to be capable to explain all of the grammatical points very clearly, and precisely, and very instantly. Yea, that's what I did when I was in Japan. Yea, so that's why, if I continue to do this job, I need to learn, like how to teach Japanese more (Nadako, Interview, December 2016).

Sadako's understanding about being professional in the field of foreign language instruction also means being able to explain grammar clearly to her students. Coming from the field of TESOL and being an English teacher in her previous background, Sadako spent hours learning the Japanese grammar by herself and from GTAs who had longer experience than her. For me, as a GTA myself, I was able to apply what we learned from TESOL courses in my own foreign language classroom. I remember we learned using authentic materials in EAP class, and I started to use authentic materials in my class.

The improvement of socialization experience benefited East Asian TESOL students to overcome some challenges in the academics, and assist them to find their roles as emerging teachers in the US. While trying to bring more recognition on the value of international students, it can be seen that international TESOL students' have a desire of being teachers in US and value the opportunities to interact with American students. Coming from a different cultural and education background, they were able to gain their sense of ownership through teaching their native language. However, as we can see, many of the improvements and accommodations were initiated by themselves.

### **The Case of Yonah: Between teaching TESOL and the native language**

Having GTA positions in both TESOL and Korean language instruction, Yonah struggled between these two positions. Acknowledging having both challenges and good feelings, Yonah expressed the most rewarding time as a teacher in US is when students need something, she helped them, and the students said, “thank you”. This in another sense also motivated Yonah to further improve her teaching to be a better teacher.

And also at the same time, I don't want to lose this position because it makes my life more interactive with the students, you know? When you have interaction with the students, you feel like I'm learning from them as well, at the same time I'm learning, you know, what should I do better, to teach better? (Yonah, Interview, February 2017).

I think I grew up there, I grew up in Korea, and then I already got the bachelor's degree at college in Korea. So even though I don't have a major in Korean literature and linguistics, I have almost close background to the teachers major in Korean linguistics. So, I think I'm very, I know a lot of history, culture contents, and everything. The only problem is I don't have enough time, to teach them. You know what I mean? (Yonah, Interview, January 24, 2017).

Not coming from the field of Korean linguistics and literature surely did not exert a problem in Yonah's teaching. As growing up from the target language culture which her students are studying about, Yonah's background from Korea was sufficient in handling teaching Korean as a foreign language in US. However, I will argue that the circumstances depend on the curriculum and the instructional method, whether it is focused on speech, and communicative approach, or the traditional grammar approach. For situations and programs where participants

need to spend time on explaining grammar, they do need a good mastery of explaining the linguistic features of the target language.

Through examining the difficulties that ITAs face in the group studied, and the accommodations that they made in dealing with these challenges, it can be seen that participants were able to seek for a platform where their different spheres of difficulties and challenges could be accommodated. They were able to build new relationships and ease the tensions, and also allow the space for emerging identities to grow.

### **Implications for Graduate Programs**

It is important for teachers and educators in the field to be aware of the different needs and intentions of international students, and to understand the challenges and struggles faced by ITAs as graduate students academically and socially. Unachieved expectations of international students require more efforts from professors and academic departments, and international students' need of faculties reaching out and giving advice on their professional development.

Faculties could have better cultural understanding and provide a supportive classroom environment for the students. TESOL teacher education programs should be able to provide curriculums that can help meet these needs. Different training programs and opportunities, like orientations and workshops should be further bridged and communicated to international students to better prepare them to be adequate language teachers.

Through reflection, I always believed that teachers can explore their self-concept and become more aware of their own strengths and limitations, understand the nature and demand of the task of teaching a language in their respective environments and adapt to new ways to become better at what they are doing (Goh, 2014). The degree to which teachers negotiate their sense of self and perform their social, cultural and intellectual roles as professionals can have a

huge influence on their commitment, confidence and competence. When teachers are encouraged to consider the cognitive, affective and sociocultural factors that influence their performance, they are taking the first steps in empowering themselves individually and collectively to manage the complexities in their work.

There is no other person better at presenting the experience and stories than the people who are living through it. I write this dissertation in the purpose of presenting how people in this study live and cope with the circumstances (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). As a dissertation from the field of education, I hope through this dissertation, international students of later times, especially the ones coming from East Asian countries, might be able to find a sense of belonging. From the detailed descriptions about the participants in this dissertation, the readers may find that there are other international students who went through the same things that they went through, and shares their experiences, thus confirms their presence as international students; or from reading about the participants in this dissertation, it might be informative for their future experiences as international students.

For teachers and administrators, presenting what participants lived through, and the accommodations that they made are informative for teachers and administrators to think how they can better their teaching, services to the students, and how they can help. Working with international students involves smoothing their academic socialization process, therefore, implications and suggestions are made in the last chapter.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

This dissertation first explored international students' interest and challenges in academic life, students' language skills in relation to their identity, and their identity construction and negotiation, hoping to bring the recognition on the value of international students. At the same time, through examining the difficulties that the international students face in the group studied, and the accommodations that they made in dealing with these challenges, it can be clearly seen that these international students as ITAs face many challenges both as students and emerging teachers, and a large portion of solution in dealing with these challenges are solely by themselves. Though they were able to seek for helps from their peers and family members, the initiation of asking for help is mostly done by the students themselves.

Despite the challenges East Asian TESOL students face academically and socially, participants were able to seek for a platform where their different spheres of difficulty and challenges could be negotiated, and a "third space" where new relationships can be built, tensions could be eased, and new identities shall be emerged. A narrative approach of this study enabled participants to tell their experience as international students. Understanding their experience is of value to teachers and administrators while working with international students.

### **Identities are multiple, but can also be hierarchical**

The analysis showed that each participant possesses multiple identities; however, participants perceived their identities in different hierarchical ways. In the scenarios of being international students in the US, their academic identity came before the other aspects of identities as their primary task in the US is to study. However, in the scenarios of being married women, housewives, and mothers, the sacrifices participants made blended into the multiple identities that they possess and made their identity as a mother prominent.

**Identities are complex, as new identities emerge**

This study demonstrated that the ones' identities construction is a complex endeavor involving more than one aspect, and new identities enact when people start to adopt different roles in lives. When researching teaching assistants, it is incomplete to only observe the projected identities that they possess: being graduate students, researchers, teaching assistants, etc. The traditional view of this group of people needs to be broken down and researchers need to think what really means to be a graduate student. As participants showed that with the changes in their lives, new identities were added and continuously being incorporated.

**Identities are intersecting, and the negotiation of identities is discursive**

Drawing on the findings of this study, it demonstrated that the process of constructing ones' identities can be discursive. Over time, people have to negotiate the relationship between their newly emerged identities with their previous identities (Haniford, 2010). This dissertation showed that identity negotiation is a reconciling and discursive process which should be viewed through the sociocultural lens. As human beings, we constantly challenge ourselves and shift our identities in different situations. The "socially negotiated" identities are not static entities as we continually develop our understanding of the ways we think and act. Research in this field should not limit the horizon to classroom practice but the identity construction outside the classrooms as well.

This study implied that TESOL educators and professionals must be aware of the different needs and intentions of students in the TESOL programs. TESOL teacher education programs should provide differentiated curriculums that can meet these different needs, and training programs and other opportunities should be further bridged and communicated to the students to prepare them to be better teachers. TESOL practicums should be an essential part in

the program. As teachers and administrators, we could think about what kind of resources that we can provide for international students to ease the tension. And the support does not limit to the academic support and services we can provide while students are on campus, but also the social and emotional support that we can provide for students. As this dissertation targets the participants as teaching assistants, it can be also useful for professors in understanding their teaching assistants, helping with them in recruiting teaching assistants and providing better training programs. I suggest that this is a joint effort made by international students themselves, social peers, professors, other TAs and university administrators.

It is important to remember that these emerging GTAs are going to be the new international faculties. This study implied that in order to prepare teachers of diverse backgrounds for their future career, teacher education programs require critical considerations on differentiated curriculums during graduate programs, individualized professional and personal development support; and educators need to reflect upon how education policy could make an impact on improving teacher's development, thus students' learning. The emerging teacher educators are the new forces that drive the direction of future higher education in the US, their experience as teachers will shed light on the field development of teaching and teacher education.

In the meantime, limitation of this study includes adding classroom observations to the design could provide more information on participants' teaching practice, which will be investigated in future studies. Also, I do acknowledge that a qualitative research dissertation like this involved with a lot of subjective point of view; however, as Schutz (1967, 1970) argues, "the safeguarding of subjective point of view is the only but sufficient guarantee that the world of

social reality will not be replaced by a fictional non-existing world constructed by the scientific observer” (p.8).

As a firm believer of everyday lives should be the focus of qualitative researchers, I believe the value of qualitative research is to present “the world that every individual takes for granted” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 489). By presenting the identities of East Asian GTAs in the EALC program at a midwestern university, theories of identity can be made more specific to particular groups who face external challenges that affect the forming of identities. This study highlighted how, though identity is multiple, it is also subject to external forces that shape identity in hierarchical ways.

## Appendix

### Appendix I: Interview questions

1. Could you tell me something about yourself?
2. How long have you been in US? Why do you choose to come to US to study?
3. How did you come to CANDI U?
4. Could you tell me about your experience at CANDI U?
5. As an international student in US, what difficulties have you encountered during your graduate study? What accommodations you made in dealing with these challenges?

Possible probes:

- 1) Do you have trouble communicating with your classmates/professors?
- 2) Do you prefer to be active or quiet in your classes? Could you tell me why?
- 3) What is your takeaway after years of study in US? Are these takeaways represented differently in your home country? What is your take on this?
6. Tell me something about your friends. What do you do with your friends here?
7. As an international student in US, what challenges have you encountered in your social life? What accommodations you made in dealing with these challenges?

Possible probes:

- 1) Do you find yourself lonely sometimes? If so, could you tell me more about it? What might be the cause to make you feel lonely?
- 2) Do you have difficulty in expressing your loneliness to others? If not, who do you often resort to while you need to express your feelings?
- 3) How much do you socialize with American students? What difficulties you encountered while socializing with American students?
- 4) Do you feel isolated in social settings in the US? What accommodations you have made in dealing with this?
- 5) Please tell me an incidents/story that you can tell about your experience in your social life as an international student in the US
- 6) Identity: Do you feel struggled between your original identity as a Chinese/Japanese/Korean with the values and ways of thinking as Americans?
8. Could you tell me about your experience working at CANDI U?
9. How long have you been teaching Chinese/Japanese/Korean? How did you come to this profession? Could you tell me the story how you got into teaching your native language? Why do you choose to teach your native language?
10. As an emerging language teacher, what difficulties have you encountered in your teaching? What accommodations you made in dealing with these challenges?

Possible probes:

- 1) How do you interact with American students? Do you have trouble interacting with your students in your classroom?
- 2) Since your native language is Chinese/Japanese/Korean and not English, your first language must have some influence on your second language. Some people call it Chinglish, and say that Americans do not like Chinglish, because they get troubled.

However, you are a teacher of Chinese/Korean/Japanese, do you feel that students feel troubled by you? Why or why not? What about people outside the university? What are their attitude towards your English?

11. What is your plan after graduation? Do you want to stay in America? Why or why not? Do you want to continue to teach your native language in the US? Why or why not?
12. Do you have any comments that you want to add?

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