ASIAN THIRD CULTURE KIDS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITY
OF CHINESE STUDENTS EDUCATED IN
A WESTERN-CURRICULUM INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

A doctoral thesis presented
by
Daniel T. Long

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
In the field of
Teaching, Curriculum, Learning and Leadership

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
Spring, 2016
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, a huge thank you is owed to my family: Missy, Kirsten, Ryan and Avery. Thank you for putting up with my stress and the hours of time when I was too busy. I could not have completed this without your support and love.

I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Corliss Brown Thompson for seeing me through the dissertation phase with a great deal of encouragement and direction. Your patience, guidance and knowledge were instrumental and I am sincerely grateful for your help in pushing me to the end.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Chris Unger and Dr. Catriona Moran for their insightful comments, challenging questions and encouragement during the defense process. Thank you Chris for always challenging me to think and rethink the deeper aspects of my learning. Thank you Catriona for your support personally and professionally, and even more importantly, your support for the students who are living the identity experience as described in this study.

My deepest gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Nena Stracuzzi, my first and favorite professor at Northeastern. Your guidance, wisdom, encouragement, sense of humor and friendship were a big part of my successful completion of this program. Thank you.

Finally, there is a well-known saying, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” It would be easy to apply the same aphorism to doctoral studies. While many may claim to have navigated the process without any divine assistance, I can only say that from the very first class until the final submission, I would not have stood a chance without prayer, faith, grace and wisdom not-of-my-own. So, thank you Lord.
Abstract

Framed within the Third Culture Kid (TCK) Identity construct, this thesis examines the lived experiences of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school. Utilizing the methodological approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis the study addressed three primary questions: 1) What defines the lived experiences of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school, 2) How do Chinese students educated in a Western-curriculum international school defines their own identity and 3) In what ways do the described experiences of ethnically Chinese students attending a Western-curriculum international school and heading to the U.S. for university mirror the described experiences of traditional TCKs? Through purposive sampling, ten ethnically Chinese students who spent their formative years in their “home” culture yet educated in a Western-curriculum international school were selected. Three superordinate themes, identity, transitioning and TCK markers, were identified. Findings included that participants experienced a complex and nuanced cross-cultural identity and reflected many of the same markers that are associated with traditional TCK identity.

Keywords: Third Culture Kids, TCKs, Cross-Cultural Identity, Cross-Cultural Transition, TCK Identity, Asian TCK
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: The Research Problem ............................................. 6  
Definition of Terms ...................................................................... 8  
Problem of Practice ..................................................................... 10  
Significance ................................................................................. 13  
Research Questions .................................................................... 15  
Theoretical Framework ................................................................. 16  
TCK Model ................................................................................. 20  
Theory Application ..................................................................... 21

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................. 22  
Non-Traditional TCK Resources .................................................. 22  
Origin of TCK Term and Evolving Definition ................................. 23  
Importance of Identity Formation ................................................ 31  
TCK Transition ........................................................................... 34  
The Asian Experience .................................................................. 36  
Proposed Research ..................................................................... 42

Chapter Three: Research Design .................................................. 45  
Paradigm ..................................................................................... 46  
Phenomenological Study .............................................................. 47  
Role of the Researcher ................................................................. 49  
Protection of Human Subjects ..................................................... 49  
Site  
Participants ................................................................................ 51  
Data Collection .......................................................................... 54  
Data Storage .............................................................................. 55  
Data Analysis ............................................................................ 56  
Trustworthiness, Quality and Verification ..................................... 57  
Positionality and Bias ................................................................. 59

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis ........................................... 63  
Developing Identity ..................................................................... 63  
Transitioning .............................................................................. 81  
TCK Markers ............................................................................. 92

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice ................ 101  
Findings in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks & Research Questions........... 102  
Implications for Practice ............................................................ 113  
Implications for Research .......................................................... 119  
Final Reflections ........................................................................ 126

References .................................................................................... 128

Appendix A - IRB Approval .......................................................... 137
Chapter One: The Research Problem

Nearly three million students around the world attend school each day at Western-curriculum international schools. These schools strive to prepare students for academic excellence and many of the students who attend these schools are preparing for U.S. college admissions (Nagrath, 2011). One area of challenge that arises for students in international schools is the transition phase when students move from the international school setting to the U.S. for university. Students encounter challenges during this phase due to a lack of a clear understanding of their cross-cultural identity; they do not fit in. This rootlessness creates a sense of detachment for the student (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Useem & Useem, 1963). Since the early 1970's, research has been conducted to address the particular needs of this group of students, referred to as Third Culture Kids (TCK's). Traditionally from business, military, diplomatic or missionary families, these children are identified as those who have "spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 13).

In recent years, the make-up of international schools is changing and evolving to include more students from families who are ethnically assimilated into the surrounding culture. According to the ICEF Monitor, a market intelligence resource for the international education industry, "80% of the demand for places at international schools now comes from wealthy local parents who want their children to receive a quality, English-speaking education in order to access the best options for university and higher education. This is a significant change from 20
years ago when international school places were dominated by expatriate students" (ICEF, 2015). These "local" students typically hold dual passports and citizenship, but unlike traditional TCK's, appear ethnically assimilated to the home culture. Enrolling in an international school, where the curriculum is Western and the language of instruction is English creates a dynamic among these students that closely resembles that found in traditional TCKs; they are caught between two cultures. The student does not have full ownership in the home country or in the educational culture and the mix of two cultures has been assimilated into their life experiences, yet these students do not fit within the traditional definition of "TCK." According to The International Educator, two-thirds of all new international schools are being opened in Asia (Nagrath, 2011), and these newly-opened schools are full of Asian students who are caught in this cross-cultural dynamic. This research project focuses on this rapidly growing population and the unique cross-cultural identity experience of these students.

Traditional Third Culture Kids transition training has proven in the past to be an effective way to prepare TCK's for the challenges of adjusting to college life in the U.S. Effective preparation for this transition has shown to help TCK's handle issues of loneliness, depression, social and cultural marginality, feeling "out of sync" and grief over their relocation. (Pollock & VanReken, 2001). Although research has studied the repatriation of Asian students who have spent time away from their home country or are living in a foreign setting (Wan, 2001; Sung, 1985; Konno, 2005; Fry, 2009), little research has been done on the reality of the distinct dynamic among this population of Asian students who are living cross-culturally due to their academic environment. This study explores the experience of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school, focusing in particular on their cross-cultural identity. Included in the data analysis is a discussion on commonalities and differences that are
found between these students and research that has previously been conducted with traditional TCK's, as well as the transition challenges associated with a cross-cultural identity.

Definition of Terms

*TCK (Third Culture Kid):* The original term used by Useem and Useem (1963) to refer to children who were raised in a country and culture different from their home culture. Elements of the home culture (first culture) and host culture (second culture) were assimilated to form a unique third culture, while still retaining elements of both the first and second cultures. These students, caught in-between cultures, were referred to as TCKs. While many other labels have been proposed to more inclusively reflect the experience of individuals who are raised cross-culturally, literature continues to favor the use of the term TCK as defined by Pollock and Van Reken (2001).

*TCI (Third Culture Individual):* A more-inclusive term used to refer to a TCK of any age.

*Cultural Hybrids:* Coined by Bhabha (1994) to refer to individuals who have grown up in "multiple cultural contexts, identities and experiences" (Greenholtz & Kim, 2009, p. 391).

*Cultural Chameleon:* An individual who, because of cross-cultural living experiences, has the ability to blend in with various cultural environments (McCaig, 1996).

*CCK (Cross Culture Kid):* Evolving from TCK research and intentionally including students who did not fit the original, this term is a simple categorization based on traditional TCK definitions (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). These individuals would include those who were raised in a wide variety of cross-cultural experiences: adoptees, refugees, immigrants, students attending a foreign school, minority and biracial children. This new term was proposed by Van Reken and Bethel (2005) to include those who, for any reason, are growing up among cultural worlds.
Global Nomad: Coined by McCaig (1992) to refer to Third Culture Kids. This term intentionally included adults and highlights the mobility aspects of the TCK experience.

Western-Curriculum International School: A school that is located in a non-U.S. setting but uses a Western curriculum that is English-based and prepares students for college in a Western country. The term is used to contrast this educational setting with a national "local" school curriculum. In this study, the Western-curriculum international school is an American-focused curriculum that prepares students for U.S. college and university admissions.

Formative Years: Referring to the adolescent years, where physical and psychological development take place. In this study, formative years refer to the developmental years of 12-18, or the years encompassed by Erickson's (1980) Identity vs Role Confusion stage of identity development.

Transition: The phase that refers to a move between cultures. Transitions can take place throughout life, and in the TCK experience, one often-studied transition is the time between high school and university, where the TCK may change countries or cultures. It is this phase that is addressed in the current study.

Asian: The use of the term Asian in this study is not an attempt to add to the complexity of the study, but merely to differentiate this population from the north-American-centric, primarily-white population studied in traditional TCK research. While Taiwanese or Chinese could easily be used in its place, these terms carry with them additional cultural and political implications that unnecessarily add complexity to the focus of the study. Although the population under study are ethnically Chinese, by using the term Asian the author is implying that the findings included here would apply to those who fit this category. These implications are further examined in chapter five.
Problem of Practice

Much has been written about children who grow up in different cultures, particularly American or Western children who have spent significant portions of their developmental years overseas (Useem & Useem, 1963; Useem, 1973; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). There are also a growing number of research studies on Asian students, educated in their country of origin, who transition to the U.S. for university or the challenges that await those who are repatriating back to their home country after extended time away (Aitken, 2008; Kim & Omizo, 2005; Sung, 1985). Little is known, however, about the unique cross-cultural identity development experiences of Asian children, raised in their country of origin yet educated in a Western-curriculum academic environment and as such, appearing to take on a distinct cross-cultural identity. Within this dynamic, the cross-cultural setting is the academic environment rather than the country or location. Given this problem of practice this study focuses on identifying and understanding this unique population: ethnically Chinese students, living in their "home" country, yet educated in a Western-curriculum international school. An examination of the distinct cross-cultural identity of the Asian Third Culture Kid, an exploration of the ways in which this experience mirrors that of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCK's) and identification of what kind of assistance these students may need in order to ensure a positive, healthy, successful transition to U.S. university life will be included in this study.

Traditionally, Third Culture Kids (TCKs) were defined as those who have "spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. Elements of each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience…” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 13). The term Third Culture Kid, therefore, refers to someone who has deeply experienced two or more cultures during their formative years, and has melded those cultures into a distinct,
unique "third" culture. They do not associate themselves fully with either the host culture or their home culture, but find themselves caught between these cultures, including elements of both the home and the host culture in their unique identity (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). For example, an American aid worker may move his family to Africa for long-term service. His children, born in the U.S., are raised during all of their formative years in Kenya. They are American children, interacting in Swahili on a daily basis with Kenyans but educated in a small international school with an American curriculum. These children meld and assimilate two unique and distinct cultures as they navigate their developmental years. The assimilation of these cultures becomes their identity: their sense of who they are. They are at times American, at times African. This similar experience would be shared by other students who fit this traditional TCK definition, including the children of missionaries, diplomats, military servicemen or businessmen working internationally.

A different phenomenon from the traditional TCK, however, is represented by the group under study: the Asian TCK. In recent years, the make-up of many western-curriculum international schools throughout Asia is changing to include more students from "local" families (ICEF, 2015). In other words, these children are ethnically Asian, whether born in the U.S. or in their "home" country, living in their country of ethnic origin but in attendance at an international school where instruction is in English and the curriculum is Western-focused. This has created a dynamic among these children that appears to closely resemble that found among traditional TCKs: they are caught between two cultures, yet these students do not fit the traditional definition of "TCK." At first glance, they appear to be living in their “home” or “local” culture, but in reality they have one foot in the East and one foot in the West. While a traditional TCK would be living in a culture that is not their ethnic culture (e.g., a western child being raised in
China as a result of his/her parent being involved in business), the Asian TCK is being raised in a culture that is their ethnic culture, but educated in a Western academic setting in preparation for university in the West. While traditional TCKs might refer to their passport country as "home," Asian TCKs frequently hold dual passports, one from the West and one from the East.

Further complicating the identity challenges that these students face is what is reported by students to be a reluctance on the part of their parents to acknowledge that their children demonstrate many of the qualities of traditionally defined Third Culture Kids, and as such, may need the same transition considerations given to traditional TCKs. Many of the parents of these students see the Western-academic setting as an academic advantage to give their child so that they can move ahead and be successful. The goal of prestigious university admissions in the U.S. is, in the opinion of these parents, best reached through enrolling the child in one of these international schools. While they encourage their child to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them, they see this as a means to an end; they want the child to leverage the advantage of the international education, yet not be too-deeply impacted on a cultural or identity level. In the minds of many parents, a Chinese student going through a Western-academic international school system will still essentially be a Chinese student. This study indicates that these expectations underestimate the cross-cultural impact that the Western-academic environment will have on Chinese students.

Traditional Third Culture Kids express specific cross-cultural challenges during their transition back to the U.S. for university. The years spent living overseas, coupled with the melding of cultures into a unique "third culture" perspectives, create a dynamic whereby the TCK feels "out of sync" in their home culture. While thinking of themselves as "American" during their years overseas, they return to the U.S. to find that this identity as an American is
challenged: they are not as American as they thought (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). This may best be expressed in the words of an American student raised in Geneva and returning home for university, who, when he "[got] back home, contrary to expectation it does not feel like home at all…the graduate has been a stranger in a strange land for much of his life, and he knows how being a foreigner works. What he is not used to is being a stranger in his own land" (Dormer, 1979, p. 3). Over the past three decades the transition needs of these TCK students has been addressed through transition training; this transition training has proven to be an effective help to traditional TCKs when they prepare to go to university (Quick, 2010). For the Asian TCK, a similar cross-cultural dynamic appears to be experienced, but this experience is convoluted by several additional factors. These factors have been explored in more detail through this study.

**Significance**

There are several important reasons for understanding the unique transitional needs of Asian TCKs. Firstly, understanding the unique perspective that these students have regarding their own cross-cultural identity allows for a better understanding of the particular Asian TCK construct. While research has been conducted both on traditional TCKs and on "first-generation" international students who are transitioning to an English-learning environment and to Western culture, the applicability of this research to ethnically Asian students who have been educated in a Western-educational environment is explored through this study. Secondly, discussions comparing and contrasting this identity with that of a traditionally-defined Third Culture Kid reveal the shared nuances of their experiences, as well as identify unique aspects of the Asian TCK identity when compared to the traditional TCK identity. When descriptors of Asian TCK's mirror that of traditional TCK's, the applicability of the conclusions from previous research is validated for this unique group. Finally, training that has been provided for traditional TCK's has
proven to be effective in reducing cross-cultural stress during transition to U.S. university life (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). As research indicates that the traits that are true of traditional cross-cultural students closely resemble the Asian Third Culture Kid experience, transition training would also benefit these students, their parents, teachers, counselors and the schools at which they attend. This study, then, results in a better understanding of this dynamic, allowing these students and their parents to better understand their identity experience and leading to more appropriate assistance to these students during the transition stage between high school and university.

There are various stakeholders that benefit from a closer study of the particularities of this group of students. First and foremost, Asian TCKs themselves may benefit from understanding the dynamic that is at work, accepting the unique aspects of their cross-cultural upbringing and acknowledging that identity confusion and transition stress exist and can be successfully navigated. Parents of Asian TCKs may benefit from understanding the unique cultural mix that has developed in their child through being educated in a Western educational system even while living in their "home" culture, and can acknowledge that some of the traditional expectations regarding the role of a typical "local" Asian student may not necessarily be fully accepted by their cross-cultural child. Teachers and counselors of these students have the opportunity to better understand the stresses that are felt by Asian TCKs and can better prepare these students for successful transition to U.S. university life. Finally, teachers, students and staff who welcome these students into U.S. universities can better understand the unique position in which these students find themselves, in what ways they may differ from traditional overseas students and how their successful transition to U.S. university life can be aided through this understanding.
For more than four decades research and practical help has been devoted to both traditional Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and traditional international foreign students during the transition phase between their international high school and university in the U.S. With the demographic change in the student makeup of international schools, many of the students currently enrolled in these schools do not readily fit the definition or characteristics of either of these two previously-studied groups. Because of their ethnic similarity with the home culture, their cross-cultural identity is not easily recognized, and research has not addressed the specific challenges of these students. They therefore remain under-served in terms of their abilities to understand their particular identity as well as during their cross-cultural transition to university. Special consideration needs to be given to this group, the Asian Third Culture Kid.

The TCK dynamics of Asian students enrolled in international schools, then, is unacknowledged and unaddressed. Exploring the cross-cultural identity experience of Asian TCKs, and discussing the extent to which the experience of Asian TCK’s mirrors that of traditional TCK’s as well as identifying the type of assistance from which these students might benefit in order to ensure positive and successful transition to U.S. university life is an important outcome of this research study.

**Research Questions**

The subject of this study, then, is an exploration of the cross-cultural identity of Asian students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school.

Several questions guided the proposed research:

1. What defines the lived experiences of Asian students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school?

2. How do Asian students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school...
define their own identity?

3. In what ways do the described experiences of Asian students attending a Western-curriculum international school mirror the described experiences of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCKs)?

**Theoretical Framework**

There is one foundational theory that frames the study on Asian TCKs: Useem and Useem’s (1963) model of Third Culture Kid identity, refined further by Pollock and Van Reken (2001). In order to better understand this construct, however, attention must first be given to Erikson's (1959) theory of psychosocial stages of development, an eight-stage lifespan continuum of human development, and in particular, the stage Identity versus Role Confusion that encompasses a child's formative years. In his book, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (Erikson, 1980) Erickson reiterates the importance of a child developing a sense of self, a sense of who one is both individually and within the social context. During adolescence, role confusion or an inability to commit to a concrete view of self, may cause issues well into the later years. The emergence of a deep self-awareness and firm sense of who one is in relation to one's surroundings takes time and maturity.

The development of this ego identity was included in Erikson's (1959) well-known Eight Stages of Human Development (See Erickson's stage theory in its final version below, Figure 1). Within the context of these stages, identity refers to one's understanding of one's place and the confidence that one's perception of self is matched by one's perception of others. In other words, a healthy identity is developed when a child feels comfortable about who they are and their role in society. Conversely, role confusion or identity crisis occurs when a child is not sure about themselves or their role in society. Developing a healthy sense of self, according to Erikson, is a
crucial step in the development of a healthy individual, and will impact one's ability to navigate the stages that continue to develop after adolescence (Erickson, 1980).

![Erikson's Stage Theory in its Final Version](image)

**Figure 1.** Erikson's Eight Stages of Human Development. Dewey, 2014)

Within this framework, the study identifies the importance of the individual achieving a sense of *who one is*. The cross-cultural upbringing of ethnically Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum academic environment will impact the sense of self, the sense of who one is as an individual and his/her place within the social context.

Given the importance of a healthy development of the identity, Useem and Useem’s (1963) model of Third Culture Kid Identity gives structure to this specific research and serves as the theoretical framework through which to view this problem of practice. The term "Third Culture Kids" (TCKs) was initially coined by sociologist/anthropologist couple Ruth and John Useem, who moved to India in the 1950s and studied the impact of this cross-cultural move on their three children. Upon returning to the U.S., the Useems referred to the unique mix of cultural identity found in their own children with the term "Third Culture Kids" (Useem & Useem, 1963). The term as defined by Useem was quite narrow, referring only to western children who
were raised and integrated in a "foreign" country due to the occupational choices of their parents. Further research in the 1970s and 1980s continued to focus on American dependents in a variety of locations, including military, diplomatic, missionary and business (Beimler, 1972; Chapman, 1975; Delin, 1986; Kelly 1975; Olson, 1986) as well as transition challenges upon repatriation to the U.S.. During the 1980's, American sociologist David Pollock refined the definition as those who "having spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture, develops a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any. Elements of each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience…" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 13). While this definition stands largely unchanged today, additional terms have also been used to describe the TCK experience, including "global nomads" (McCaig, 1992; Marwood, 2009) "cultural chameleons" (McCaig, 1992) and "transculturals" (Willis, Enloe & Minoura, 1994). Pollock and co-researcher Van Reken went on to do extensive work in the field of TCK studies, and are referred to by most researchers engaging in research related to cross-cultural transition and intercultural identity.

According to Ruth Van Reken, co-author of *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds* (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001), the definition of TCK has changed over time, transcending some of the traditional qualifiers first defined by Useem. For example, Useem's use of the TCK term related primarily to children who were raised with high mobility and who traveled extensively during their formative years due to their parent's occupation (R. Van Reken, personal communication, December, 2013). The TCK dynamic has expanded to include non-Westerners as well as children who do not fit the original mold such as adopted children and children whose passport country was not the one they considered their "home" country. Through their continued research and the encouragement of others who were researching the TCK
experience, additional terms have been coined to refer to other individuals who are caught between cultures, including Third Culture Adults (TCA's), Global Nomads and Cross Cultural Kids (Van Reken & Bethel, 2005). Van Reken and Bethel encourage a move towards the term CCK as more reflective of the experienced cross-cultural dynamic than the original TCK term. While CCK might be a more accurate term to reflect this research topic, the well-known term TCK was specifically chosen by this researcher as a means to bridge the original TCK research to the experience of Chinese students who are educated in a western-academic setting.

Third Culture Kid theory, as defined, researched and reported by sociologists Pollock and Van Reken (2001), forms the basis for most of the current research on cross-cultural adjustment, intercultural identity formation and transition today (Hervey, 2009; Lyttle, Barker & Cornwell, 2011; Navarette & Jenkins, 2011; Moore & Barker, 2011; Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). This model details the common characteristics of TCK's, including high mobility, cross-cultural lifestyle, system identity (associating their identity with the organization to which they belong), large world view, cultural rootlessness, restlessness, complex sense of belonging, unresolved grief from frequent loss, and convoluted cultural identity. Van Reken and Bethel (2006) remind researchers that this model is constantly shifting as the world changes; there are fewer and fewer mono-cultural communities, while individuals represent a growing complexity when it comes to cultural makeup. This theory highlights a two-fold dynamic at work in the TCK; high mobility outside of their "home culture," and cross-cultural worldview, both of which impact the identity development of the individual. These students are caught in the middle between their ethnic culture and their host culture and a “smattering of other cultures” (Natario, 2016), as illustrated below in the Third Culture Model, Figure 2 and Figure 3.
Given Pollock and Van Reken's (2001) theory on the TCK construct, this research builds naturally upon the foundation that has been set by this framework. Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school setting are living a cross-cultural dynamic; their ethnic culture (home) is reflected in society at large, while their international school (host culture) provides a Western culture that differs widely from the home culture. For
that reason, the study finds that these students undergo a similar cross-cultural dynamic as TCK's. When addressing the unique perspectives of Chinese students who are educated in western-curriculum international schools, it is the TCK theory (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) that most closely explains the foundational underpinnings of the unique experiences of these students who are being raised cross-culturally. The application of this theory to the research on these students a) allows these students to better understand the unique dynamic of their shared experience, b) allows educators who work with these students to better understand the cross cultural transition needs of these students, and c) allows parents of these students to better understand the identity challenges that are markers of the TCK construct. According to Erickson (1959), it is during the adolescent years (12-18) that a child is examining his/her identity and trying to find out who he/she really is. Understanding that the home and host culture differs from one another is a key point in better understanding the cross-cultural makeup of one's identity. For this reason, Erickson's (1959) theory of identity development gives meaning to Pollock and Van Reken's (2001) TCK theoretical framework.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The first step in addressing these questions is a thorough, sophisticated, substantial review of relevant current research on TCK and other cross-cultural issues. According to Boote and Beile (2005), significant research can only be performed when the researcher first understands the literature in the field of study. Without "building on the scholarship and research that has come before" (p. 3), the researcher cannot expect to advance collective understanding of the topic. Moreso, the literature review puts the research in its proper context, moving beyond a list or survey of existing literature, and towards using the literature as a vehicle for bringing meaning to the research topic (Bruce, 1994). This literature review, therefore, sets the scholarly and historical context for this research study and offers a critical examination of the claims made in published research. It is in this context that a thorough investigation of TCK and cross-cultural transition research takes place.

Non-Traditional TCK Resources

While a thorough professional review of the literature usually implies research and peer-reviewed articles, it is worth noting beforehand that there are a myriad of TCK and cross-cultural identity blogs, posts and memes that have spread across the internet. These different TCK resources have exposed an increasing number of students to the TCK definition and experience, students who may not otherwise understand the term or categorize themselves as a TCK. Examples would include Facebook groups like, "I'm a Third Culture Kid, Don't Try and Understand Me," (n.d.), Buzzfeed articles like, "31 Signs You're A Third Culture Kid," (Jha, 2013), and websites like "TCKid" (n.d.) that connects TCKs and those who are researching and working with TCKs. While these troves of information lack the academic rigor usually associated with research literature, they offer unique and changing insight into how TCKs
identify themselves and how those who are raised cross-culturally define their experiences (Cox, 2004). As these sources were referred to in participant interview and data analysis, they become part of the discussion of the literature on the TCK experience.

**Origin of the TCK Term and Evolving Definition**

The term Third Culture Kid was originally used by Sociologists John and Ruth Useem who spent several years conducting research in India, and while there, noticed some unique interpersonal changes in their children which they attributed to their cross-cultural move. Dr. Ruth Useem in particular started using the term "Third Culture Kid" and writing about this experience in 1960 (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). According to Useem, *third culture* defines the assimilated culture that a child who lives overseas creates as part of the melding of their home (parents) culture and their host (foreign country) culture. Useem, in Hayden and Thompson (1998) states:

> Although they have grown up in foreign countries, they are not integral parts of those countries. When they come to their country of citizenship (some for the first time), they do not feel at home because they do not know the lingo or expectations of others—especially those of their own age. Where they feel most like themselves is in that interstitial culture, the third culture, which is created, shared and carried by persons who are relating societies, or sections thereof, to each other. (p. 29)

Useem describes the three distinct cultures to which a TCK is exposed; the home or passport culture (first culture), the combination of all the cultures in which the TCK has lived (second culture) and the community of people who have lived in this cross-cultural dynamic (third culture). While abstract for most, this third culture is very real for the TCK (Limberg & Lambie, 2011).
Useem’s work, however, was focused on American children who, because of their parents’ career choices, moved overseas. These included children of missionaries, business people, military officers, Foreign Service officers or teachers, all working in a foreign setting (Van Reken & Bethel, 2005). Throughout the 70's, 80's and early 90's, continued research on this population (Beimler, 1972; Chapman, 1975; Kelly, 1975; Delin, 1986; Olson, 1986; McCaig, 1992) led to a broadening of the definition to include other children who were raised in cross-cultural dynamics. One shared similarity between these populations, however, was the high mobility of individuals as they moved between cultures. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) became the primary drivers and most-often-cited researchers of the TCK experience, but they also began noticing the increasing complexity of the cross-cultural experience for many students. Ruth Van Reken notes that since the early days of Useem's work, "many who have grown up cross-culturally but not in these particular contexts call themselves TCKs because they identify so strongly with the characteristics David Pollock described in his classic TCK Profile" (Van Reken & Bethel, 2005). Useem herself stated that as a cultural scientist, she realized that these ideas (TCK) would evolve with time (R. Van Reken, personal communication, December 2013).

For this reason, a variety of other terms referring to the TCK experience were proffered by researchers. These terms included Adult TCKs, Third Culture Individuals, Cultural Hybrids, Cultural Chameleons, Global Nomads (McCaig, 1992; Shaetti, 1993), transculturals (Willis et al., 1994), and Cross Cultural Kids (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Van Reken & Bethel, 2005). While each of these terms described a wider population than that originally researched by Useem, the term TCK remains the most widely used to define the experience of those who are being raised cross-culturally. Van Reken and Bethel (2005) make one important distinction in their latest discussion of the CCK model: they question whether high mobility is a necessary part
of the experience. In other words, the term encompasses the experiences "children often face when growing up among multiple cultural worlds for any reason" (p. 3). This is an important distinction as it relates to the proposed study on Asian students who are raised in their home culture but educated in a western-curriculum international school. Mobility is not the issue, but a daily transition between two different cultures has to be navigated by the student. The CCK term encompasses this experience.

**Benefits of the TCK experience**

The TCK experience has been researched for almost four decades now, and both quantitatively and qualitatively studied. One major theme that has come out of these studies is the somewhat obvious conclusion that there are positive and negative results of growing up cross-culturally, specifically during one's formative years. Referred to by Pollock and Van Reken (2001) as benefits and challenges, the TCK is encouraged to embrace these "often paradoxical" benefits and challenges of the TCK experience. Benefits include:

**Cross cultural skills.** The TCK seems at home in any culture (Greenholtz & Kim, 2009; Arasaratnam & Doerel, 2005). They have learned how other cultures operate and tend to be able to move freely and easily between cultures. For this reason, they also build cross-cultural bridges due to a comfort with diversity (Quick, 2010). The TCK has a sense of ownership and interest in many countries and have an interest in the deeper layers of cultures, people and languages (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). When a TCK reads a news story about some foreign location, chances are good that he can identify in some way with the people affected by that story. The world, for the TCK, is part of their "home." TCKs tend to seek to understand cross-culturally; they don't assume that their way is necessarily the only or right way to think or act (Berry, 2008; Pascoe, 2006; Park et al., 2012). Likewise, TCKs know a lot about many different international
topics, people, names and places. Tolerance for differences and intercultural sensitivity are frequently noted as markers of the TCK profile (Straffon, 2003; Sobre-Denton, 2011; Lyttle et al., 2011).

**Social skills.** The TCK demonstrates higher levels of social sensitivity, interpersonal sensitivity, and the enhanced ability to monitor social cues (Lyttle et al., 2011). They have a wide variety of friends from all over the world, meet new people easily and can read social situations with a great deal of insight. This social acumen can result in TCKs being mistaken for being older than they are (Quick, 2010). TCKs tend to exhibit higher sensitivity and listening skills, due in part to the accelerated maturity that comes through interacting with many people from many different cultures (Pascoe, 2006). Foreign language ability also enhances the TCKs desire to connect with people. This is especially helpful in light of the research indicating a correlation between successful acculturation and connecting socially with host country individuals (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011).

**Adaptability.** The TCK has the ability to adapt to new situations quickly and has high levels of cross-cultural understanding, often coupled with and related to the second-language ability (Berry, 2008; Limberg & Lambie, 2011). TCKs often appear confident in approaching change, though that confidence may also involve the ability to hide apprehension that is felt internally.

**Challenges to the TCK Experience**

Despite these advantages, there are also some challenges that accompany the TCK experience. These include: transition challenges, a lack of relational commitment, identity confusion, a perception of arrogance, and social ignorance. Each of these will be discussed here.
**Transition challenge.** TCKs transition often, but they don't always transition well. It was Useem's reflections that led Cockburn (as cited in Limberg & Lambie, 2011, p. 46) to say, "The experiences of TCKs are similar to new immigrant non-western students' experiences when they relocate to western countries." While one would expect immigrant students who are new to the U.S. to have transition challenges, one would not necessarily expect the same to be found in an American who was returning to the U.S. (their "home") after years living overseas. These two different realities mark the TCK experience; they are cross-cultural, and they are highly mobile (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Researchers have repeatedly pointed to the different stages of grief that are experienced by TCKs during transition. These stages include denial, anger, bargaining, sadness/depression, withdrawal, rebellion, vicarious and delayed grief (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Several studies articulate the psychological impact of frequent moves leading to lower levels of emotional stability (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Lyttle et al., 2011). TCK girls undergoing transition attempt suicide at a rate that is 60% higher than girls who are not transitioning, and feelings of stress, guilt, fear of the unknown, homesickness and alienation are frequently cited by TCKs as significant challenges to cross-cultural living (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009). This grief, related to the identity and mobility markers of the TCK experience, effects TCKs differently, both in degree and timing.

**Lack of relational commitment.** With the adaptability to new situations comes the unwillingness or inability to deeply commit to those new situations. TCKs are used to coming and going, and therefore tend to plant shallow roots in these new situations. This can often be mistaken by their peers as a general *shallowness* on the part of the TCK. While social interactions with other cross-cultural individuals tends to be deep and meaningful, the TCK can
be equally disinterested in committing to relationships with what they perceive to be homogenously-minded people.

**Identity confusion.** Many of these psychological challenges can be attributed to the identity formation confusion that the TCK experiences. While feeling foreign in a foreign country can be expected, it is the transition back to the U.S. that can cause reverse culture shock; TCKs are not prepared for the feeling of being foreign in their own country (Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004). "These globally mobile individuals may be seen as playing a multiplicity of roles, each of which is associated with a specific culture and a specific set of significant symbols. For these individuals, an important aspect of social life is the management of their multiple selves" (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008, p. 266). Pollock and Van Reken (2001) indicate that part of this identity formation challenge is related to the uneven maturity of the TCK: their experiences have accelerated their maturity, leaving them unable to connect easily with their peer group in the home country. At the same time, TCKs may find themselves "out of phase" when compared to their peers. For example, many TCKs arrive back in the U.S. for university without having a driver's license. They have traveled extensively to a variety of amazing international destinations, but cannot drive a car. Quick (2010) reminds TCKs that although their experience has shaped them, that is not the totality of their identity. It should not limit their definition of themselves, but must be seen as one part of the whole.

**Perception of arrogance.** TCKs frequently express frustration with the lack of worldview and cross-cultural understanding of their peers at "home." The stories they tell of exotic locations, foreign friends and their bi-lingual ability can appear to be "showing off." In reality, the TCK is sharing the only story that she/he knows, that of living internationally (Quick, 2010). The TCK may also appear to have confused loyalties that can be mistaken for a lack of
patriotism. In reality, the TCK sees different perspectives on the same issue and may have embraced a different set of values from those the "home" culture believes are right (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). The TCK may find himself in a position where he is more eager to take the less-popular position on an issue, if only to differentiate himself from the homogenous majority opinion. This can be easily misinterpreted as arrogance or even narrow-mindedness, which can then translate into a more difficult social transition for the TCK.

**Ignorance.** Ironically, a TCK can be both incredibly knowledgeable about the world, and incredibly ignorant about his own country. Having spent the majority of their time overseas, chances are the TCK does not know some of the things that "everyone" is supposed to know in their home country. For example, it is highly likely that the TCK may not know the members of the locally-followed professional sports team, and they may not even know the sport or how it's played. The TCK may not be aware of any of the popular music, movies or TV shows that their peers are talking about. Humor that is familiar to the home culture may be completely foreign to the TCK. These things can create additional stress and loneliness during the transition phase (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Ignorance may also cause the TCK to make statements or use words that appear to be prejudicial or "non-PC" (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010; Sobre-Denton, 2011).

**Conflicting Perspectives in TCK Literature**

Throughout TCK literature, differing opinions are encountered regarding the identity formation aspects of the TCK experience. One such debate surrounds the TCK sense of *belonging*. Terms used by researchers to describe this experience include rootlessness, social/cultural marginality, confused cultural identity, multicultural identity, cosmopolitan and homelessness. While some researchers see the TCK as having a lack of a clear cultural home, being home everywhere and nowhere (Rigamer, 1989; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Bushong,
30

1988), others see the cross-cultural communication skills as exceptional and the accompanying experiences as primarily positive (Moore & Barker, 2011; Arasaratnam & Doerel, 2005). The TCK will often identify themselves as "other," when in the home country, as coming from the host country, and when in the host country, as coming from the home country. Rigamer (1989) encourages parents to instill a strong sense of a "home culture" in their children, giving them roots and grounding. Rigamer as quoted by McClusky (1994), states, "…a child has to have a sense of where she's from, where she belongs, who her people are, what her culture is, what her beliefs are before she can open up and become international" (p. 24). On the other hand are those who pride themselves in not actually having this strong base in a single home culture, and consider that the exact nature of the Global Nomad experience. It may be confusing and frustrating to the TCK to be forced to "adopt" a strong "home" culture that they do not themselves feel (McClusky, 1994).

Greenholtz and Kim (2009) discuss further the issue of marginality for the TCK. On the one hand, there are those who seem to experience encapsulated marginality: because of a lack of roots and grounding, this individual experiences a feeling of rootlessness and alienation despite their ability to bridge multi-cultural perspectives and practices. On the other hand, constructive marginality describes the TCK who lives happily and healthily within their own unique, multicultural selves.

Shaetti (1996) describes this by saying:

I moved in and out, between and among conflicting parties, building bridges across differences but never settling firmly on one side or another, in one place or another… I began to use my marginality constructively, to help me become part of society rather than
apart from it. This was an ongoing process, not an event. Now, at least, I value and celebrate my cultural marginality. (p. 186)

In reality, one may see both the positive and the negative in the TCK cross-cultural experience, but researchers agree that there are a variety of positive outcomes related to growing up "between cultures." These outcomes, if navigated in a healthy manner, will lead to a successful identity adjustment and a strong, positive sense of “who one is” in society. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) encourage TCKs to embrace the "often paradoxical" benefits and challenges of the TCK experience. Whereas high mobility may lead to a sense of homelessness, it can create deep empathy and cross-cultural understanding on the part of the TCK towards others. By embracing these competing interests, the healthy identity development of the TCK is more assured.

**Importance of Identity Formation**

The combination of these cross-cultural adjustments and psychological responses to stress are significantly important in the development of identity for the TCK. According to Limberg and Lambie (2011) identity development is more complex than geographic location or ethnic background. Just because one is a citizen of a given country or ethnically identifies with a certain population does not mean that he shares an identity with that same group. The dreaded and unanswerable question, "Where are you from?" further adds to the TCK's convoluted sense of identity. While one may look Western, the thinking, behaviors, values and actions may be more reflective of the host country (the country in which the TCK is living). Conversely, the Asian student who is living in the U.S. or educated in a Western-academic setting in an international school would look Asian, but think, behave and act in a more Western manner.
Uniqueness of the assimilated culture in identity formation. The result of this cross cultural identity confusion is that TCK's end up connecting easily with other TCKs and often find those who have not shared cross-cultural experiences too "narrow-minded." Grimshaw and Sears (2008) address this identity confusion by explaining:

These globally mobile individuals may be seen as playing a multiplicity of roles, each of which is associated with a specific cultural and a specific set of significant symbols. For these individuals, an important aspect of social life is the management of their multiple selves. (p. 266)

In other words, TCK's relate to their world through a variety of unique cultural perspectives and therefore understand and find understanding in others who also relate in the same manner. As described in Hayden and Thompson (1998):

Their crazy-quilt childhoods make them privy to many cultures and owners of none…

Knowing a culture is a little like Trivial Pursuit…You collect lots of information – values, bits and pieces of history, the names of athletes, in-jokes, humor, code words – and then store it away. Then, during personal exchanges, you dip back into the data bank and pull them out and make connections with other people. (p. 30)

Importance of acculturation to identity. Throughout current TCK research, stages of acculturation repeatedly emphasize the differences in the ways that TCKs react to their cross-cultural experiences. Kim and Omizo (2005), Berry (1997) and Berry (2008) discuss four different levels of adaptation to new cultures: (a) separation, (b) integration (acculturation), (c) assimilation, and (d) marginalization. Accordingly, children who transition cross-culturally can choose to integrate the home and host cultures in one of these four ways; (a) they can resist the host culture and instead stay entrenched in their home culture; (b) they can become proficient in
the host culture while still maintaining their home culture as well; (c) they can abandon their home culture and completely embrace the host culture or; (d) they can have no interest in adopting either their home or host cultures. The degree to which they choose one of these four responses can have a significant impact on their psychological well-being and their formation of identity (Kim & Omizo, 2005). If children adapt by assimilating their home and host cultures, the result is a strong multicultural identity. Research findings further indicate that the TCK and the new immigrant both undergo the same identity struggle when transitioning.

**Importance of family to identity.** A final theme that is found throughout TCK literature is the importance of the family in the adjustment of the TCK to cross cultural transitions. Positive relationships with one's parents are an important factor in helping the TCK achieve a strong multicultural identity rather than a confused cultural identity (Moore & Barker, 2011; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). Hervey (2009) goes on to explain that the parents' role in transition is often simply to give the child the freedom to express feelings. They can also help by facilitating and encouraging the maintaining of friendships from the culture that is left behind. This support from parents can help the TCK avoid the natural feelings of loneliness, isolation and restlessness.

**TCK Transition**

Sociologist and TCK guru David Pollock (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) outlines the five stages of a normal transition cycle as follows:

1. **Involvement Stage**- this is the stage immediately preceding transition. The TCK is in a situation where they are known, "settled" and where they feel like they fit.
2. Leaving Stage- The TCK begins to prepare for a move. Preparation often takes on the appearance of detachment; the person begins to mentally and emotionally separate from others and from the situation as a means of coping with the upcoming transition.

3. Transition Stage- This is a stage marked by chaos. The move, packing and unpacking, leaving behind the old community and finding one's place in the new community all mark the transition stage. Families often operate in a dysfunctional manner at this stage due to the emotional extremes that each member of the family is experiencing during transition. The continuity of the previous situation has been replaced by the unknown of the current location.

4. Entering Stage- This stage is marked by the need to figure out how one becomes part of the new community. Roles and relationships are all new, and the social aspects of the new community may operate much differently than the one in the TCK's previous experience. Navigating this can cause angst and fear in the hearts of TCKs.

5. Re-involvement Stage- The end game, at least temporarily, for the TCK. Feeling comfortable enough in the new situation to plug in and get involved is a marker of this stage. Not only does the TCK feel like part of the group in this stage, more importantly others treat the TCK as an accepted member of the new social dynamic.

Although movement through these stages differs widely from person to person, each transition involves navigating each of these stages to some degree, assuming, of course, that the goal is successful adjustment. Quick (2010) states that one could argue that TCKs are in a continual state of transition between each/all of these stages. This is most readily seen in the wide range of TCK answers to an otherwise simple question, "Where is your home?" For this reason also the TCK experience increases the intensity of transition, most importantly because the family
relationship is so tied into the notion of "home" for the TCK, and separation from family leads to a deep sense of grief for many of these students.

**Role of the family in TCK transitions.** Quick (2010) commits a full chapter in her book *The Global Nomad's Guide to University Transition* to the parental support for TCKs during transition. Noticeably absent in her discussion is the need to convince parents that their TCKs have some particular needs during the transition to university phase. Most traditionally defined TCK parents *know* the challenges that are facing their children when they transition from one culture to another because *they themselves have experienced some of the same challenges* during their overseas move. For that reason, Quick's admonition to affirming and valuing the unique needs of TCK children, encouraging parents to help their children say goodbye properly and communicate openly about expectations, anxieties and the future falls on willing ears. Practical helps for parents as they navigate the university transition with their TCK while also planning for the "empty nest" when they return overseas are included in this discussion. The traditional TCK experience, then, clearly resonates with both child and parents, and the transition helps that are given are beneficial to both.

**The Asian Experience**

While traditional TCK issues are clearly widely recognized, there is limited information regarding the Asian TCK experience. In particular, little is known about the specific identity formation and transition challenges for the Asian student undergoing a cross-cultural experience that is related to their academic setting. Several TCK research studies have recommended, for further research, a more careful examination of different TCK possibilities, including the Asian TCK construct (Moore & Barker, 2011). Rather than looking at specific Asian TCK experience, most current research touches on the topic of Asian immigrants, Asian international students and
Asian students who are transitioning back to their "home" countries, and this research is a starting point for better understanding the particularities of the Asian TCK experience.

**Asian immigrant studies.** There have been several studies conducted on the Asian immigrant experience. Sung (1985) discovered that Chinese immigrant children who transition to the U.S. during immigration find acculturation to be a challenge. One of the biggest factors that can lead to difficult transitions and identity confusion for the Asian student is the battle between the cultural values of their home culture (East) versus the values of their host culture (West). Cultural expectations of the traditional Chinese family conflict with those seen in the "host" country, leading to alienation on the part of the child and the need to constantly balance "who they are," whether Asian or Western. Well known to those who have spent any time in the East, the values of collectivism, conformity to norms, deference to authority, emotional self-control, humility, filial piety, and avoidance of shame fly in the face of the individualistic, self-reliant and confident approach valued in the West (Iwamoto & Liw, 2010; Wan, 2001). The Asian immigrant finds himself in "the dilemma of trying to be both Asian and Western without contradiction" (Aitken, 2008, p. 446). Kim and Omizo (2005) further address the psychological implications of the tension in integrating western and Asian cultural values, and conclude that this tension can lead to identity confusion. This complex process of identity formation is due to the challenge of growing up in a setting where parents' expectations and values differ widely from the child's perspective (Garros & Kilkenny, 2007). This tension exists equally on the part of the parents, and has been illustrated even in current popular literature like *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan (1989) and more recently, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* by Amy Chua (2011). In these stories, the traditional cultural norms held by the parents clash with the more western
culture that the children have adopted as part of their own. Acculturation on the part of the child causes conflict with the parents, changing the dynamic of the family roles (Chung, 2001).

These studies add light to the importance of the proposed research. For the Asian student, there are strong roots in the Eastern values (ethnically Asian with Asian parents), yet their schooling in a Western setting (American international school) conflicts with these values. Western teachers in an American-curriculum classroom may mistake the quiet deference and unquestioning respect that is afforded them by Asian students as a lack of interest or inability to effectively communicate. The Asian student in this setting is living the East/West tension described in research on immigrants.

Asian "returnees." Multiple studies have also been conducted on Asian immigrants or international students who have returned home to their country of origin, or "ethnic home." Most of these studies have involved Kaigaishijo and Kikokushijo, Japanese students who having spent several years abroad, are returning to Japan. In general, research found that the re-integration into Japanese society was not easy: returnees expressed this process as painful, turbulent, traumatic and alienating (Fry, 2009). Students who adjusted the best to the host or foreign country, had the most difficult transition upon returning to Japan (Fail et al., 2004). This adjustment challenge is due not only to the identity crisis being navigated by the individual returnee, it is compounded by the treatment of Kaigaishijo and Kikokushijo by Japanese themselves. While there is a fascination with western language and culture, a deep Japanese nationalistic pride relating to language and cultural norms can prevent these students from being fully accepted as "one of us" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Podolsky, 2008). While the treatment of Kaigaishijo and Kikokushijo is not as negative as it once was, reintegration into the local school system may also prove to be particularly challenging road for these students. A similar
experience has been detailed by Korean returnees, who, on the one hand reap the benefits of being fluent in English and exposed to western academics, but can be seen as "elitist" upon returning to Korea. Related to this experience, and of interest to the proposed study, Melles and Schwartz (2013) detail levels of prejudice experienced by TCKs and note that even many western TCKs experience prejudicial treatment and intolerance when returning to their home countries.

While these Asian students clearly experience cross-cultural transition, they do not reflect the experience of the participants of the proposed study.

**Chinese international student studies.** Several studies have also detailed the experience of Chinese students who are studying abroad, either in the U.S. as international students or in other Asian countries outside of their ethnic group. Many of these studies found that the Chinese students engaged in collectivist behavior, choosing to hang out together in homogenous groupings where culture and language was shared (Wan, 2001; Konno, 2005). This was seen as a coping mechanism as these students underwent cross-cultural transition. The Asian values of conformity to norms and deference to authority did not always align with the norms of the culture in which these students interacted (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010), and this had an impact on the students' cultural identity. Studies also addressed the "all Asians look alike" stereotype that may complicate a student's racial identification. This stereotype was not specific to the U.S.: Chinese students studying in Singapore, while appearing ethnically similar to the host culture, experienced varying degrees of identity conflict while navigating this cross-cultural experience (Leong & Ward, 2000). It was postulated that the similarities in ethnic makeup caused an underestimation in the degree of cross-cultural adjustment that was necessary.
These studies support the need to look more closely at the experience of Asian TCKs. While not international students in the traditional definition, these Chinese students who are educated in a western-curriculum international school may appear to be "just another Asian student." This is deceptive; their cross-cultural makeup and convoluted identity does not fit the preconceived expectation or stereotype. For this reason, a careful examination of their particular experience is in order.

Asian TCK experiences. There are several examples of research that is in the realm of the proposed study. One of the most well-known TCK studies involving an Asian participant details the experience of a Korean student, born in Hong Kong and raised in the U.S., U.K., Japan and France, before graduating high school in Canada (Greenholtz & Kim, 2009). The subject of the research, Lena, experiences a true "cultural hybridity," where the ethnocentric/ethnorelative divide was straddled. Despite her cultural heritage, Lena felt most comfortable among those who shared her cross-cultural experiences. This, coupled with her high level of mobility during the formative years, aligned her experience with the traditional TCK definition as outlined by Useem and Useem (1963), Useem (1973) and Pollock and Van Reken (2001). Her experience, however, does not reflect the participant pool in the proposed study: Asian students educated in a Western-curriculum international school. The students in the current study experience far less mobility and fewer transitions than those experienced by Lena.

One researcher of the Asian TCK experience, Danau Tanu (2008) herself a third culture kid, describes the challenge for a non-Westerner in a Western academic setting. Chinese-Japanese-Indonesian by ethnicity, but attending a large Western-curriculum international school in Jakarta, Tanu found that students in her situation had to repatriate every night when they went home. Attending school meant engaging in a Western culture and with it, the expectations of
being "Western." Returning home each evening meant re-entering an Asian culture, and with it, the expectations of being "Asian" (R. Van Reken, personal communication, December, 2013).

Although not technically classified as TCKs, these Indonesian students seem to experience many of the same "growing up among worlds" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. v) issues that traditionally defined TCKs experience. Tanu continues to research this population, exploring the "extent to which TCK identification is a project of growing up overseas or a specific educational experience" (Tanu, 2008, p. 10).

**Parents of the Asian TCK.** One of the challenges impacting many Asian TCKs is a lack of recognition on the part of the student and his/her parents that they are undergoing cross-cultural identity formation challenges. The parents, who are ethnically Asian, desire an American education for their child, including full English immersion and all the Western cultural traditions that are found in most American schools, yet they continue to treat their child as if they are completely Asian (Eastern). The amount of influence that an American school system exerts on these students creates a dynamic where their thoughts, actions and values are more reflective of a Western tradition than an Asian one, yet they remain by all outward appearances, Asian. To make matters more challenging, the role of the family in the life of the Asian student has huge ramifications to the identity formation and adjustment needs of the Asian TCK. The well-known novel by Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* illustrates the pressures that Asian students have in navigating the family relationship, often finding themselves as a cultural mediator between the immigrant parent and the host culture (Aitken, 2008). Through a series of humorous and fascinating vignettes, the book highlights the difficulties that immigrant mothers have to understand their westernized daughters. The challenge of growing up in a family with expectations and values that differ so widely from the child's perspective makes the formation of
identity much more complex (Garros & Kilkenny, 2007). Family pressure increases as parents' sense a loss of control over family roles or family values. Conflict over dating restrictions, expectations for academic success or sacrificing self-gratification for family duty alienates the Asian student from the family support so desperately craved during times of transition (Chung, 2001; Sung, 1985). All these factors contribute to the specific identity and transition needs of Asian students.

Hoersting & Jenkins (2011) address these issues in particular during a discussion of the cross-cultural students. These individuals need a framework and a category in which to describe their particular situation. For the Asian TCK, this lack of recognition as a TCK is the first issue that potentially leads to more identity confusion, often in the form of cultural homelessness or cultural membership uncertainty. A known and recognized term, like TCK or Asian TCK, "normalizes the experience" (p. 20) for the Asian student, allowing them to accept this divergent identity as an acceptable norm. Data clearly indicates that individuals with higher cultural homelessness had lower self-esteem while identifying oneself with a label like Asian TCK led to lower levels of cultural homelessness. This "strong group identification helped maintain an individual's sense of belonging." (p. 28) and may be particularly necessary for the Asian TCK. Tanu (2008) reiterates the need for the TCK to have their experience validated. Accepting the term "Asian TCK" allows the unique experience to be framed in a way that describes reality for the Chinese student educated in a Western-curriculum international school. This in turn gives that student a means of connecting and identifying with a group of others who have also undergone the same experience.
Proposed Research

While there is ample research on traditionally-defined TCK issues and on foreign student/immigrant transition, very little is found on the particular dynamic experienced by Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school. This research study defines these schools as a school that is located in a non-U.S. setting but using a Western curriculum that is English-based and prepares students for college in a Western country. The term is used to contrast this educational setting with a national "local" school curriculum. In the problem under investigation, the Western-curriculum international school is an American-focused curriculum that prepares students for U.S. college and university admissions. The majority of Asian TCK research has been done on Japanese and Korean TCKs who return to Japan after university in the U.S. These students experience a very unique reverse culture shock because of the alienating impact of English speaking ability in a country of non-English speakers and the negative impact that cultural/linguistic miscues has in the otherwise reserved and formal Japanese culture (Fry, 2009). Quantitative research on the differences between the transition issues experienced by Asian TCKs versus traditional international students reported that there is no significant difference in the levels of stress experienced between these two groups when transitioning to U.S. universities (Konno, 2005). Traditional international students are frequently offered significant assistance during this transition, however, while the Asian TCK with their Western-style dress and "non-accented" English are assumed to be "American." As such, their distinct transition needs may remain unaddressed.

It is evident, therefore, according to existing literature on TCK and Asian student transition, that there appears to be commonality between traditional TCKs and Asian students who are living in their "home" culture but educated in a Western-curriculum international school.
Limberg & Lambie (2011) and Hervey (2009), among others, provide a wealth of information on the traditional TCK and the unique adjustment issues faced by these students. Research by Kim & Omizo (2005) presented above, describes the cultural differences between the Asian and Western university student and how those differences impact identity formation. There are clear and distinct gaps, however, in the existing literature: further research on the Asian TCK in particular is needed, due in part to the relatively new phenomenon known as the Asian TCK. Given the themes that emerge regarding traditional TCKs and Asian students and the specific identity formation and transition needs that impact these groups, the literature allows for a case to be made for further research on this topic: Asian TCKs experiences seem to mirror the experience of traditional TCK's, and these students may have a more positive transition to U.S. university life if their unique identity-formation experience was better understood. Furthermore, providing parents with information regarding the markers of a TCK identity and how that impacts their children would allow the family to be proactively and positively involved in the transition phase.

**Conclusion**

While traditional TCKs have well-recognized and understood transition and identity formation experiences, the unique position of the Asian TCK has not been thoroughly researched. Given the positive impact of transition training to TCKs, Asian TCKs may have a more positive transition to U.S. university life if they were provided the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their unique identities and given training to prepare for the stress of transitions. Furthermore, the parents of Asian TCKs may benefit from training that explained the uniqueness of the Third Culture Kid perspective, allowing them to more effectively meet the transition needs of their children. Giving Asian TCKs the tools to understand their unique,
assimilated cross-cultural identity and helping their parents understand and accept the unique position of the Asian TCK may result in a more positive transition and psychological health for the Asian TCK. The implications of researching this topic lead to positive benefit found in the lives of Asian TCKs as they effectively transition to university, understand their unique identity and adjust in a psychologically healthy manner to the challenges of interacting cross-culturally.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Choosing a methodology is largely dependent on the questions being asked by the researcher. In describing the experiences of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school, qualitative research answers the "how" and "why" questions and tells a story about the experience being described (Butin, 2010). Rather than focusing on a cause and effect relationship, qualitative research explores, describes and interprets these experiences, resulting in a thick, rich description of these students, in particular focusing on their cross-cultural identities which have been developed through their lived experiences. The researcher in the context of qualitative research is one who actively learns and relates the experience through the participants' words and perspective (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative methodology aligns well with the central questions being asked:

1. What defines the lived experiences of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school?
2. How do Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school define their own identity?
3. In what ways do the described experiences of ethnically Chinese students attending a Western-curriculum international school and heading to the U.S. for university mirror the described experiences of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCK's)?

Qualitative interviews result in a more thorough understanding of the lived experiences of these students (Creswell, 2013). The themes that emerge through the interviewing process and data analysis allow the researcher to gain a more complete understanding of the complex nature of the cross-cultural experience of these students, leading the researcher to understand the unique
experience, as well as enabling the researcher to discuss the similarities between resultant data and previously reported research that has been conducted with traditional TCKs.

**Paradigm**

Creswell (2013) also states that the researcher inevitably brings to the research setting a set of theories, beliefs and perspectives that guide everything related to the research process. These paradigms act as a lens through which truth is viewed, understood, and presented. Anfara and Mertz (2006) describe this as containing “the researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological premises” (p. xx). Major paradigms include positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism-interpretivism (Creswell, 2013; Butin, 2010).

Research in accordance with the tenets of constructivism-interpretivism is designed with the assumption that reality is socially constructed. In other words, the meaning of truth is believed to be represented differently through the diverse perspectives of the participants, while the role of the researcher is to search for patterns of meaning within those truths. Individuals, groups and cultures all interpret truth uniquely, and the researcher attempts to uncover, document and describe those perspectives. The goal of a researcher operating in accordance with a constructivist-interpretivist perspective is to understand the lived experiences of the participants, experiences that may not even be immediately or consciously known to the individuals (Ponterotto, 2005).

A constructivist-interpretivist acknowledges that reality for the participant is relative and subjective, and understands that the researcher's role is to interpret and describe that reality reflecting the participants' perspectives as closely and as authentically as possible, understanding of course that the researcher brings to the research a unique bias. For the researcher to acknowledge this bias is an integral part of conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).
In the case of ethnically Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum academic setting, the experiences of a cross-cultural upbringing and the resultant cross-cultural identity-formation provide an interesting and unique perspective in relation to existing TCK models. While much has been written about the traditionally defined TCK identity formation, lived experiences and transition challenges, the same cannot be said for the Chinese student who is undergoing the cross-cultural experience of being educated in a Western-curriculum international school. In conducting research with this population, the constructivist-interpretivist approach offers the opportunity to make meaning of the unique cross-cultural identities of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school.

**Phenomenological Study**

The research tradition that is most closely aligned with the focus of the proposed study is phenomenology. Within the context of a phenomenological study on cross-cultural students, a deeper understanding of the "essence" of their lived experiences through interviews with individuals and an analysis of significant statements and themes will emerge (Creswell, 2013). This approach, which has been widely used among previous sociologically-founded research on TCK issues, is resulted in several important findings, including (a) a more complete understanding of the particular and unique experiences of Asian students who are educated in a western-curriculum international schools, (b) a more complete understanding of the impact of this cross-cultural experience on these students' sense of self and identity and (c) a set of data themes and descriptions that can be compared with previously reported methodological research on the traditional TCK experience. This comparison is the bridge between traditional TCK literature and the data that resulted from the proposed study. Through the collection of this data, a more complete exploration of the Asian TCK experience is presented (Butin, 2010). A research
study designed in accordance with a phenomenological tradition concludes with a comprehensive description of what is experienced within the given phenomenon, leading to a better understanding of the lived experience of these students.

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Specifically, the research methodology in this study focuses on the unique experience of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-academic setting by utilizing an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. This approach involves what Smith and Osborn (2007) describe as a "detailed examination of the participant's life world… attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with the individual’s personal perception…” (p. 53). It is a three-pronged approach, examining and making sense of the participants' shared experience (phenomenology), interpreting the participant's experience as it is shared (hermeneutics) and focused on the particular, distinct experience for each participant (ideography). The goal of the IPA approach is to help the researcher make sense of the participants' making sense of the shared experience. In the case of this study, the researcher explored the particular experience of the ethnically Chinese student who is educated in a Western-academic setting by interpreting the meaning behind the personal perceptions or accounts that the participants shared in the interview process. This interpretation was driven also by the researcher's own conceptions and ideas about the phenomenon under examination.

**Role of the Researcher**

Unlike traditional phenomenology, where the researcher attempts to bracket or set aside his own biases, IPA allows for the researcher to take an active role in the process. Smith and Osborn (2007) claim that the researcher's own conceptions "are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity" (p. 53). As someone
who has experienced the TCK and cross-cultural identity under study, the researcher is well-positioned to make sense of the participant as he/she makes sense of the experience. Also particular to this approach, the researcher asked open-ended research questions about a subject that is personal, emotion-laden and practical, and did so in a non-judgmental, active-learner, exploratory manner (Creswell, 2013). In order for this approach to be successfully employed, the researcher needed to be someone who is accessible and trusted, so that participants could openly and easily share their personal experiences. In the case of this particular topic, the researcher is a member of the community in which these students are being educated, is personally knowledgeable about the TCK experience having lived it himself, and has developed a trusting relationship with participants which led to genuine and open sharing about their personal lived experiences. Each of these is an important trait for the researcher in conducting qualitative research within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

There are a multitude of ethical issues related to protection of the participants within a research study. Creswell (2013) reminds researchers that ethical considerations take place at all points in the research process; prior to conducting the study, at the point of collecting data, during analysis and reporting of data, and when publishing the study. Ensuring that research protocols follow the guidelines set by the National Institute of Health and within the scope of approval by the Institutional Review Board of Northeastern University is a primary responsibility for the researcher. Careful consideration of the potential risks (psychological, physical, legal, social, and/or economical) to the participants, particularly those who are more vulnerable, must be assured (Butin, 2010). The researcher did not anticipate nor experience any risk associated
with any aspect of the completed research, neither were participants drawn from a vulnerable population.

In following standard research protocol, several important steps were taken to ensure that participants were aware of the purpose and expectations of the research as well as their rights when agreeing to participate in the research. Firstly, the institution itself was in agreement with the research taking place on campus. The international school received clear and complete explanations of all aspects of the research and gave approval for students within that school to be interviewed. The students themselves were made fully aware of the nature of their participation and gave signed permission for interviews to take place. In line with established norms, participants were given the right to drop out of the study at any time of their choosing. A potential complication when interviewing students was an assumed pressure that involvement in a study may in some way impact grades or other academic achievement (power imbalance). The author of this research was not directly responsible for any academic work for any of the students involved in the research, thereby alleviating that concern.

Secondly, the collection of data must be ethical. Developing a relationship of trust with the participants included full disclosure of how all data will be used. In the case of this study, participants were given the opportunity to review the themes that emerged from their interviews, with the opportunity to adjust, alter or withdraw their remarks at that time. Data collection involves honest reporting and reporting multiple perspectives, including positive and negative results. Participants were made aware of the fact that financial or other rewards were not offered for participation. Data was collected, analyzed and reported in a way that respects the privacy of the individuals. Pseudonyms were chosen by all students who are involved in interviews, and recordings and transcriptions were secured in a locked file cabinet. Computer access of all data
were password protected and after the research is defended, original recordings with any identifying characteristics will be destroyed (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

Finally, presenting and reporting of data was ethical and reflected the protection of participants. All stories that were shared were presented in such a way that individual participants can not be identified. When sharing the individual experiences of any given Chinese student, the story was either intentionally vague or shared as a composite story so that confidentiality is assured. Creswell (2013) reminds researchers that raw data should not be shared with others and that material should not be used for multiple publications without full-disclosure; this protocol was followed.

Site

The chosen research site is a large Western-curriculum international school in Taiwan. This school enrolls many students who fit the demographic described in the research problem: ethnically Chinese students educated in a Western-curriculum international school. While the site is the international school, the participant pool is not currently attending this school. Instead, most of them were alumni from that school. The school is a particular setting in that alumni frequently return to the school to visit, making it an ideal location to connect with participants and to conduct the interviews.

Participants

Given the nature of the research question and following accepted IPA guidelines, the participant population was selected in accordance with specific criteria. In line with a typical purposeful sampling approach, whereby the researcher pinpoints participants who are normal or typical to the situation being studied, students who fit the definition of being ethnically Chinese students being raised in their home culture but educated in a Western-curriculum international
school will be identified. These students must have attended this school during their formative years, described in the study as 12-18 years old. Having lived the experience under investigation, these students are uniquely qualified to do that which Creswell (2013) explains as a need to "describe what is typical for those unfamiliar with the case" (p. 207). Ethnically Chinese students who were raised in a non-Chinese speaking country were not included, as their cross-cultural identity will have likely been impacted from a source other than the international school, and the experience will have differed from the one being explored in this study. During the course of eliciting participants, other ethnically Chinese students who attended a different Western-curriculum international school in Taiwan were identified, and they too were included in the participant pool assuming that they also met the other demographic qualifications. The number of participants involved in the study aligned with standard ranges in qualitative phenomenological research; interviews were conducted with 11 participants with the goal of providing an in-depth, complex view of the lived experience, while preventing the process from becoming unwieldy or diminishing the depth of the data. One interview was eventually dropped from the final data analysis as it did not lead to any significant feedback.

Recruitment and Access

Creswell (2013) reminds researchers that there are several factors involved in recruiting participants for research studies. In the case of qualitative research, greater access to the research site and greater levels of participation and buy-in on the part of researcher and participants are needed. Furthermore, developing a relationship of trust, not only with the participants, but also with the institution or setting in which the research is taking place, is crucial if a researcher hopes to collect meaningful qualitative data.
Given the importance of these factors to this research project, the research site is one in which the researcher has developed trust, having worked in that setting for eight years and having established professional, respectful relationships with others. Effective and open access to the research site can be significantly enhanced with the input and permission of gatekeepers (Creswell, 2013), the role of which, in this case, was played by the principals at the high school level and the Head of School. Gatekeepers not only provide access to the research site, but more importantly can also help the researcher identify potential participants as well as encourage participation in the research process. Within the context of the proposed study, the researcher has a good relationship with the gatekeepers as demonstrated by having been entrusted to do previous presentations on the impact of cross-cultural transition, which is closely aligned with intended research. Once IRB approval was completed, the institutional approval proceeded with no complications.

The recruitment of participants took place through an email sent to the class presidents from the graduating classes of 2006-2014. The presidents of those classes maintain a class Facebook page, and the request was made to forward information regarding the study to the members of each class. The email included a general outline of the topic as well as the specific criteria for those who would like to participate in the research, a clear explanation of the time requirements, general information regarding confidentiality and an indication that there was no significant compensation for involvement in the research interviews. Snowball sampling was used to include other students who met the criteria, as well as recent graduates who were still living in the area. Two participants included in the final data pool were referred by others who responded to the initial email. Students who volunteered for interviews were given a short demographic questionnaire, and final interview participants were chosen based on those who
most closely aligned with the demographic criteria for participants. The researcher attempted to choose an equal representation from both genders when choosing participants.

**Data Collection**

Data collection began once the researcher identified participants who met the desired demographic based on ethnicity, years lived in their "home" culture and number of years educated in an international school setting. Once students were identified as meeting the criteria, 4 boys and 7 girls were chosen to participate in two semi-structured interviews, approximately one month apart. Each interview lasted from 50-90 minutes and was conducted in a quiet but visible room near the technology support center or via Skype or Google Hangouts if the participant was not physically available. The room was private as far as student access, but the interview took place in a room that is visible to other adults. Following IPA protocol, semi-structured interviews were scheduled with participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Interviews began with a casual discussion, followed by a general description of the research topic and a request for permission to record. While specific research questions and sub-questions were asked, the researcher also encouraged elaboration of ideas that were voiced by participants. Through the interview process, the researcher made a concerted effort to connect with the participants so as to better understand their experience, and to "enter, as far as possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent" (p. 59). At the conclusion of the interview, participants had the opportunity to ask questions and were promised a copy of the interview transcript.

The second, follow-up interview took place approximately one month later, after the participant had received the transcript from the first interview. During these follow-up interviews, which lasted 20-30 minutes, participants were given the opportunity to change,
discuss or otherwise clarify things that were verbalized during the initial interview based on their receiving of the interview transcript. This discussion as well as the second-interview questions became part of the overall data analysis. For participants who were not available in person for the second interview, the interview was conducted on Skype or Google Hangouts.

**Data Storage**

Willis, Inman and Valenti (2010) remind researchers that data should be stored in a location that is safe and secure, while the medium used should be stable. In most cases, electronic data storage was used; interviews were recorded using an Mp3 recorder or, in the case of Skype and Good Hangouts, utilizing Camtasia Studio. Anecdotal and reflective notes that were taken during interviews were typed and stored with the audio interview files on a password protected hard drive. The demographic data, original notes taken during interviews and all digital recording files were stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's workplace, with a copy of all digital files stored on a password protected hard drive and stored at the researcher's home. All standard research protocol for the protection of data and the protection of participant confidentiality were followed.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was completed in line with IPA protocol. Interviews were analyzed in several steps, starting with multiple thorough readings of the interview transcript for each participant. Comments were initially made in the margin of the transcripts, after which the comments were highlighted using phrases and themes that "captured the essential quality of what was found in the text" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 68). During this coding process, the researcher engaged in interpretive work typical to the IPA approach. Codes and comments also included descriptions of the particular experience that was shared (descriptive comment), particular words
or phrases that the participants used to explain their experience (linguistic comments) or ideas that were interpreted by the researcher as emerging from what was shared (conceptual comments). Once coding had been completed, emergent themes were listed and connections between the themes and between the different transcripts were coherently labeled. Once all of the transcripts underwent this rigorous process, these themes formed the basis of the data that resulted from the study. A table of superordinate themes was constructed in preparation for writing and discussing the findings.

The final stage in analysis was concerned with translating the identified themes to create a narrative account that fully explored the experience under investigation. Participant comments were linked to themes in this narrative account, and the researcher used specific comments to highlight specific themes that emerged. Linking findings with existing literature was another key component of the final write up and discussion. Finally, recommendations for future study were made based on gaps that emerged through the data analysis or due to nuanced feedback by participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

**Trustworthiness, Quality and Verification**

Limitations and delimitations exist within any research study. Acknowledging and addressing each of these is an important step for establishing credibility, openness and validity. Creswell (2013) discusses at length the significance of validation in qualitative research, reminding researchers that demonstrating accuracy and credibility of findings are no less important in qualitative research than in quantitative. The strategies used to validate qualitative findings must ultimately lead to a sense of trustworthiness on the part of other researchers; the transferability and confirm-ability of the study depends on the credibility established through this validation process (Creswell, 2013). Member checking, prolonged engagement, external audits,
clarification of researcher bias, triangulation and rich, thick description are some of the tools used by qualitative researchers to achieve an acceptable level of validity.

In this study, several steps were taken to maintain credibility, trustworthiness and validity. Firstly, the interview and transcription process was detailed and meticulous. Participant answers and discussion points must reflect as closely as possible exactly what is said by the participants. The coding process was equally detailed, reflective and thoughtful. Codes and themes reflected the reality of participant responses, not the researcher's bias regarding the meaning of what was shared. Aligned with a member-checking approach to triangulation, follow-up meetings with each participant reviewed the themes that emerged during the coding process. If participants expressed concerns over the emergent themes, the researcher sought to clarify, change or discuss transparently these discrepancies. Once participant feedback had been received, the researcher sought the input of other academics who are familiar with the topic at hand, including one of the seminal theorist on cross-cultural and third-culture studies, Ruth Van Reken. Feedback regarding the format of the study as well as the identified codes and emergent themes allowed for clarification of any discrepancies or points of tension with other existing research. This triangulation process added to the reliability and transferability of the study (Creswell, 2013). Finally, it was important for the researcher to fully disclose any data that did not fit the patterns of identified themes or codes; a step referred to by Creswell (2013) as a negative analysis. Acknowledging outliers in the data lent credibility to the other findings that have been identified.

**Potential Threats to Validity**

As a final step in addressing validity and trustworthiness, the researcher must identify potential threats to internal validity. Foremost in this study is the threat of researcher bias; as
someone who has experienced the phenomenon under study, albeit with some variations, it was important that the researcher not assume upon the study or its' participants things that are particular to my experience rather than the lived experiences of the individual participants. While the researcher's acknowledged bias is part of the interpretive aspect of IPA analysis, the researcher needs to resist allowing this bias to alter the data that would otherwise result from the analysis process. Participant motivation, location, attitudes and/or mortality were not a factor in this study; the researcher has a positive working relationship with participants and expected and received a willingness on their part to be involved in the study. As a teacher at the school, the researcher initially feared that he may encounter hesitancy on the part of some participants to be transparent in their sharing, however the positive relationship that has been developed between teacher and students enhanced the conversation and the depth of what was shared by participants. The participant pool was extensive in this setting, so the main challenge was identifying which participants would give a broad perspective of the lived experience in terms of the phenomena.

**Positionality and Bias**

This study originates from the researcher’s own personal and professional experiences with Third Culture Kids. While working at international schools for the past twenty years, the researcher has witnessed first-hand the change in the international school student body make-up, the unique characteristics of the Asian TCK student, and the specific challenges that face this group of students. Similarly, as someone who grew up overseas during his formative years, the researcher also experienced the perspectives of a traditional TCK, having difficulty explaining who he was and where he considered "home." The challenge to adequately understand his cross-cultural make-up was particularly difficult during the high school to college transition, as the researcher returned to the U.S. ("home” culture) but did not feel like he fit into that environment.
Through attending transition training during his senior year in high school and seeing the practical benefits of that preparation during the transition to university, the researcher speculates that there would be equally impactful benefit of this training in the life of the Asian TCK.

The researcher’s initial bias stems from the fact that he is a traditionally-defined TCK. The researcher’s birthplace is Okinawa, Japan, but he spent all his formative years in Vietnam and Taiwan. Educated in an international school, he returned to the U.S. for university looking and sounding just like every other "American" male, 19-year old college student, but in reality there was a dynamic at work that caused some considerable transition stress during the researcher’s first two years of university. This assimilation of cultures (in his case East and West) into a third, unique culture is the defining point of TCK research. The researcher had the distinct fortune of attending university in upstate New York, the same university that was the home to David Pollock, the sociologist who coined the term "TCK" and spent decades studying and presenting on this group of students. Through Dave Pollock’s interaction with the researcher (along with many other TCK's at his university), he gained a better understanding of the cross-cultural experience that he was living, was able to overcome the "out of synch" feelings that resonate so frequently with TCK students and learned to assimilate the cultural mix that defined his life experiences (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). In short, the researcher grew to understand that the distinct background that had been given to him through living overseas resulted in his identity being that of a TCK. This experience and his time with Dave Pollock demonstrated to the researcher the value to TCKs of undergoing transition training and understanding the markers of the TCK identity.

Secondly, the researcher’s positionality and interest in this topic relates to his current employment in a Western-curriculum, international school in Taipei, Taiwan. The majority of
students who attend this school are ethnically Chinese but were born in the U.S. and hold American citizenship. With rare exception, students at this school are trying to gain admissions into a highly competitive university in the U.S. As a teacher here, the researcher encounters many students who exhibit many of the cross-cultural traits that are evidenced both in himself and in the TCK's with whom he was raised. For example, they are bilingual and often mix languages mid-sentence in order to better express ideas. They have melded portions of their home culture (Taiwanese) with their adopted culture (U.S.). While abstract for most, this third culture is very real for the TCK (Limberg & Lambie, 2011). What is unique about the TCK experience for the Chinese student in a western-academic international school setting, however, is that often there is no context for this experience. As a TCK growing up, the terms related to TCK identity were well known among the researcher’s group of friends: “we knew we were TCKs and we knew that we would have transition challenges when returning to the U.S. for university.” The Asian TCK does not necessarily have access to these same ideas. They know that their experience is unique, but they often do not have the label to express this unique experience. When conversing with an alumni in Berkeley several years ago, she listened intently to the TCK discussion at hand. After a few minutes she exclaimed with relief, "Well then I'm a TCK!" It gave her the means by which to verbalize and contextualize her experience.

An additional challenge to Asian TCKs is the perspective and expectations of their parents. Many of the researcher’s students' parents were among the first generation in their families to be educated in the U.S. for university. Their English is still accented and they see themselves as "true Chinese or Taiwanese." There appears to be an unwillingness to admit that their children are NOT the same, and for that reason they hold very traditionally Chinese expectations for these students regarding many aspects of their lives. These expectations impact
all areas: college choice, focus on education, jobs, where and with whom they will live, dating and marriage options. These expectations impact the identity that students hold for themselves, and it is an exploration of this identity that is the primary focus of the current study.

**Challenges Related to Positionality**

When embarking on this research, the researcher needed to be cognizant of how his positionality may impact the collection and interpretation of data. Care was taken to listen to the nuances of the experiences that were being shared by each individual, listening for the details of their story and the ways in which that may or may not reflect his own experiences, rather than fitting what he heard into a preconceived notion of the TCK experience. While fully expecting to hear that there are plenty of commonalities between the experiences of Chinese Third Culture Kids, there were also many differences in those experiences, differences that were a result of a range of family, economic, social backgrounds and/or the time that each student spent in Taiwan. Rather than fitting data into preconceived notions, care was taken to interpret the data from multiple perspectives in order to achieve a more specific and applicable understanding of the experience.

The researcher’s personal background as a TCK has heavily influenced his understanding of the TCK dynamic as well as the need for and value of transition training for TCK students. This has, of course, also led to some biases regarding the TCK experience. Furthermore, the current educational setting allows the researcher to work with many ethnically Asian students who exhibit cross-cultural traits. Markers of traditional TCK experiences are frequently seen in these students, and the proposed research will show which of these markers are similar to the traditional TCK experience and to what extent these similarities exist, with the desire to see that research be applied in a way that will benefit these students as they transition to U.S. university
life. Understanding one’s personal biases allowed the researcher to approach this research with a better understanding of the topic and made him more cognizant of how one’s biases may influence one’s perception of the research data. For the research to be truly helpful, it needs to be presented transparently.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-academic international school, to better understand the cross-cultural identity of these students and to understand this identity in the context of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCK) research. Two separate interviews were conducted with 11 participants, 5 male and 6 female. One interview set was eventually dropped from the analysis due to a lack of sharing on the part of the participant. Analysis of the remaining ten interview data, following the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach, yielded three superordinate themes and nine corresponding nested themes; themes which relate directly to the research questions that guided the study. While the research questions under an IPA approach are framed broadly and openly, the findings that emerge through detailed analysis must relate specifically to the questions that guided the inquiry. This is certainly evident in the findings that emerged in this study. Superordinate themes and their corresponding nested themes relating directly to research question one and two included: 1) developing identity (1.1 language, 1.2 East/West cultural mix, 1.3 role of family, 1.4 western academic environment). Research question three was addressed with the following superordinate and corresponding nested themes: 2) Transitioning (2.challenges, 2.2 successful transition (2.21 friend groups, 2.22 parental understanding and support, 2.23 international student organizations, 2.24 religious fellowships, 2.25 social media)); 3) TCK markers (3.1 homelessness, 3.2 moving between cultures, 3.3 broad perspectives). Superordinate themes were identified as those recurring in at least four interviews with corresponding nested themes identified as those recurring in at least two of the ten interview data.
Developing Identity

The first theme, developing identity, relates directly to research questions one and two; what describes the identity experience of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-academic environment and how do these students define their own identity. Students who are educated in a culture different from their “home” culture often experience the development of a cross-cultural identity due to the necessity of navigating two or more distinct cultures at a time. The first superordinate theme that emerged in this study captures the participants’ challenges in navigating this cross-cultural dynamic. Identity in this context refers to the need for the participant to understand who they are in relation to their environments, whether that be their family, school or social surroundings. It also encompasses the sense of self that the participants develop as they seek to better understand the different contexts that make up their lived experiences; contexts which may include a sense of home, cultural/ethnic identification or answers to the question, “Where am I from?” In the case of the participants in this study, the development of their sense of who they are as a cross-cultural individuals, and how that identity is understood by each participant is the primary focus. The researcher found four distinct areas of convergence among participants as they detailed their lived experiences. Firstly, the importance of language in the development of a cross-cultural identity was consistently mentioned, particularly as it impacted the communication that took place between participant, family and school. Language also had an impact on the participants’ ability to express their own feelings and to articulate the lived experience under study. Secondly, participants referred frequently to the mix of East and West culture in their experiences, whether that be the cultural expectations that were placed on them or the cultural expectations that they placed upon themselves. The role of family as well as family expectations was the third nested theme that was consistently identified.
as an important facet of identity development within the cross-cultural context. Finally, participants referred to the specific role that the academic setting played in the development of this identity; how the Western-academic environment changed their sense of “who they are.” These four nested themes, language, East/West cultural mix, family expectations and the Western-academic environment thus become the nested themes discussed within the superordinate theme of developing identity.

**Language**

The first nested theme involves the use of language and how that use impacts the cross-cultural identity that develops. Participants in this study naturally referred to language as a part of their experience; as ethnically Chinese children they are born into families who use Mandarin Chinese in the home, yet as students educated in a Western-academic setting, English became the medium for communication while at school. This duality in language-use was identified as an integral part of the duality of their cultural identity.

**Dual languages as indication of dual cultures.** Language was mentioned by each of the participants as a key part of their cross-cultural identity. In particular, when asked about the use of language at home, all of the participants replied that there was a mix between Mandarin and English used in the household. Students would use English with one of their parents and Mandarin with one of the other parents, or they would use “Chinglish,” a mix of back-and-forth English and Mandarin. All of the participants relied on both languages to communicate at home to adequately express their ideas. For example, Jack commented, "Both my parents speak English and Mandarin fluently, so it's convenient…Like sometimes, there are some phrases in Chinese… or some phrases in English that are… [better expressed] in a particular language, so I guess [I used] whatever [language] is more effective in communicating what idea I'm trying to
say.” Similarly, Mina adds that she speaks back and forth seamlessly with her family in "Chinglish. “I am sure they have asked me something in English and I've replied in Chinese, or they ask[ed] me something in Chinese and I've replied in English.”

Speaking both languages at home was an important part of how students described their identity. They saw themselves as cross-cultural because they were also cross-lingual. This was true whether the students started life speaking Mandarin or whether they started speaking English. The relationship with their parents was one that involved the use of both languages seamlessly. This dual use of languages then naturally resulted in a cross-cultural identity in participants that are being raised using both languages back and forth.

**Language when expressing emotion.** Students also described themselves and their parents as having a default language of comfort. This is the language that would be used during moments of heightened emotion. For instance, students explained that for some of them, their parents would use Mandarin when they were trying to express different levels of emotion in particular, but in general conversation, the same parent might use English only; the indication being that the expression of emotion would be most closely connected with one’s sense of self. Likewise for most participants, English became the default in an emotion-laden conversation. Two participants provided specific examples of how English is their primary language of comfort. Jack stated, "English is still my primary language, the language I'm more fluent in and well-versed in, so if I get frustrated or nervous or angry or emotions, whatever the emotion, usually brings out the English….” Becky likewise commented, "I think when I'm having a serious conversation, it's in English, because I can express myself in English better. It's actually quite even in the rest of conversation, just random [back and forth in English and Mandarin]."

This idea was shared by the majority of participants, who made comments that they express
themselves more clearly using English, which was the language of their education, although certain ideas or concepts required the use of Mandarin to convey particular and specific meanings.

While students express an advantage in using two languages, there are some challenges that accompany this use of deal languages in conversations. For example, Becky mentions that it is, "problematic, because you end up not knowing certain vocabulary words for a certain language because you just use the other language if you don't know." In other words, there is a negative aspect of bilingualism. There are times when students feel that they can’t adequately express what they are thinking or feeling because of gaps in the languages, which in turn add to the cross-cultural identity frustration for these participants.

**Language and family expectations.** While the back and forth in Mandarin and English helps to create this cross-cultural identity in these participants, the expectations of the parents on the participants also becomes a key factor. Three of the participants mentioned specifically that their parents have put pressure on them to learn Mandarin better in order to maintain their Chinese identity in the midst of their Western academic identity. There was an implied concern that the participants, having been educated in English, were losing a part of their Chinese identity. Iris, for example, explains that during her time in high school, her parents insisted on her studying Mandarin instead of any of the other foreign languages. "My parents were very adamant about, 'You don't even know how to speak your own language. Why are you trying to learn another language?' And that was something that stuck with me …." The expectations from parents to learn Mandarin well in the midst of also speaking fluent English create in these participants a unique cross-cultural identity related to this language acquisition. JY mentioned that her parents primarily talk in Chinese, but they consciously use certain words in English to
make it more understandable for her, even though she will reply, "It doesn't really matter. You can talk Chinese, I'll understand." JY goes on to mention that there seems to be in the back of her mind the idea that she can't speak proper Chinese. "So [my mom] maybe like dumbs down her vocabulary and feels like I can't notice. She'll say something or she'll speak very clearly so that I can understand her, but I try to reassure her by speaking Chinese, oh, I can understand, or things like that.” She goes on to say, "I don't know what I sound like in Chinese. I'm still in denial about the fact that I have an accent.”

Language expectations at home and abroad. It became apparent through the feedback voiced by participants that, in the midst of the obvious advantage found in bilingualism, there can also exist a tension related to identity based on language use. This tension is compounded by comments made to participants related to their language. Participants were further reminded of their cross-cultural identity in two different facets of language acquisition. One was in the local response to their fluent English and the other was in the American response to their fluent English. In both settings, participants were “reminded” that they did not fit the mold or expectation.

When interacting with local Chinese people, the participants in the study, who spoke fluent English and Mandarin, often experienced a reaction from the local population regarding their fluent English. Local Chinese will hear participants speak to each other in English, and express surprise that this “Chinese person” is speaking such fluent English. The fluency of English separates participants from locals. Irene explained that when she tells [local] people she's from Taiwan, they say, "But you speak English… I have to explain to them that I grew up in a different place [and in an English speaking school].” This reaction is further compounded because their Mandarin, when speaking with local people, is not as fluent as it should be. JY
mentioned, "Here in Taiwan, people don't believe me because I don't sound like I'm from Taiwan. I don't really look like I'm from Taiwan, even though I've been here my entire life, and in America, they don't believe me, either because I don't look like I'm from Taiwan, I don't sound like I'm from Taiwan. They'll have to really know me to know the difference.” She goes on to say later, "I speak Chinese [with] an accent … which is really embarrassing, so I open my mouth and they know, and … [I] don't fully identify with the people here.” Irene explained, "I guess when I'm interacting with local Taiwanese, I feel a slight disconnect as well because I'm not fully immersed in the culture, because, again, it's six years since I've lived here, and so it's always a back and forth. Besides the slight language barrier, my level of Chinese is about just conversational. There are certain terminology that I'm not familiar with and slang nowadays I have no idea.” Matt added, "I speak Mandarin with an American accent, I've noticed. It's something that I'm really disappointed in myself with and it's something that is really sad because I've been here for 10 years.” The tension that exists locally, then, is two-fold; participants speak English better than they should to be defined as “local,” and they do not speak Mandarin as well as they should to be thought of as “local.”

Conversely, when these participants go to the US, language also becomes an area of difference with their American friends; they run into the opposite stereotypes. According to Jack, when he went to university, met new people and explained that he was from Taiwan, he would encounter the international student stereotype; the American friend would usually say, "'Oh, you're an international student! Your English is so good!” Jack explained, “so I usually tell them I'm American, and if I've gotten to know [them] better, … I've lived in Taiwan for a while …but usually I'll leave out that part so I don't have to explain why my English is so good and all the stereotypes or rumors that they may have heard about [Taiwan].” Becky added that when
explaining that she is from Taiwan, she often hears, "Oh, wow, your English is so good!" and she would need to go on and explain that she went to an international high school in order to help people understand why an ethnically Chinese student who did not grow up in the US would be speaking un-accented English. Mina and Taylor also added that when they are asked where they are from, the follow-up question is usually, “Why is your English so good?” This was a shared experience for all participants in this study and lent itself to a difficulty explaining their identity to people they encountered.

Language then becomes a key factor in identity development for these participants. While on the one hand they speak Mandarin, they speak it in such a way that it is obvious to local Chinese that they don't belong here. On the other hand, their ethnic Chinese identity does not fit the stereotype they encounter when they get to the US and are able to speak fluent English, even though they grew up in an international setting. Communicating with others takes place in a multi-lingual environment and navigating this language issue becomes a part of the identity development for participants in this study. In the case of these participants, the use of Mandarin at home and the learning of English in the academic setting has resulted in a back and forth between these two languages. This becomes key to who they are as a person and how they identify in terms of ethnicity, culture and language. It also creates difficulty when encountering local population because it becomes apparent very readily through their Mandarin that they are “not one of them.”

**East/West Cultural Mix**

Just as the back and forth between Mandarin and English becomes a key aspect of cross-cultural identity, participants also expressed other areas where an East vs. West cultural mix defined their identities. For the majority of respondents, this was simply a situation where they
were unable to align themselves completely with any one culture or any one place, but this was
not always as simple as a mix between an American and a Taiwanese culture. Students
navigating in East-West cultural mix experience unique difficulty when pressed on which
perspective they most identify with. Participants in this research study were asked to explain the
experience that they’ve had growing up between cultures. In doing so, the researcher would ask
participants which culture they most identified with. Responses varied among students, but the
general underlying theme that emerged was that it was very difficult for students to completely
identify or align with any one culture. The experience of being ethnically Chinese raised in a
home culture but educated in a Western-academic environment led to the development of a
cross-cultural identity; an experience that was expressed in a variety of ways.

**Convoluted identity.** Many of the students, when interviewed, responded that they may
identify with one culture or another, but as clarifying questions continued to be asked, the
identification changed. This is not unusual for people who are going through cross-cultural
identity, and in particular, as they grow to understand their identity better. JY responded without
hesitation to the question of cultural identification with the answer, “Taiwan.” She then backed
that up by saying that she tells people that she’s “Taiwanese.” Yet a moment later, JY faltered on
that identification, “I mean, I feel like I’m not Taiwanese. I can’t just be that. That doesn’t make
sense fully to me. And I can’t be American either. I don’t fully identify with the American
culture either. So yeah, ethnically by definition I’m Taiwanese. But emotionally or
psychologically that doesn’t really fit. That doesn’t really sum up who I am completely.”

Irene commented that as she got older, her Taiwanese identity grew. "When people ask
me if I'm an American, I say yes, but I don't really know what that means anymore, especially
since America is such a melting pot of all these identities of people. So everyone coming into it,
when they say they're American, they don't really, I guess it's almost just a term, it doesn't really mean anything anymore. So I've definitely grasped on to my Taiwanese side.” She goes on to say, "I felt like I was a little more Taiwanese than I was American, even though I had that background, that mixed background.”

One significant reason for the convoluted sense of East/West identity seemed to be related to the fact that the participants did not fit entirely in a local culture nor entirely in a Western culture. When they were out and about in Taiwan, they were not considered a local, as defined by Mina, “My accent, my dress, the way I walk, the way I speak Mandarin, I sound like an ABC. And even the way we dress and the way we walk, people describe it as a certain air of confidence that kids here don't have." This was something that came up repeatedly in other participant interviews. Irene added, “I almost feel like an outsider because whenever me and my sister visit [local family members] …we kind of lose things to talk about and were just kind of listening to their conversations.” “I could sense [my local friends and family] saw us differently, nothing specific, no specific actions, but just they saw us differently. We weren’t one of them,” added Becky. Irene shared a story about how, even though she identified with her American side, she was not “American” enough to local employers to get certain jobs because of her ethnic appearance being Chinese. For example, she was passed up as an English teacher merely because of her ethnic identity even though her achievement and experience in English surpassed the eventual hire in that job. The need for participants to navigate and understand their own cross-cultural identities, then, is complicated further by the expectations and responses of those they encountered on a daily basis; there were daily reminders that they did not fit entirely with the Eastern or the Western contexts.
Uniquely Taiwanese. One final aspect of the East-West cultural mix that became evident through interview data was the response on the part of the participants regarding the pride they feel in claiming Taiwan as part of their identity. This was something that had less to do with what many people would consider cultural attributes as it did to the fact that Taiwan is, in the participants’ estimation, such a wonderfully unique country. When asked in which culture she feels the most comfortable, replied, "Not even probably. Definitely Taiwanese culture, and I think that unfortunately just boils down to the fact that even though they know I'm different, I look similar to …” She went on to say, "I wonder how much of your research is going to be driven by the fact that Taiwan itself is a very unique culture because the locals are just so friendly.” Becky stated that it's uncomfortable for her because she feels like “cross-culturally, I’m Taiwanese and something else.” When pressed on what that something else was, Becky replied, "The other 30% is TAS American, an American school.” Even the understanding of what it means to be Taiwanese or American comes into play when expressing the East-West cultural mix and how that impacts a participant's identity development. According to Jack, "I actually got a question a couple weeks ago one of my friends asked me… ‘are you Taiwanese, or are you American… if people ask you, what do you say?’ It took me a while… even to this day, I haven't formulated an accurate answer to that. I guess I'm a little of both…If I had an option I'd say both, because I was born into a Taiwanese background, but I was born as an American. So in that case, I usually just tell people I'm Taiwanese-American.” Irene added, “I think for some kids, they really spend half of their life in the one area and the other half of their life in the other area, so maybe they didn't go back and forth as much as I did. Maybe their experience is a little clearer for them because they know that exactly this part of my life I was here and then here I was like this. So maybe it's easier for them to identify that part of their experience made them
think this way, whereas for me it was a lot of back and forth, so everything just sort of meshed together." When asked about his experience, Matt replied, "The idea of an American culture for me is different from actually living in the US… being exposed to an American school does not make me exposed to all American culture." Yet when asked to explain further, he also did not identify with the Taiwanese. The Taiwanese, he said, "is also the international. I don't know if it counts. It's like this lifestyle being in a mix, like the center of a Venn diagram. It's just more comfortable."

This East-West mix in the cross-cultural identity of participants was voiced again and again throughout the interview process. While participants were not always able to articulate the reasons that they did not fit in one culture or the other, each one expressed a place of tension between cultures, not fully identifying with either.

**Cross cultural values.** An additional aspect of cross-cultural identity as expressed by students was the cultural expectations placed on them to conform to the cultural *values* of the Eastern or Western traditions. Values relating to the importance and role of the individual in society, respect given to the opinion of elders, and the value of family and education are expressed differently in Western and in Eastern tradition. As individuals who are “caught in the middle” between these two cultures, participants gave voice to the experience that they were expected to navigate these cultural values in the same manner that they navigated the other differences between the East and West. For example, JY referred to the fact that her family, especially on her grandparents' side, are very traditional Chinese grandparents, expecting the Eastern traditional focus and respect for elders, and there were aspects of that culture that she personalized for herself. "The filial piety thing, the hierarchy thing… I don't identify completely with Eastern culture. But in America, I don't identify with a totally individualistic culture, either.
I think that… people are [self-centered]. I don't have that…whatever I do, I want to do it for my family.” JY goes on to explain the difference between her perception of the Western individualistic value and this stereotypically Eastern way of thinking, "The self-centeredness is kind of annoying, the fact that people seem to do things for themselves. It's very hard to relate sometimes because of the self-centeredness. Conversations are superficial because, [people act as though] if you're not advantageous to me, I don't really need you. It's very hard to have a conversation about something real with [someone with Western values].” While those who adhere more closely to Western individualism may take exception to her description of this value, JY’s explanation reflects a reaction to a stereotype of one side of her cross-cultural identity, a side with which she does not prefer to align. Daniel explained, "Sometimes with most of my cousins [who live in the U.S.] I'm a little frustrated because they are too Americanized. They are too…white-washed. There are a lot of things that are very important with our cultural identity, our moral values, our language, our arts. The appreciation for the Chinese culture should exist. After all, this is where you're from. My cousins oftentimes don't see it that way or they have a very difficult time understanding. Part of the reason is their parents don't care as much, either. We can talk about American culture things, pop culture… but we can't talk about how we view certain issues or how they act.” Daniel mentioned that part of this mix has led to him seeing the world as a smaller place and that he does not identify strongly with one culture or another, but finds himself in the middle. He mentions things he notices about his American cousins that irritate him. For example, "My cousins in the US have a sense of entitlement. This is kind of clear in the US culture in my opinion. The parents kind of serve the kids more than anything else. Often at times, I don't agree with that." This value, as he saw it, contrasts sharply with the filial piety perspective found within the Eastern culture with which he identified, yet
while Daniel saw things in the Western culture that he did not like, he also did not fully identify with the Eastern culture either.

It was evident, then, to the researcher that the navigation of the East-West cultural mix was a difficult one, one that participants had a difficult time explaining and articulating in a way that could be easily understood. Participants vacillated back and forth in their own responses as to which culture they more closely identified with and they explained the East vs. West cultural expectations as being a part of this difficulty. Finding the mix between the Taiwanese side of who one is and the American side of who one is becomes a process that leads itself to coming up with a third alternative, a cross-cultural mix, a unique culture in and of itself that neither aligns fully with the Taiwanese nor the American cultures exclusively.

**Role of Family**

The role of the family and familial expectations is the third subordinate theme under Developing Identity that emerged through detailed data analysis. Participants in the study expressed in many different ways how the family impacted their view of who they are and how they end up identifying themselves. The family's impact on identity development is arguably even more important in an Eastern cultural context because of the importance given to the role of the family in the life of the individual. Eastern value systems require the family to be a part of the overall decision-making process on the part of the individual. In other words, decisions are not made in absence from family input and opinion. Participants in this study, having been raised with one foot in the East and one foot in the West, are clearly impacted by the Eastern cultural tradition of allowing family to have impact on decisions made in their life. This then in turn impacts the way that the participant may or may not view him or herself because of the family's view of who they are. When asked a question regarding parental input, Irene responded, "Am I
factoring in my parents? I mean, if it was just me, purely me, I would answer a certain way.” But she admitted in the discussion that she would have to factor in her parents; that was the expectation placed on her within this context. Irene’s comments were shared by four other participants, all of whom related stories of how the extended family becomes part of the decision making process. Family expectations come into play in the lives of participants, not only in whether they identify as Chinese or American, but even in other decisions they will make in their life regarding what kind of jobs they will have, the importance of education, or even who they will end up marrying.

**Pressure to be more “Chinese.”** The majority of participants in this study expressed the fact that their parents wish for them to identify more with their Chinese roots. Matt commented that his parents "expect us to identify as Chinese. It used to be funny like, because my Mandarin wasn't as good and they would say, 'Matt, people are going to see you as Chinese, and then you're going to speak terrible Mandarin,' and they'd be like, 'You're just American,' and I'd say, 'No!' But at the same time I would usually, my default is that I identify as Chinese, and then Canadian, and then American." Daniel added, "Families are extremely important. Family is the core component to everything. We feel like we need to resolve issues instead of just leave things there. We believe a lot in the Confucian morals. We believe we should not consume in excess. Everything should be just about right. Humility, modesty, those are things our parents keep stressing.” "My family already has a mindset,” explained JY, “the Western mindset, but they are also an Asian family… we're an Asian family, so I was raised like that. So there was a lot of those values, like responsibility, respect, very, very, or like honor. That's still very much a part of me, which is maybe not quite a Western thing, but education like language and the way we learn things, the things we were supposed to like, teachers, how in Eastern culture we're taught to
respect your teachers, and... I had ... Western teachers. So we were more eager to learn the Western culture from our Western teachers because of our Eastern culture being like, you need to learn and you need to listen to your teachers.”

Several participants mentioned that their parents express some understanding of this dynamic. "Oh, yeah, of course, I still think they think of me as a Taiwanese kid going to America but having American behaviors. It's still placing you in an environment....,” explained JY. Taylor said that her grandparents frequently remind her that she's Chinese, by commenting, "You are Chinese. You're Chinese. And when I tell my parents I'm Chinese, my dad will be like, 'No, you're American.' And my mom doesn't care.” When asked why there's this difference in opinions among her family members, Taylor mentioned that her grandparents have a strong affinity with the Chinese culture, whereas her dad likes America and doesn't mind his daughter identifying with America. Becky also added that her parents frequently remind her that she's Chinese. When overhearing her make comments related to her Taiwanese identity or an American identity, they will later remind her, “Becky, you do know you’re Chinese, right?”

The emphasis placed by parents for these students to identify with the Chinese culture lends itself to the cross-cultural identity being developed. Students are navigating not only their own experience, they're navigating the parental expectations placed upon them as they walk through the identity development years. These expectations often compete for identity allegiance, and provide frequent reminders to students that they do not fully “fit” in either culture.

**Western-Academic Environment**

The final subordinate team under Developing Identity is the Western academic environment and what impact that has on the cross-cultural identity of the individual. The
Western academic environment in this setting refers to a large international school where the curriculum being used is Western-focused and the language of medium is English. Participants mentioned that this Western academic environment was different than a local academic environment that they might find in a Chinese school. Matt commented that the Western academic setting was what was attractive to parents, that it would be beneficial to have an American-style education, even though the ethnic Chinese identity was so important. He goes on to explain that this academic environment led to changes in his mannerisms and accents, through the fact that he's more outspoken and more social than other Chinese students who have been raised in a more traditional academic setting, this leads to his cross-cultural identity. "I think my parents sent me here with the intention of preparing me better," explained Mina, “having a wider worldview and everything, and it definitely did do that. But I also feel like it made things too easy for me growing up. If I would have gone to a local school, I would've struggled so much with the workload. And I know that students at TAS work really hard, too, but it's a different environment." Mina also mentioned that her parents, unlike a lot of Eastern parents, allowed her to make a lot of choices in her life about where she went to school. Becky added that her teacher in fifth grade forced her to speak in front of the class [which was not usually the case in a local school] and it was helpful in giving her confidence.

There are several other facets of the Western academic environment that students point to in impacting their American identity as opposed to the Taiwanese identity: the open-minded approach to education, the ability to challenge their teachers, the ability to think creatively and outside the box, to have less pressure in terms of academics. Each of these were mentioned by multiple participants as a difference in the Western academic environment that they would not find in a local academic environment. "The American education system is focused on creativity..."
and on solving problems,” stated Matt, “where from my opinion, local school and the Chinese
education system is more focused on memorization and figuring out problems without having to
find ways to solve them, and then just doing that over and over again. It's like TAS at the middle
school. We had those problem-solving and there were like 10 different ways to do that, whereas
at local schools, they'd have only one way.” He goes on to explain that the idea of individualism,
being creative, having thoughts for himself, were all markers of the Western academic
environment. JY mentions that curriculum in a Western academic environment is, "more
effective. I feel like we're learning in 3D whereas in a local school you learn in 2D. I don't know
if that makes sense. It's just much deeper, so much more comprehensive, and there's an
environment.” Daniel added, "TAS allows students to talk more. They encourage you, in fact.
They encourage dissenting opinion. One of the reasons why I left local school is I had too many
confrontations with my teachers and they thought it would be a better environment for me where
I can voice my own opinions….”

These factors, repeatedly mentioned throughout participant interviews, lend themselves
to a better understanding of why the Western academic setting is an important part of the cross-
cultural development of the individual. While the use of English as the medium of instruction
creates a bi-lingual student, the expectations for the student within the context of the Western
academic environment become an integral part of the cross-cultural identity that is being
developed. This Western academic environment was referred to by all participants as a key to
more opportunities in the future, not only in terms of U.S. college admissions, but in the variety
and complexity of jobs available to them in an increasingly globalized job market.
Transitioning

Transitioning was the second superordinate theme that emerged through thorough data analysis, a theme that relates directly to the third research question; in what ways do the described experiences of Asian students attending a Western-curriculum international school mirror the described experiences of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCKs)? Participant responses regarding transition highlighted the many ways in which the experience for Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school mirrors that of traditional TCKs. In many cases, the cross-cultural identity of a student is highlighted during the transition phase, as students move from the overseas setting to university in the U.S. When students are raised in a setting where all their classmates are also cross-cultural individuals that identity experience becomes “the norm.” When transitioning to a new setting, however, the cross-cultural individual suddenly realizes that their understanding of what is “normative” may not be accurate. The transition phase becomes a time where cross-cultural students realize the unique distinctive of their particular experiences. For participants in this study, the transition-to-college phase was identified as a time where they started to realize and appreciate the unique cross-cultural identity that defined their lived experience. Nested within this superordinate theme are two subordinate themes; challenges of the transition phase and markers of successful transitions. Participants referred to several things that assisted in successful transitions, including finding a friend group, parental support and understanding, international student organizations, religious fellowships and social media. These areas of convergence across participant responses will be discussed here.

Challenges

Participants in the study expressed a variety of issues related to transition to the US for university. These transition challenges included encountering stereotypes and expectations that
people had about them because of their ethnic or overseas living experiences, adjustment to
friendships and expectations with friendships in college, and adjustments to being so far away
from home. The challenges encountered were compounded by the fact that many participants
assumed that going to the US would not involve a big transition because they identified, at least
in part, as Western. In reality as Mina noted, "It's very different once you are actually there…
America is huge. There are all kinds of kids so I was surprised at how big the actual difference
was. I thought that it would not be that hard of a transition. I thought that I could just ease into it
but it was very different so that kind of threw me off." This was an experience shared by most of
the participants as they made this transition to university.

**Encountering stereotypes.** Encountering stereotypes was one thing that was mentioned
by five participants in particular, mostly in relation to the fact that Americans who they ran into
at college had expectations about them as ethnically Chinese. Many of these stereotypes were not
true of participants who were cross-cultural. Iris commented, "I am sure it was happening the
whole time I was living in Taiwan but it was really solidified for me when I went to college and I
was in the minority. I am not sure the kids who are white or not Asian probably felt something
but for me in that sense I didn't have to but when I was in college it wasn't anything over but
people made comments like, 'Oh why do all the internationals hang out together? Why do all the
Asians hang out together?' Those comments really bothered me and probably made me feel like I
had to consciously not just be friends with Asians but at the same time it also made me feel more
proud of my culture and ethnicity." Daniel mentioned along with Jack that there is a general
ignorance about the location of the country of Taiwan and that ignorance is most frequently
voiced in terms of comments like, "Oh you’re from Thailand." "I like Thai food." Or, "Have you
ridden an elephant before?" For other people who are more educated on the subject, according to
Daniel they will say, "Great, Taiwan. That's the country off the coast of China and you guys are having some kind of power struggle. It will be an interesting thing to talk about." Mina mentioned that one of her roommates was from China and there were several students who indicated that one of the challenges they had to overcome in adjusting to university was the stereotype that Chinese from China and Chinese from Taiwan are the same thing or that all Asian students are the same and have experienced the same things. Participants, understanding that they did not fit the stereotypes ascribed to them, expressed frustration. This also led to a defensiveness in standing up for other Asians when they were looked down on or stereotyped by friends in the U.S. Three participants shared about their time in university when international students would be ridiculed or mocked by American students as “fresh off the boat.” Participants would come to the defense of international students, even though the international students differed in the way they themselves would self-identify.

**Friendship adjustment.** Each of the participants mentioned specifically that the biggest adjustment was really adjusting to the people and building positive relationships. According to JY her biggest challenge was how to connect. "I really had to think about it though. I was like I was a fish out of water. I was miserable as a freshman and the weirdest thing is that I was miserable without even knowing that I was miserable. I [wanted] to be American.' Then coming home I [reflected], ‘Why did I do that?’ I didn't even know that I was stripping my identity…Do not lose yourself." This desire to fit in socially was repeated across the board by all participants. Jack mentioned, "My freshman year was kind of difficult. Making new friends, getting used to new environment even though that's where I am originally from but still being away from so long it's a new environment. Making new friends and getting used to a new lifestyle, a true independent lifestyle away from my parents. That's definitely one thing I had to deal with." Mina
commented, "I didn't feel like I fit in the community there. Sometimes when I go back and think about it I am not sure if I wasn't trying hard enough. If I had expected it to be easier for everything to just fall into place. I don't know if I didn't put in as much effort or if it really just wasn't for me."

The most common comment regarding the difficulty in developing friendships when transitioning to university was that the relationships and friendships encountered seemed to be phony or fake. Taylor mentioned, "I guess I didn't feel bonded and everyone, I don't know. I feel like it was kind of phony." Other students commented particularly on the fact that they were feeling disconnected and that the students they encountered at university seemed in the words of Taylor, “extreme….They would just care about themselves," she said, "they would [consider], 'Oh I shouldn't do this because it might affect her.' They would just be like, 'I'm going to do this.'"  Matt mentioned that the homogeneous environment at TAS is safe and that was not what he encountered when he went to college. "Personally I don't drink in the US because one, I'm not legal and two, I don't want to put myself in a position where I can be in some danger. When I come to Taiwan I have no problem going out to drink or go out to have fun with my friends because Taiwan is that culture that seems completely safe." "The American lifestyle threw me off," added Jack. "College lifestyle like the parties, the campus lifestyle, having so much gap between classes, there's a lot of different aspects of college life that was different from high school." He went on to mention that he couldn't afford this lifestyle. "First of all, I can't afford [it from a] financial aspect and I can't afford it on an educational aspect. It's not worth it. At the beginning I guess I just wanted to make friends. Like I don't care who my friends are. After a while I realized I can't be friends with everyone." Iris went on to add to these comments by saying, "Socially I felt like there were a lot more kids I had seen that would just drink and do
really stupid things and that kind of surprised me. I was like, 'Oh I cannot believe someone could do this. Clearly you have to have some sort of intelligence to get into this school. You are acting like a complete idiot or a very irresponsible actions.' That was a little surprising to me. They seem on that level a little less mature."

These comments reflect a general feeling on the part of the students that the social transition to college was an area of difficulty. The stereotypes attributed to them as Asian students did not, in many cases, “fit,” the friendship dynamic was different than the one that participants were accustomed to, and the level of maturity among peers did not meet expectations. In addition to these factors, the students were located in the US and for the majority of them, their parents were still residing in Taiwan. The distance alone between their university and their home created a feeling of disconnect from what was going on at their home and led to feelings of loneliness and isolation. While it is not unusual for college students to encounter some adjustment issues when transitioning to their freshman year in college, it seems that the cross-cultural identity of ethnically Chinese students who are educated in western academic setting lends itself to a more difficult social adjustment when encountering students who did not fit the social norms that they were used to encountering at their international school.

**Successful Transition**

While encountering these challenges can be expected, addressing the challenges and overcoming these challenges is the goal for successful transition. Participants mentioned several factors that allowed them to address the transition challenges they encountered as cross cultural individuals. Several of the participants alluded to the fact that this adjustment is ongoing. JY said, "I am still kind of adjusting to it. I am a lot more careful about who I share my feelings with… I am more careful about how I express caring for somebody." Her expression of an
ongoing transition and an ongoing adjustment was shared by many of the participants. The positive impact of friend groups, parental support, international student organizations, social media and religious organizations were factors in the successful transition as mentioned by participants. These will be individually addressed here.

**Friend groups.** The primary way that participants chose to adjust to this transition challenge was to find good friends. Iris mentioned, "I talked to my close friends about the way I was feeling. During senior year when I was applying to med school, I also talked to a therapist at school about it because they have therapists on campus. That definitely helped." Becky added, "I think [my transition] could of been a lot harder, but I was very lucky because I found very close friends in my first semester at school. I almost don't know [what a difficult transition would be like] because I just found amazing friends." Daniel mentioned that he made his own group of friends, a group of entrepreneurs on campus in which he experienced a “good fit.” He found them to be more open minded to different markets, to different things and they saw a larger world. Irene commented, "Finding the group of friends within my first year was key. We had the incoming freshmen. There was seven or eight of us and we all became really close and built that friendship throughout the rest of the four years." She went on to add that her declared major was a big factor in identifying that group of close friends, as friendships developed within the students that were all sharing the same major.

There were several participants who referred specifically to the Asian friendship groups that they developed during the transition process. For example, Jack shared that his development of a friend group primarily reflected friends from the Asian community. "Most of my closest friends would probably be in the Asian-American community. I guess it's just more comfortable being around that environment…you are either Asian-American or you've lived in, I guess, from
an area that's predominately Asian or someone that's lived internationally for a while because I guess we have things to talk about. I ... happen to so naturally gravitate toward the Asian-American community." He went on to share that the background and lifestyle of growing up internationally was something that made him seek out other people who also had shared a similar lifestyle. "Don't try to fit in with everyone," he concluded. "Just be yourself. Don't try to be friends with everyone. Just be yourself and find a good group of friends that share. It doesn't matter who, just find a good group of friends that you can always go to, that you can count on for things. Don't compromise who you are just to fit in." JY echoed the sentiments of other participants as she expressed the ease with which friendships continue between other students who, like her, were raised in an international school setting. “It’s just a different type of friendship. It was just so easy,” she said in reference to her ongoing friendships with other international school students. Reconnecting with friends from similar backgrounds during the transition year can assist in the successful navigation of difficult, lonely times. These comments reflect the importance of finding good friendships in making the transition to university and navigating the cross-cultural transition to the U.S.

**Parental understanding and support.** A second factor that assisted in the transition to university life was support from the parents. According to participants, this support was not always overtly stated, but was perceived support on the part of the participants. Becky mentioned that her parents raised her to have her own opinions, and to express herself which was unlike a lot of Chinese and Taiwanese homes. These opinions and ability to express herself were a part of her successful transition to university. JY commented that her mom was always saying things like, "You know you are the first out of college. You need to go out and do some things and see some things." She was not putting JY under intense pressure to immediately adjust to what
would be considered stereotypically traditional Eastern values on rushing your way through education, getting a job and starting to earn money. Parental support for students to explore their interests and “enjoy” life were seen as positive helps in transitioning. Daniel mentioned that his dad had always specifically encouraged him to think differently and to stand out. That allowed him in his adjustments to the University of Michigan to be okay with not going along with the crowd. Taylor and Jack both mentioned that their parents just want them to be happy; they want them to “make the most out of where you are at.” This openness to their children exploring their interest and exploring things that gave them joy seemed to indicate that it was an important factor in a successful transition in the road to college. Finally, Mina commented that her parents are a lot more open minded about things, about a lot of things. They had allowed her to study a degree that she wanted and that in turn gave her a peer group that helped her adjust to the university life. Finally Jack shared that his parents said, "We don't want to force you to be a certain kind of person. We want you to be happy because it's your future. We want you to make a decision for yourself." This approach on the part of parents gave a positive proactive emphasis to the transition that students were going through and allowed them to approach that transition in a way that by all indications led to a greater degree of positive success in the lives of these students.

International student organizations. A third area that participants mentioned as important for the positive transition to university was international student organizations and international student orientations that were offered by universities. This was an interesting point because for some students they were encouraged not to go to their international student orientation because they did not actually fit the mold of an international student who had not been educated in a Western academic setting; international student orientations seemed more
geared for students who had never experienced the U.S. Yet for those students who did attend these orientations, they found mixed results. For JY she remembered the orientation laughing, "We had the classic bonfire. We had a lot of talk about taxes, things like that. Which kind of reinforced the fact that we were foreigners. I don't know why they do that. We had a tour of the college town and we had ice breakers." Irene on the other hand commented that, "The international kids group had a lot of discussions about where we were from and we talked a lot about our cultures and our similarities, differences between our peers so I think that was a big help." Clearly for some students an international orientation or group was meaningful while for other students a focus on the mundane of American life did not positively impact the transition. Four of the students mentioned specifically that they met students who were from the international organizations and that these friends helped them in their transition to university. Jack mentioned that he was involved in a Taiwanese student association club for a while which was a good way to adjust with other students who were from a similar background. Mina befriended many of the international students during international orientation, while Becky found that many of her closer friends were ethnically Asian, Korean, Japanese with whom she connected through some of the international student groups. This was a benefit to her because she specifically mentioned that, "I think the biggest thing that Asians in general are just more discerning of the atmosphere." The connection with international students, whether that be through orientation or through international organizations, certainly was one factor in successful transition to university.

**Social media.** There were three participants in particular who mentioned in this study that social media played a part in their successful transition and a better understanding of their cross-cultural identity. Irene and Taylor both referred to a BuzzFeed article where a discussion
regarding third culture kid issues or cross cultural perspectives was discussed. This BuzzFeed article circulated on Facebook and according to Irene, "It was really funny. I think some specific things that I really identified with was when people ask you where you are from and you have to explain all of these things and sometimes you want to give a really short version of it and you can't because you can't capture the whole experience." Taylor also referred to the same BuzzFeed article as, “pretty much on point.” While hardly a reputable source of information, social media articles helped students think about their experiences and come to a better understanding of “who they are.”

Iris commented that in terms of current media and social media, one of the ways that she continues to connect with family is through Line, which is a chat app widely used in Taiwan. The use of this media in connecting with parents, whether it be through an app or through Skype, was something that three of the participants referred to as a positive in terms of maintaining contact with home. While this certainly has changed in the last 20 years due to an ever increasing number of means of keeping connected, it's important to note that these participants saw this ability to keep connected as an important facet of adjusting to university.

**Religious fellowships.** The final subordinate theme that was mentioned under positive transitioning was a connection with campus fellowship groups or religious organizations. There were two participants in particular who referred repeatedly to the importance of their connection within their on-campus fellowship group and how it allowed them to be brought together with other people from a variety of backgrounds. Matt shared, "I think faith is one thing that brings everyone together. The breaking of barriers was a lot easier than say going to a culture club where you might see one white person who spent some time in China at some point. I think another thing would be how faith has shaped me and how faith in general is [seen as] a Western
concept. That aspect helped build my bridge to transition in college. [My faith is] something that is … another culture I would identify with." Matt also shared that his attendance at fellowship group helped him meet people that look like him and shared similar feelings about things that he did. Becky shared that she also closely identified with her fellowship group when she first started attending university. Many of her closest friendships developed from that group, and this not only aided her transition, but also helped her to think more closely about her own identity. "I think I only think about my spiritual identity. I rarely think about else because nothing feels like home but it doesn't surprise me. I'm not bothered by it." Becky goes on to say, "You have to know what you believe in. Or else when you go to America you will be overwhelmed by all these ideologies and you will end up conforming to them whether or not you believe in them without thinking them through." This connection to fellowship groups and religious organizations was key in allowing these two participants to maintain balance, focus and a foundation in things that have been established for them prior to making the transition to university. For students who adhere to a faith tradition, involvement in fellowship groups is one method by which cross cultural individuals can be assisted when transitioning to a university setting.

**TCK Markers**

A final superordinate theme that emerged through this study is the identification of markers that defined the traditional Third Culture Kid (TCK) experience. These identified markers directly address the third research question that guided the study, detailing in what ways the lived experience under investigation mirrored the experience of traditionally defined third culture kids. Extensive studies on the TCK dynamic have highlighted a TCK individual’s sense of “homelessness,” broad and open perspectives and one’s ability to move seamlessly between
cultures as a byproduct of the cross-cultural lived experience. As highlighted in earlier chapters, the participants in this study do not fit the traditional TCK definition, yet there was a convergence across participants that their cross-cultural identity, having developed through their experiences as ethnically Chinese students educated in a Western academic environment, indicated that there were shared markers with those identified in traditional TCK studies. These markers include a sense of homelessness, the ability to “move” seamlessly between cultures, and a broader perspective than non-cross-cultural peers. It is these three nested themes that are addressed here.

**Homelessness**

Traditional TCK studies highlight the tension that exists for cross-cultural individuals when faced with the question, “Where is home?” Participants in this study were quick to “claim” identification with a location or culture. For example, when asked directly, “Where do you call home,” most participants answered the question with a specific location or culture. Upon further exploration, however, it became evident that the declaration was not as solidified as initially indicated; there was much more complexity to the understanding of “home” than initially indicated. JY, having responded without hesitation to the question, “If someone asks you where you are from, what do you say?” with the answer, “Taiwan,” then backs that up by saying that she tells people that she’s “Taiwanese.” Yet a moment later JY explains that she is not fully Taiwanese. “I mean, I feel like I’m not Taiwanese. I can’t just be that. That doesn’t make sense fully to me. And I can’t be American either. I don’t fully identify with the American culture either. So yeah, ethnically by definition I’m Taiwanese. But emotionally or psychologically that doesn’t really fit. That doesn’t really sum up who I am completely.” As participant begins to explain what that means, the sense of homelessness emerges. Although they may categorically
state one location or country as home, there is an uneasy tension that exists in that explanation, due partly to the fact that the people in that “home” do not think of them as “local.” The difficulty of expressing this sense of home was highlighted by three participants in particular - Becky, JY and Matt. Becky commented, "It's really hard to put a finger on it." JY added, "I feel like I don't know where I'm going to be at home. I don't know if I'll ever fit in somewhere. I don't know if that's okay, like sometimes it is super tiring. I just don't want to think about this." Matt added, "I won't be burdened by a place. I'd be really happy to be back in Taiwan or to be in San Francisco. Settling down is not appealing to me."

Participants gave voice to this idea that the concept of home is difficult to define by students who are educated in a Western academic setting even while being ethnically Chinese. Having to commit to calling one place or another home caused many of them during the interview process to pause and express angst in trying to answer this question. Even those that committed to one place as being “home” oftentimes vacillated during the ensuing discussions. Iris laughed, “I don’t even know [where I am from]. It’s so hard! I tell them I’m from Taiwan….and then I have to explain everything…” Daniel mentioned that, "being identified with somewhere has to do with where you call home, and I still think Taiwan's home. So when you first ask me where I'm from, I'll always answer Taiwan," even though he goes on to explain that he probably will not spend his adult years here. Becky said that she will tell people when asked where you're from, "I was born in Illinois. I don't remember it because I moved to the Bay area when I was two, then I moved to Taiwan." She now claims Taiwan as home. She went on to add later in the interview that, "rootlessness makes more sense to me than restlessness, because even now I don't really know where my home is. When we go back to Taiwan... I always feel it is home. At the same time, part of why it is so great is because it's temporary."
This idea of having a place that at times feels like home and at times doesn't is at the heart of the concept of homelessness that comes out of TCK research. Irene made the comment, "it's so hard. I don't even know. I think I like to tell them I'm from Taiwan because I'm very proud of my ethnicity and where I grew up. And it's almost a good conversation starter, especially when I'm in the States and it's like where are you from? And I'm like, I'm from Taiwan." But a conversation starter is much different than a firm sense of identity, and this lack of ability to declare one place or another home is at the heart of the traditionally-defined TCK life. This question seemed to cause the most problems in terms of a quick answer. Jack was noticeable perplexed as to how best answer this question, and in his answer he went back and forth between his years in San Francisco and his identity in Taiwan as well. Homelessness, then, becomes an apparent marker of the experience of the ethnically Chinese student raised in a Western academic environment.

**Moving Between Cultures**

A second marker that is found in TCK literature is the idea of a seamless moving between cultures that identifies the Third Culture Kid experience. In the case of participants in this study, it also clearly identified their experience as ethnically Chinese students educated in a Western academic setting. JY expressed it in summarizing her experience by saying, "ethnically by definition I'm Taiwanese. But emotionally or psychologically that doesn't really fit. That doesn't really sum up who I am completely." Iris called this cross-cultural identity experience the "otherness" that she has. Identifying neither completely as Taiwanese nor completely as American, Matt referred it as, “international. I don't know if that counts. It's like this lifestyle of being intermixed. Like the center of a Venn diagram. It's just more comfortable." JY in expressing her experience says, "That perspective is so special. You can be that as well as this."
So why narrow yourself down to this? I stopped trying so hard to be an American and instead I wanted to show people my world through, even though they didn't quite understand it when I said to them, like I can't really explain being from Taiwan, or I can't explain being a TCK. Like, they'll know the definition but they don't understand it. But for me I just wanted to show them."

Irene comments that for some kids that spent half their life in one area and the other half in another area, they didn't go back and forth as much as she did, and maybe their experience is a little more clear for them, “because they knew that exactly this part of my life I was here and then I was there. Whereas for me, it was a lot of back and forth so everything just meshed together.” Jack commented that, "I was actually, it took me awhile. Like even to this day I haven't formulated an accurate answer to that. Are you Taiwanese or are you American? I guess I'm a little of both. Like, if I had that option I'd say both. I was born into a Taiwanese background but I was born as an American. So I usually just tell people I'm Taiwanese American, because that is the truth."

Daniel took a more philosophical approach, expressing this dynamic as, "the fight between cultures doesn't exist. It's all about how you think about it. So just dig down, figure out how you feel about certain things, certain scenarios, and immediately will start having a feeling about what values in life, what items are important to you. Eventually you'll come to a place where there are certain things where you are in the middle. And that's fine. Being in the middle is perfectly fine." Other students expressed the same struggle of being caught between their cultures. Daniel went on, "there's this side of me and there's that side of me. And then I don't know who I am. That's how I see a traditional Third Culture Kid. The difference between me and them has a lot to do with the fact that I've accepted who I am. These are the things I believe in and it's the combination of these things that make me who I am. I'm at peace with that."
With this cross-cultural identity, however, comes the positive advantage of being able to move between cultures in a seamless manner. For example, Taylor said, "I meet a lot more people. I feel like it makes the world a lot smaller because everywhere you go you bump into someone who knows another person. There's a lot more to talk about. The language aspect is actually like, we're required to learn a third language and everyone and is like, 'oh you speak Mandarin and English and another language? I'm so jealous I only speak English'." Matt experienced the advantage of his cross-cultural identity while still in his Sophomore year at university. "In our school, teachers are starting to realize that we're getting a lot of mainland students and they're starting to realize they have to accommodate their teaching style to the students, and I think it's possible for me to act as a go-between. Even though these students are coming with decent English, they're still going to be behind with comprehension and reading speed, and teachers will need to draw out discussion from them.” Matt’s view of his ability to act as a go-between reflects this ability to move seamlessly between cultures. This marker of a traditional Third Culture Kid experience, then, is also found in the experience of participants in this study. Navigating this movement between cultures is part of the identity development process that students who fit the dynamic under study go through.

**Broad Perspectives**

Finally, key markers of Third Culture Kid experience as indicated by TCK researchers include a broad understanding, openness to others and adaptability. These were also heard repeatedly in the participant interviews among the population under study. Six of the eight participants referred to the ability to understand cross-culturally as well as an openness to different ideas that summarize their experience. For example, Iris mentioned, "I think we're definitely more culturally aware. Or it's not even that, than more open-minded and we've
experienced the culture on a first hand in a way that you couldn't have if you lived in the US. I don't know if kids like ABC's (American-born Chinese) in the US felt like they maybe were embarrassed or whatever, because they were in a minority, but you definitely don't feel that having grown up in Taiwan where everyone is like you. She goes on to mention that the importance of meeting people who are different from you, different ethnically, is a key marker of a successful transition to university. JY commented, "how different I was. That was so cool. I realized American kids have a very small [life]... some people don't even have passports. I've been everywhere... as a TCK and being able to travel... relating to so many more perspectives versus one. A lot of things were one sided for the American kids. They were just very... All they know is this. I loved... [being able to say] 'I know what you mean, and I know what you mean, and I know what you mean,' That is cool. Because what I mean embodies what both of you mean." Mina added, "Everyone can relate to someone on something. Even if you're from completely different cultures, there's a middle ground everywhere. You can be best friends with someone who has been brought up in a completely different cultural upbringing. So I feel like the barrier isn't there unless you think it is. So that's how I'm trying to deal with myself right now, is just to see everything as not being a barrier. Just because they are different from you, doesn't mean [you should feel like you’ll] never be close with them."

This ability to be open to other people and understand is part of the TCK perspective. It's also previously mentioned as one of the frustrations in making connections with North American students upon entering college. Irene commented, "I think we're more culturally sensitive. I would say that just overall maybe more well-rounded and more receptive of any kind of information. We... have a different way of thinking about [the things that] people are talking about - I guess, because we have this international background.” Jack comments, "For me as a
Third Culture Kid, I'm more open to people from all different backgrounds; where they're from, different values, different religions, cultures, experiences. So I guess being in this situation helped me not have those racial barriers or background walls, or limitations on the people I meet. I guess that's opened or broadened my horizons on everyone, because I know that I can't expect everyone to go through the same experiences that I did. Everyone's different. I guess that's contributed to me appreciating everyone and their diversities and what they bring… I learned something from them and they can learn something from me."

This perspective defines a broad understanding, openness to others and adaptability that is found in the Third Culture Kid experience and is shared by the participants in this study.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-academic international school, to better understand the cross-cultural identity of these students and to understand this identity in the context of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCK) research. In answer to research question one and two, a close analysis of the interview data yielded insight into how participants experienced and made sense of their cross-cultural identity and different factors that impacted their understanding of who they are in relation to their environments, whether that be their family, school or social surroundings. Relating to research question three, data analysis also gave a deeper understanding of the transition challenges that participants encountered when they moved to the US for university. Finally, data analysis gave enhanced and nuanced acuity into the participants’ cross-cultural identity as it relates to traditional Third Culture Kid studies, indicating close correlation between the experience of TCKs and the experiences of Asian students who are living in their “home” culture yet are educated in a Western-academic environment.
Participants indicated that there were several factors related to identity development. The use of two or more languages, both within the home and within the educational environment had an impact on the cross-cultural identity experienced by these students. The combination of Eastern and Western cultures, and the expectations placed on participants based on these cultural expectations gave further complexity to their cross-cultural experience. The academic environment also had a role to play in this identity development, as expectations within the Western-academic environment differed from those in the participants’ “home” culture.

Transition challenges were addressed by participants who indicated that they struggled to connect with friends when starting their collegiate experience. A lack of depth in relationships, the encountering of what participants perceived as ignorance or stereotyping on the part of classmates, and general loneliness based on the cultural differences and the distance from “home” and family were all mentioned as distinct challenges that needed to be overcome. Conversely, participants identified several positive themes that assisted them in overcoming transition challenges. These included finding friend groups, parental understanding and support, connecting with international student groups, using social media to understand the experience and connecting with religious fellowship groups.

Finally, detailed analysis identified several markers of the traditional TCK experience that were also present in the participants under examination. Understanding and processing the concept of “homelessness” mirrored the experiences described in previous TCK research. Participants described an ease in moving between and among different cultures and a general broad, open-minded perspective as further evidence that their cross-cultural identity correlated with the markers of the TCK experience. Overall, the analysis of participant interview data concluded that Asian students who are raised in their “home” environment but educated in a
Western academic setting experience a similar development of a cross-cultural identity that mirrors that of traditional Third Culture Kids.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this research study was to explore and examine the unique cross-cultural identity of Chinese students who were educated in a Western-academic environment, and to explore this under the lens provided by Useem and Useem's (1963) Third Culture Kid construct refined further by Pollock and Van Reken (2001). Erickson’s (1959) theory of identity development provided underlying context to the cross-cultural identity that marked the experience of these participants. The researcher employed the qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach in this study, which allowed him to explore more deeply the lived experiences of participants and interpret the sense-making of the phenomena under investigation. Unique to the IPA approach is the allowance for the researcher’s own experiences and conceptions to become part of the interpretive activity. This study reflected the need for the researcher to take an active role; the essence of the cross-cultural identity experiences articulated by participants was more clearly understood within the context of the researcher’s own cross-cultural and TCK identity. Three distinct research questions guided this inquiry:

1. What defines the lived experiences of Asian students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school?

2. How do Asian students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school define their own identity?

3. In what ways do the described experiences of Asian students attending a Western-curriculum international school mirror the described experiences of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCKs)?

Data analysis of participant feedback clearly indicated that these research questions were
addressed through the current study. In relation to research question one and two, the lived experiences of Asian students educated in a Western-curriculum international school was detailed as it related to their convoluted and nuanced sense of cross-cultural identity development. Furthermore, research question three was addressed through ample evidence that the experiences of traditionally-defined TCKs were mirrored in the cross-cultural experience of these participants under investigation.

The three superordinate themes that emerged through thorough data analysis were 1) developing identity, 2) transitioning and 3) TCK markers. This chapter will begin with a discussion of these three themes and their connection to findings as they relate to the theoretical framework that guided the study and the body of literature that informed the research questions and approach. Implications of the findings will be discussed, with an emphasis on the shared characteristics between the cross-cultural identity of these participants and the traditional TCK experience. Recommendations for practice will be made with specific suggestions for students who undergo similar cross-cultural identity formation as well as for the parents of students who are living this experience. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for further research on the specific cross-cultural identity experience of Asian students who are educated in a Western-curriculum academic environment, based on the limitations of the current study.

**Findings in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks and Research Questions**

Within the context of the Identity Development (Erickson, 1959) and TCK (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) theoretical frameworks coupled with the supporting literature, the following findings emerged from the analysis of the results of the current study. Each finding is discussed as it relates to the theoretical frameworks that focus the study as well as the research questions that drive the inquiry.
Identity Development

The primary focus of this study was the cross-cultural identity development of participants, and how that identity was impacted by their ethnicity and their academic environment. Research question one and two specifically focuses the study on the identity development of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school as well as seeks to understand how these students define their own unique identity. Interviews were conducted on ten participants, all of whom were between 18 and 24 years old. The age of the participant was specifically chosen because of the stage of life in which each participant was found. In his book, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (Erickson, 1959), developmental psychologist Erik Erickson outlined a framework for understanding the development of an individual’s identity, or a deep awareness of who he one is. The identity formation stage, according to Erickson, spanned the adolescent years of 12-18. During this time, the individual develops a sense of who he or she is, or enters a stage of identity confusion if this stage was not navigated successfully. As the seminal theory on identity development, Erickson’s Psychosocial Stages of Development (1959) gave foundation to the current study. Based on Erickson’s research findings that a healthy identity is developed when a child feels comfortable about who they are and their role in society, the experience of being an ethnically Chinese student who was educated in a Western-curriculum international school was expressed and explored in terms of the unique cross-cultural identity that was developed through the lived experience. Within this framework, one moves through the stage of identity development as one encounters different points of crises. Crises refer to points at which one’s environment changes, leading to internal psychological dissonance. For participants in this study, these points of crises refer to transition stages, when he/she moves from the known to the unknown. For example, as students graduate from their
international school and begin university, this transition becomes a point of crises; the student encounters dissonance due to a change in their role in society. This dissonance becomes a period in which students grapple with who they are; their identity.

The researcher specifically chose students who were in the 18-24 age range, with the expectation that they would be able to better articulate the identity formation process that they had navigated as they transitioned to university. While participants were able to give deep meaning to the experience of living cross-culturally and the tension of moving between cultures, it became apparent through data analysis that the process of identity development was still ongoing in these participants. Each of the participants expressed a level of confusion and angst regarding their identity; each one was unsure how to specifically articulate the experience they had lived and their sense of who they are. For that reason, responses vacillated between cultures and allegiances; participants expressed that it was difficult to align completely with either their Chinese culture or their American culture. It was not necessarily a source of consternation to participants, but there was the acknowledgement that their identity was much more convoluted than initially assumed. As a result, the researcher concludes that the formation, development and finalization of identity of Asian students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school may take additional time beyond the adolescent years as outlined by Erikson. Data indicates that the complexity of the experience for these students may require distance from the transition or crises point in order to fully understand the identity that has formed through a cross-cultural upbringing.

Useem and Useem (1963) and Useem (1973) along with Pollock and Van Reken (2001) built upon the identity formation provided by Erickson through studying the particular impact of cross-cultural experiences on identity formation. Focusing specifically on children who had been
raised in foreign locations, Useem’s (1973) use of the term Third Culture Kids (TCKs) was expanded by Pollock and Van Reken to define a student who “spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture, develop[ing] a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 13). The TCK construct, along with the corresponding terms related to this experience (Global Nomad, Cross Cultural Kids, Cultural Chameleons) are reflected in the participants in this study (McCaig, 1992; Shaetti, 1993; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Van Reken & Bethel, 2005). Being ethnically Chinese students, raised in their home culture where the language is Chinese and the cultural values and traditions are deep-rooted and localized, these students enter the Western-academic environment which is a completely different culture. While the language of instruction in English is certainly one glaring difference, this dynamic is also marked by differences in the underlying values that define the Western mindset and that permeate the learning environment. Students who spend their formative years in this environment end up developing this “sense of relationship” with both the Chinese and the Western cultures. This dynamic was expressed repeatedly in participant interviews, as students sought to define which aspects of which culture defined their sense of who they are. While the original TCK definitions included “high mobility” as a marker of the TCK experience, Lindberg and Lambie (2011) note that identity development is more complex than geographic location or ethnic background. This certainly proved true in the data that emerged through interviews with these cross-cultural participants. Even without high mobility, Chinese students educated in a Western-academic environment encountered an articulated cross-cultural identity experience. This was poignantly illustrated as each one shared the struggle of feeling like they did not wholly “fit” in either the Chinese or the Western setting.
This dynamic as described by participants aligns with the models (Figure 2 and Figure 3) of the TCK Identity (Van Reken, 1996; Natario, 2016).

![The Third Culture Model](image1.png)

**Figure 4. TCK Interstitial Culture**

![TCK Identity Location](image2.png)

**Figure 5. TCK Identity Location**

**TCK Markers**

Research question three focused the study on the TCK identity and the challenges that these students may face when transitioning. According to the TCK model, common
characteristics of the TCK identity include high mobility, cross-cultural lifestyle, system identity (associating their identity with the organization to which they belong), large world view, cultural rootlessness, complex sense of belonging, convoluted cultural identity and unresolved grief from frequent loss (Hervey, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Navarette & Jenkins, 2011). Participants in this study related each of these characteristics in their interviews, although there were discrepancies between the experience of participants in this study and those “traditionally-defined” TCKs. These discrepancies are discussed within each of the traditional TCK markers.

**High mobility.** Traditional studies on the TCK experience assumed high mobility as important in the cross-cultural identity that was formed in the student. For example, a child who leaves the U.S. and moves to Indonesia is going to encounter a drastically different culture, a culture that they could not otherwise encounter fully without this international mobility. The current research indicates that the TCK dynamic is experienced by these participants in this study even without the traditionally defined international mobility. There is mobility, but not in the same manner as that indicated by Useem and Useem (1963), Useem (1973) and Pollock and Van Reken (2001) as necessary for the TCK experience. Participants in this study were living in their “home” country, the country of their ethnicity. The Western-curriculum international school was also in that “home” country, yet there was a cross-cultural gap between the “home” country and the “host” school. As stated by a Chinese student studying in a Western-academic international school, Duanduan Hsieh, “This gate [of school] works like a bridge between two different worlds” (Hsieh, 2016). The mobility in terms of actual distance is negligible for the Chinese students attending a Western-academic school, but the cultural distance is significant between these two locations. The research findings suggest that mobility (distance) is not necessary for TCK identity to develop, assuming that the cultures that are navigated are distinctly different.
For example, the participants in this study had to navigate a distinctly different culture in the school and in the home.

**Cross-cultural lifestyle.** Participants in this study referred frequently to the mix in cultures that were navigated on a daily basis, through language, cultural expectations and values. The participants were able to navigate easily through both the Western (American) and the Eastern (Chinese) cultures, and articulated the intercultural sensitivity that marks the TCK experience (Straffon, 2003; Sobre-Denton, 2011; Lyttle et al., 2011). Interviews indicated that students felt most comfortable navigating a back-and-forth relationship with the Eastern and Western cultures, and this was found in language (Chinglish), and cultural expectations. Sensitivity to cultural norms was high for this group. Participants understood that the academic environment had created a Western-mindset, one in which sharing ideas openly and asking questions was valued. Likewise, they understood that they needed to consider the Eastern values placed on them by family as reflected in the importance placed on respect for elders and adherence to family expectations.

**System identity.** While traditionally-defined TCKs identified with the system that led to their international mobility, including the mission agency, the diplomatic agency or the company (McCaig, 1992; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001), participants in this study expressed an identification with the academic environment. Within the Western-academic institution, participants found their peer group of similarly-identified individuals. Comfort levels were high within this peer group as those members had also experienced the cross-cultural identity development that defined the lived experience of students in this study. For that reason, participants reflected on the friends they chose to interact with when they transitioned to the U.S. for university; many of those friends were also defined as cross-cultural and as having lived a
similar experience. Participants also reflected on the uniqueness of the “culture” that is found within their international school community; the school community itself was seen as a cross-cultural location by students. System identification, with the system being the academic environment, was high for this population.

**Cultural rootlessness and convoluted cultural identity.** Cultural rootlessness, or the lack of belonging to any single culture is a traditional marker of the TCK experience (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Quick, 2010). This lack of belonging is expressed through the inability to align oneself completely with any one culture. Participants in this study frequently referred to this dynamic in describing their own experiences. While in one situation they may align themselves more closely with the Eastern way of thinking or values, in another they may align more closely with the Western. The researcher found that there was little predictability as to which culture aligned more closely for participants at any given time. This clearly points not only to the rootlessness found in the TCK experience, but also to the convoluted sense of cultural identity that has developed. Participants, as the TCK model suggests, are caught between cultures and constantly navigate within the interstitial cultural identity.

**Unresolved grief due to frequent loss.** While many of the markers of the TCK experience are found within the population under investigation, one marker of traditionally defined TCK experiences that was *not* found in the participants of this study was that of unresolved grief due to frequent loss (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Quick 2010). Traditional TCKs experience frequent moves due to high international mobility. Children of diplomatic, military or business families seldom stay in one location for more than three years at a time, and these frequent moves create frequent opportunity for the children to experience loss. Friends, homes, languages and cultures are uprooted and changed so often that the TCK individual grows
accustomed to “moving on.” Often, the move is sudden and can be hectic, leaving little time for meaningful “goodbyes.” Friends of the TCK may also be experiencing the same dynamic, and this situation leads, over time, to unresolved grief in the life of the TCK. This grief can manifest itself later in the form of depression, lack of relational commitment, or in other negative psychological or health-related behaviors (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009; Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Lyttle et al., 2011). For participants in this study, international mobility as traditionally defined was not a marker, and therefore they did not undergo the frequent loss that marks the TCK experience. A unique aspect of the dynamic of the Chinese student in the Western-academic international school is that most of their Chinese peers will stay in the same school throughout their formative years. With the exception of a small number who leave to attend boarding school in the U.S. or who must relocate due to family changes, most students who are ethnically Chinese are in their “home” country, and the academic environment is one in which the parents of these students want their children to stay through graduation. While there is a natural turnover of other international students (diplomatic, business) within the school, the students who participated in this study experienced very little mobility during their formative years. The implication, then, is that there is less need to address grief due to loss in this population that in the general TCK population.

**Transition Challenges**

While the challenge for traditional TCK transition relates to the unfounded expectation that Western students would adjust easily to a return to their “home” country after years spent living abroad, this dynamic is different for the Asian student educated in a Western-academic setting. Even if these students have visited the U.S. frequently or lived there for a period of time, the transition to the U.S. for university becomes a completely new chapter. Having spent their
formative years in their “home” culture, students are now entering a completely Western culture. Spending their formative years navigating between East and West through the home and educational environment and developing a cross-cultural identity, these students are now entering a primarily mono-cultural environment in the U.S. This transition, while different from that depicted in traditional TCK literature, is nonetheless just as significant in its impact on the Asian TCK. Participants in this study walk in to the university setting *sounding* as though they are American. With their non-accented English, western dress and mannerisms, the expectation is that they are similar to any other American student. Yet hidden below the surface is this cross-cultural identity that does not allow them to identify fully with the American student. For that reason, participants frequently mention the dilemma encountered when their classmates ask, “Where are you from?” With their non-accented English, participants do not fit the mold of the international student, yet they are also not “American” enough to fit the Chinese-American mold. There is a nuanced difference in the unique cross-cultural identity that results in a non-alignment with either of these stereotypes; they are Chinese students from an international location, yet they are not completely Chinese. They speak fluent, non-accented English, yet they are not completely American.

TCK literature identifies issues that arise during difficult transition phases in the life of the TCK. These include lower emotional stability, lack of relational commitment, difficulty making significant friendships, feelings of being out of place, loneliness and alienation (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009; Limberg & Lambie, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Allowing TCKs to undergo the transition process in a way that gives them voice to the reality of the experience is an important means of supporting students through the transition phase. Quick (2010) commits a full chapter in her book *The Global Nomad’s Guide to University Transition* to
the important part that parents play in supporting their children during the transition phase. Students in the current study voiced many of the same experiences shared by traditional TCKs during their transition to university. Each participant alluded to the difficulty in forming meaningful friendships and that they often felt out of place in comparison to their American university peers. Times of loneliness and the need to find the support of family and friends was mentioned in many interviews, indicating that the alienation and lower emotional stability that marks the TCK transition was also found in this research group. The desire to connect with others who were “like them” was an underlying need voiced by participants. Students who received the support of other cross-cultural individuals fared better in making this transition, as well as students who had parents who sought to understand and support them during this phase. Keeping connected with high school friends, using social media to keep in touch with family and encountering cross-cultural and Third Culture Kid material, which led to a better understanding of the dynamic that they were encountering, all assisted these students with their transition to the U.S.

The literature on the TCK experience includes significant details related to identity development, outlines markers of the TCK dynamic and addresses the transition needs of TCKs as they adjust to life in the U.S. Findings as discussed relate directly to the research questions that focused the research, with questions one and two focusing the inquiry on identity development and question three focusing on the TCK experience. In each case, this research also had implications for the participants in the current study, indicating that the cross-cultural identity that develops among Chinese students who are educated in a Western-academic setting closely mirrors that of the traditional TCK experience. It is within that context that implications for practice are discussed.
Implications for Practice

One of the goals inherent in practitioner-based research is to provide insight into how the research may have practical impact on current practices within the educational realm and to address a real world problem (Willis et al., 2010). Within the context of the current study, the researcher desires to see the implications from this research influence practice in three distinct ways: 1) assist cross-cultural students as they navigate the development and understanding of their own unique cross-cultural identities, 2) assist parents of Asian cross-cultural individuals as they seek to understand the unique identity that is developed through enrollment in a Western-academic setting and 3) assist institutions as they acknowledge, better understand and provide necessary helps to students who are transitioning while navigating this unique cross-cultural identity. The goal for this research is that the findings will positively impact the problem that exists among Chinese students who are educated in a Western-academic setting, namely that there is a lack of acknowledgement of the cross-cultural identity that develops, and a lack of information and assistance available to these students to help them better understand their lived experiences and navigate the cross-cultural transition expected of them.

While much has been written about the TCK identity and transition/reentry training for TCKs who are returning to the U.S. for university, two sources in particular offer the bulk of expertise in this area. Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) and The Global Nomad’s Guide to University Transition (Quick, 2010) have become handbooks for cross-cultural students and their parents as they navigate the transition to the U.S. for university. These books focus specifically on the TCK experience, and
address the specific transition considerations for those who identify as TCKs, including the children of internationally-located missionaries, diplomats, military personnel and business executives. Participants in the current study indicate a shared experience with these traditionally-defined TCKs, and as such would also benefit from the same accommodations and considerations that are given to TCKs. Recommendations regarding assistance for the Asian-student in understanding his/her own unique cross-cultural identity and the impact of that identity on transition, assistance for the parent of these individuals as they seek to better understand the unique needs of their children, and assistance and guidance to institutions as they concern themselves with the successful and healthy development of these cross-cultural students are each discussed here.

**Recommendations**

**Assistance for Asian cross-cultural individuals.** The first recommendation refers directly to the participants in this study; Asian students who are raised in their “home” culture but educated in a Western-academic setting. Given the nuanced and convoluted identity that has been developed through growing up cross-culturally, there are several steps that can be taken to assist these students as they acknowledge, process and understand their identity and as they prepare for transition to the U.S. for university. Firstly, students who are living the experience as a cross-cultural individual must be given the opportunity to learn the meaning of this experience and the opportunity to speak about their experience with those who understand the dynamic. As indicated in Erickson’s (1959) work on identity development, it is through the formative years that individuals begin to mature in their sense of “who one is, both individually and within society.” The uniqueness of the cross-cultural identity found in the participants of this study requires students to be given the opportunity to better understand the dynamic under which their
identity is being shaped and formed. This takes place as opportunity is given for conversations about the TCK experience, presentations on cross-cultural identity formation, discussions related to the tension that exists as one seeks to navigate the expectations and values of two distinct cultures, and times for processing the challenges that are unique to the cross-cultural individual. Secondly, students who fit this dynamic must be offered the psychological help necessary for support as they develop their sense of identity, in expectation that this support will lead to the development of a healthy sense of one’s place. Support in the form of personal counseling and the input/guidance of significant adults would be a crucial consideration for students who are undergoing this dynamic, particularly as they encounter challenges in the process of identity development. This support is ongoing, as-needed and differentiated depending on the needs of the individual. Finally, students who are living a cross-cultural experience must be given guidance and assistance during the transition phase from their “home” culture to another culture, whether that transition takes place upon graduation or during an earlier point in the adolescent years. Participant interviews indicated that preparation for transition in the form of specific training prior to the transition and assistance during the transition by other cross-cultural individuals helped make the transition more successful. Feedback also indicated that the transition after university is another phase where preparation and assistance may be necessary to the Asian cross-cultural individual.

**Assistance for parents of Asian cross-cultural individuals.** Secondly, the parents of these cross-cultural individuals must be a part of the process of health identity formation and transition. The primary focus of these recommendations refer to the need for Asian parents to better understand the particularities of the identity experience being navigated by their children. Participants in the current study mentioned, across the board, that their parents did not quite
understand the cross-cultural dynamic that was lived by their children; a completely understandable phenomena considering that most of these parents were themselves mono-cultural. Assisting parents in understanding what a cross-cultural identity is and how that identity has been developed through attendance at a Western-curriculum international school is a key aspect in addressing the particular needs of these students. Recommendations regarding assistance in three major areas include pre-enrollment, support during the adolescent years, and transition training.

**Pre-enrollment.** The researcher recommends that cross-cultural identity training be given as part of the enrollment process for Asian families who are enrolling in a Western-academic environment. Assumptions have been made on the part of international schools that these families understand the dynamic in which they are enrolling their child. This assumption, according to participant feedback, is incorrect. Asian parents need to consider that the academic environment in the international school is, in essence, another culture, and that their child will become a cross-cultural individual because of the time spent in that environment. In other words, parents need the opportunity to understand what their child is getting in the academic environment; it is more than simply an education. It becomes a completely cross-cultural experience, and as such, their child will no longer be a mono-cultural individual. Parents should also, as part of this process, be given information regarding the innumerable positive benefits that a cross-cultural child has, as well as some of the challenges that this child will face as they develop their unique cross-cultural identity.

**Ongoing support.** Once parents better understand the cross-cultural dynamic that their child is navigating, assistance should be ongoing for parents as the child continues in the educational environment through their formative years. The researcher recommends that parents
be offered frequent opportunities to hear about the cross-cultural identity and the challenges and rewards of developing that identity. Family counseling, as needed, should be recommended as part of this process. With the primary focus being on the health and well-being of the individual, any assistance that can be given along the process of identity development should be considered. Participants reported that in many cases they knew and understood that they were developing a unique identity, but they encountered resistance on the part of their parents to that identity. Parents need the assistance necessary to understand what identity development is, and how they can support their child as they seek to better understand who they are and what place they have in society.

**Transition training.** Finally, the researcher recommends that parents be a part of the transition training given to students prior to university transition. Parents need information on what aspects of transition will be difficult for their children, and how they as parents can support and assist the child as they undergo transition. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) and Quick (2010) dedicate a chapter in their books to parents, helping them assist and support their children during the college transition period. In many cases, information regarding cross-cultural transition will also benefit the parent as they prepare for the “empty-nest” that is left when the child departs for university. Training in the form of presentations and sharing sessions would benefit parents as they seek to support their cross-cultural children during this process.

**Assistance for institutions that serve Asian cross-cultural individuals.** The third and final recommendation refers to the institutions that serve students who have undergone this identity formation. Institutions can be an integral part in the successful transition and the health and well-being of the cross-cultural student. There are two main recommendations for institutions: staff training and support structures for students. Firstly, staff within schools, both
at the high school and collegiate levels need training on the particular needs of their cross-cultural students. This training must include not only information regarding how cross-cultural identity is developed, the particular tensions that exist within the cross-cultural individual, and how cross-cultural individuals are navigating several cultures simultaneously, but must also include how cross-cultural individuals differ from other international students or other non-American students who may also be enrolled in the school. Participants in this study referred frequently to their frustration at being lumped in with other students who may be from a foreign country, but who in no other way reflect the identity that the cross-cultural individual has developed. Universities are notorious for matching Asian cross-cultural individuals with roommates who “look like them,” assuming that their similar outward appearance will guarantee a “good fit” in the dorms. This ignorance can be overcome as institutions seek to better understand the unique identities of all students, and cross-cultural identity is one facet of that training that would prove helpful. Secondly, it is recommended that institutions continue to improve the support structures that are in place for cross-cultural student transition. Whether it be new student orientation that is particularly geared towards cross-cultural individuals, counseling support through the transition phase and beyond, or the frequent “check-in” by peers and adults who interact with the cross-cultural student, each of these will add to the successful transition on the part of cross-cultural students.

**Implications for Research**

While the current study adds significantly to the literature on the cross-cultural identity development of Chinese students educated in a Western-academic environment, there are several limitations to the study that could be pursued through further research. Within the Scholar-Practitioner framework, the researcher identifies areas that were identified in the data that can be
explored further and through which the problem of practice can be more thoroughly addressed. These “gaps” appeared through the data analysis work and indicate areas where the data encourages further research. Five major identified areas include research on parental perspectives, language discrepancies and the child’s sense of identity, variations in the learning environment, how the political landscape in the research setting may impact identity development and how religious affiliation within the collegiate setting may impact transition.

**Parental Perspectives**

Although this research study focused specifically on the cross-cultural identity formation of participants who met the criteria for the investigation, responses from all participants indicated that parental input and reaction to the participants’ lived experiences, sense of identity and transition challenges had significant impact on each participant. While navigating the cross-cultural identity can be challenging, the parental response to that experience adds a level of complexity that must be further explored. Parental understanding and acceptance of the cross-cultural identity that is developed as the child undergoes the educational process during the formative years impacts the ability of the child to accept “who they are” and their sense of place in society. Parental involvement or lack thereof during the transition-to-the-U.S. stage appears to have significant impact on whether the transition is seen as positive or negative. Parental expectations for declared majors, future jobs and even spousal choices were mentioned in the context of the cross-cultural identity process for participants. The researcher recommends continued investigation into parental perspectives, in particular how and to what depth parents perceive the cross-cultural identity of their child. Date indicates clearly that students undergoing a cross-cultural identity formation experience would be aided by a better understanding of the parental perspectives associated with that experience.
Language

As indicated in the data analysis, language was another key aspect of identity formation for participants in this study. There were significant differences in the ways in which language was used at home and between individual participants and their families. Further research regarding some specific differences would lead to an increased in-depth understanding of how bi-lingual cross-cultural individuals are impacted by language. In particular, some questions that may be addressed through additional study include: Does the use of English in the home help the development of cross-cultural identity or cause identity confusion? If parents have accented English, does this impact the student’s perception of how he/she should identify? Does it matter whether or not the parents’ language is accented? What is the relationship between the student’s affiliation with a specific culture and his/her use of a given language? How is identity development impacted by the perception of the use of language (English and/or local language) on the part of the local population (e.g. is it considered socially advantageous)? Given that language connects people, to what extent does a lack-of-comfort in the parent’s “native tongue” impact the closeness of the relationship between child and parent? These questions arise from the data within the current study, and researcher who address the impact of language on the cross-cultural identity experience would add a level of nuanced complexity to the discussion of this experience.

Variations in Learning Environment

Throughout the collection and analysis of data, the researcher encountered situational differences which appeared to be dependent on factors in the given learning environment. In
particular, the school in which the majority of participants were educated during their formative years is considered a highly-academic, relatively homogeneous, large institution with ample resources for students. Learning specialists, highly trained educators, and a variety of support structures and personnel (e.g. personal and college counselors, grade-level advisors) create an environment where students are given favorable opportunities for personal and academic success and where the general culture for success is positive and encouraged. This situation does not exist equally at all Western-academic international schools. Variations in the learning environment, which may include the size of the school, the number of students in each class, the variety of cultures represented in the school body, the curriculum being used (e.g. International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement), whether the curriculum is Euro-centric or North-American-centric, the location of the institution and its impact on student access to the local culture, how the students in the Western-curriculum international school are viewed by the local population; each of these are nuanced differences which may result in changes in the lived experiences of cross-cultural individuals, and would be reflected in data differences in those studies. The researcher encourages others to pursue these nuanced differences in further study, with the expectation that a better understanding of the differences in the lived experiences of students in different settings would allow for more specific and focused assistance in aiding these students during the college transition process. While data resulting from the current study certainly contributes to the traditionally-defined TCK theory and the understanding of cross-cultural identity, there remain variations that are unexplored through the current study and which, once researched, would add inclusively to the cross-cultural identity experienced by others who fit these variations.
The second learning environment to consider for further research is that of the collegiate setting. Participants in this study attended a variety of universities, and there were significant differences in the manner in which each university addresses students who are arriving from an international setting. Some universities have limited specific orientation for international students, some collectively address all international students without acknowledging (or understanding) the difference between the participants in this study and those international students who have never experienced Western culture, and others are proactively seeking to aid in the college transition process based on the specific backgrounds of each new student. For example, Lewis and Clark College in Portland has a specific TCK center, and is extremely proactive in assisting international and cross-cultural students based on their individual, particular needs. Further research would be beneficial, focused on how the proactive approach to transition assistance for cross-cultural students leads to personal health and sense of well-being, academic success during the college years, and even the correlation between this assistance and student re-enrollment rates. The researcher recommends that further research look at the effectiveness of different collegiate transition programs as they relate to this particular cross-cultural population, so that other institutions may add to or alter their programs to better meet the needs of these individuals.

**Political Landscape**

The Taiwan-China political landscape was mentioned frequently by participants in this study as an added level of complexity to their identity as Chinese or American. Within Taiwan, the need to carefully define the Taiwanese versus Chinese identity is fraught with risk. While several of the participants alluded to the dilemma of identifying as Taiwanese or Chinese, this dilemma was perhaps best articulated by Daniel who referred to the struggle he felt when it came
to the China/Taiwan identity: “Instead of being a third culture kid, what most TAS students
actually are is they’re fourth culture kids. Because there is a cultural dilemma between Taiwan
and China. Confucianism and all the traditional family values are Chinese characteristics, not
traditionally Taiwanese. And Taiwan is actually a second or third culture on its own….that’s the
beauty of culture, right? You add a little bit to it and it’s entirely different….There are
similarities, but there are a lot of differences.” This statement gives depth to the experience that
is being navigated by the participants in this study, all of whom are ethnically Chinese living in
Taiwan. Responses from participants indicated that this political dynamic became part of the
convoluted cross-cultural identity, a process with also included pressure from parents. For
example, Becky stated, “I’m proud of being Taiwanese, even though my parents say I’m
Chinese, which is interesting.” Matt added to this dynamic by saying, “I will identify myself as
Chinese and not Taiwanese. I mean, my dad has a Taiwanese passport because he was born here,
but he will still call himself Chinese, but we look more towards the mainland heritage as opposed
to the island heritage.” While it would be impossible to begin to fully explain the complexities in
the China/Taiwan issue, further research would possibly unveil ways in which the identity
development differs between participants who strongly identify as Taiwanese and those who
strongly identify as Chinese. Application of this research could also extend to other Asian or
non-Asian participants who are caught in similar politically nuanced situations (e.g. Tibet, Nepal,
East Timor). While outwardly these seem like minor variations, the complexity of the cross-
cultural identity for Chinese students educated in a Western-curriculum international school
indicates that these political variations may impact more significantly than initially portrayed.
Religious Affiliation in the Collegiate Setting

The data resulting from two specific interviews, Becky and Matt, indicated that there was an advantage for some cross-cultural students to have a strong sense of religious affiliation in navigating not only their own cross-cultural identities, but in transitioning effectively to U.S. university life. These participants referred frequently to the positive result impact of “having a like-minded group” with whom to identify during the transition phase. Given the relatively low number of participants in the current study who referred to this dynamic, the research does not suggest that those without this affiliation have a more difficult time adjusting; rather, the researcher questions to what extent group identification and/or religious affiliation impact positive transition for cross-cultural individuals who are transitioning to the U.S. for university. Further research on the connection between religious affiliation and identity development could assist other religiously-affiliated cross-cultural students in making a successful transition to university in the U.S. The importance of religious affiliation/religious tradition and a more regulated sense of identity could also be further explored, with particular focus given to specific affiliations and how these impact transition.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-academic setting, to better understand the cross-cultural identity of these students and to understand this identity in the context of traditional Third Culture Kid (TCK) research. The researcher found that the experience of growing up in an ethnically Chinese household in a Chinese culture, yet educated in a Western-academic environment did indeed create a unique cross-cultural identity in these participants. This experience mirrors closely the research findings from traditionally-defined Third Culture Kid (TCK) studies.
The researcher believes that the most significant contribution of his findings is the application of Third Culture Kid (TCK) constructs to a newly identified population, the Asian student who is educated in the Western-academic international school. With the broadening of the TCK definition to this population, specific transition and identity-formation needs for this particular group can be addressed. Furthermore, the data resulting from this study indicates the importance for all parties to understand the unique cross-cultural identity that is being formed in this population; the individuals themselves gain a greater understanding of their own experience, the parents of these individuals acknowledge and begin to understand the experience being navigated by their children and the institutions that educate these individuals gain a deeper understanding of and more appreciation for the particular health and well-being of these students. While there are limitations to the study that must be addressed through additional research, and the complexity of the cross-cultural identity experience still requires further exploration, this study contributes to the current literature on cross-cultural development, TCK constructs, and the role that the Western-curriculum international school may play in identity development for cross-cultural individuals.

**Personal Reflections**

What began as an interesting and eye-opening conversation with a Chinese alumnae regarding the unique challenges that she faced in navigating the East and West cultures that defined her, then built upon through a series of observations regarding the particular cross-cultural dynamic that is being lived by many of the students in my school has culminated with this paper. By “culminated,” however, I do not want to indicate that the story has been told or the experience has been fully explored. Instead, this is the start of a conversation regarding just one example of cultural hybridity and the most similar experience previously explored, the TCK
identity. Through the interview process and data analysis it became increasingly clear that the experience of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school is not only nuanced and complex, but that it also closely resembles that of traditional Third Culture Kids. This was repeatedly confirmed as I discussed my research with countless other students, teachers and friends, each of whom was able to apply the findings from this study to their own particular and unique cross-cultural experience. These conversations ultimately lead in turn to a better understanding of oneself, and, ideally, an increase in the desire to better understand others. It is to this end that I encourage the conversation to continue and deepen.

One may well ask, however, “Now what? What is the plan moving forward?” There are several steps that are required of me with the completion of this project. Firstly, I desire to continue this conversation with as many students who are living this experience as possible. Having lived the TCK experience myself, I understand the cathartic process of talking through the different challenges that one faces as a cross-cultural identity is lived. It continues to be my hope and expectation that students who are living this experience find a healthy, balanced perspective of their role and place in society and the unique ability that they have to impact the lives of others as cross-cultural individuals. Finding opportunities to help these students will continue to be my primary focus. Secondly, finding opportunities to have these discussions with parents of students who are living this experience must also be part of the plan moving forward. Whether it be in the venue of parent meetings, specific parent presentations or individual conversations, I will be taking the opportunities to discuss with parents the cross-cultural identity of their children, with the expectation that understanding on the part of parents will positively impact the student who is seeking to understand their own experiences. Finally, finding opportunities to reach administrators and teachers within the international school setting will
become part of the action plan moving forward. Regional conferences allow for the opportunity to discuss the findings that are presented here, and I will be actively looking to take these opportunities to expand this conversation with those who are directly impacting the educational setting in which these cross-cultural students are learning.

In closing, I ask the reader, “What about you? What is your story? What part will you play in helping students who are living a cross-cultural experience embrace the strengths and challenges that this identity affords?” I join Ruth Van Reken in saying that it is my hope that this conversation that began 50 years ago with the initial TCK definition will continue to be expanded and applied as new cross-cultural experiences are lived.
References


I'm a Third Culture Kid, Don't Try and Understand Me. (n.d.). Facebook Group Page. Retrieved February 17, 2015, from https://www.facebook.com/cantunderstandtcks


*Journal of Research in Personality, 43*(5), 755-763.


Appendix A

IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: September 10, 2014        IRB #: CPS14-08-03
Principal Investigator(s):  Nena Stracuzzi
                             Daniel T. Long
Department:                   Doctor of Education Program
                              College of Professional Studies
Address:                      20 Belvidere
                              Northeastern University
Title of Project:             Asian Third Culture Kids: An Interpretative
                              Phenomenological Analysis of the Cross-Cultural Identity
                              of Chinese Students Educated in a Western-Curriculum
                              International School
Participating Sites:          Taipei American School superintendent letter in file
DHHS Review Category:         Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents:            One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval:          12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: SEPTEMBER 9, 2015

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
   recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
   be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
   prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
   other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B
IRB Renewal

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION
RENEWAL APPROVAL

Date: August 19, 2015
IRB #: CPS14-09-03
Principal Investigator(s):
- Neve Stravuzzi
- David T. Long
Department: College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Brinfield
Northeastern University
Title of Project: Asian Third Culture Kids: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Cross-Cultural Identity of Chinese Students Educated in a Western-Curriculum International School
Approval Status: Closed to Enrollment - Ongoing Analysis Only
Participating Sites: Permission Letter on File
Original Protocol Approved: September 10, 2014
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: N/A
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: AUGUST 18, 2016

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nina C. Regna, Director
Northeastern University FWA #46030

Human Subject Research Protection
Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Dear __________,

Greetings from Taipei American School! It seems like a long time since you were walking the halls here, and you may be surprised to suddenly hear from me like this. I am writing because I am seeking participants for a research project that I am conducting as part of my doctoral dissertation through Northeastern University. The title of the proposed dissertation is *Asian Third Culture Kids: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of the Cross-Cultural Identity of Chinese Students Educated in a Western-Curriculum International School*. Simply put, I am looking at how the identity of ethnically Chinese students may be impacted by the time spent enrolled in a western-curriculum international school like TAS. Participation in this study would help to inform educators about the unique experiences of students who, like yourself, have experienced a cross-cultural upbringing due to your attendance in an international school. The study will involve an initial interview that will last between 60-90 minutes, and may include a follow-up interview that will last between 30-60 minutes. Interviews will take place either on-site at TAS, at another convenient location of your choosing, or via Skype/Google hangouts at the convenience of the participant.

I am looking for 6-10 participants who fit the following criteria:

- Ethnically Chinese
- Between the ages of 18-25
- Lived in Taiwan throughout his/her formative years (ages 12-18)
- Spent his/her formative years (ages 12-18) enrolled in a Western-curriculum international school
If you fit these criteria and would be interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email. Your participation is entirely voluntary; you do not have to volunteer. Furthermore, if you know of others who fit these criteria and may be interested in participating, please feel free to forward this email to them.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Dan Long

Northeastern University

long.dan@husky.neu.edu

+886-2-2873-9900 Ext. 584
Appendix D

Site Permission for Research

---

Permission Form for Research: Superintendent

Dear Dr. Hennessy,

I am currently doing graduate work in education at Northeastern University, and am preparing to begin work on an action research project. My research topic is the cross-cultural identity formation of Chinese students who are educated in a Western-curriculum international school. Better understanding the way these students view themselves and to what degree their identity formation mirrors that of traditional Third Culture Kids (TCKs) will lead to a more complete picture of the unique identity of our students and will contribute to the way we prepare our students for their adjustment to U.S. university life.

Although no participants in the research are currently enrolled at our school, they will all be alumni from this institution. Given the central location of this school in the community, there may be occasions where the interviews will take place on campus in a quiet but visible location. The interviews that form the bulk of data will be collected in accordance with all acceptable Institutional Review Board protocols, including signed consent forms. Participation will be voluntary and will not involve any conflict of interest.

I also want to highlight that this research project is an extension of the work I do as part of my normal responsibilities as a teacher and class dean. In leading annual transition meetings for our seniors as well as presenting cross-cultural transition information in parent transition meetings, this research will lead to an increased understanding of the identity-formation and transition needs of one particular population in this school.

In following accepted research protocol, I will keep all the data I collect completely confidential and will not use our school's name nor any student's name in any research report. In keeping with confidentiality protocols, within the research the school will be referred to by the pseudonym Taiwan International School. If you would prefer a different name, please let me know.

No information that I present will be linked to any personal information that could be used to identify individual alumni. I am confident that I have taken the necessary steps to ensure that my research will be conducted in ways that meet ethical standards and will begin research once I have received permission from the Institutional Review Board. I have attached the consent letters that I wish to give to the alumni students.

I will, of course, be sharing the analysis of data with you and others in our school who may be interested. I would also like to present some of the findings at the EARCCS conference next year if that opportunity presents itself.

Please sign below and return a copy of this letter to me indicating whether or not you give permission to conduct this action research project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Daniel Long

☐ I give permission to you to conduct the action research project described above.

☐ I do not give permission to you to conduct the action research project described above.

[Signature]

Dr. Sharon D. Hennessy

Date: August 12, 2014
Appendix E

Informed Consent

Northeastern University
Human Subject Research Protection

Signed Informed Consent Document: Department of Education

Name of investigators: Dr. Nena Stracuzzi (Principal Investigator), Daniel Long (Student Researcher)


Informed consent to participate in a research study

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but I will explain it to you first. You may ask me any questions that you have regarding the study or your participation. When you are ready to make a decision, please tell me if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, I will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate because you fit the demographic of an ethnically Chinese student who is living in Taiwan and you have attended an American-curriculum international school during your formative (12-18) years.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to conduct interviews to better understand the experience and cross-cultural identity of ethnically Chinese students who are educated in an American-curriculum international school. By understanding the cross-cultural identity of these students, it is hoped that the school can better meet the needs of these students as they transition to the U.S. for university.

What will I be asked to do?

If you choose to take part in this research, you will be asked to sit for an initial interview. Questions regarding your background, educational experiences, and sense of self (identity) will be asked. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interview will be sent to you, after which a follow-up interview will take place to allow you to clarify your answers or to add to your remarks.

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?

The initial interview will take place at a location of your choosing. If you do not have a preferred location, the researcher will arrange a quiet location at Taipei American School to conduct the interview. In the event that an interview cannot be conducted in person, the interview may also take place on line via Skype or Google hangouts. In each case, the initial interview will not last
more than 90 minutes. After you have had the opportunity to read the initial transcript, a follow-up interview will take place if requested. The follow-up interview will not last more than 40 minutes.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**
There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you during this research.

**Will I benefit from being in this research?**
The only direct benefit that may result from this research is a better understanding of your own sense of self and understanding of how your experiences have impacted who you are. No other personal direct benefits are foreseen, although the things we learn from your interview may help other students who experience the same cross-cultural identity experience. Your interview will help me better understand how students like you may be better served during your transition to U.S. university life.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your participation in this study will be confidential. Only I will know your real name and/or information about you and what you have shared. An imaginary name will be chosen at the start of this interview. Only I will know which participant is linked to which chosen name. The interview will be recorded and typed using this name. The interview will be transcribed by me, and once the transcribed interview is reviewed by you, the original recording will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my home until it is destroyed along with all information regarding the link between your real name and the pseudonym. No reports or publications will use information that will identify you in any way without your expressed written permission.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any questions. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate, you will not lose any rights, benefits or services that you would otherwise have.

**Who can I contact if I have a problem or question?**
You may always contact the researcher, Daniel Long at long.dan@husky.neu.edu or the Principal Investigator (faculty advisor) Nena Stracuzzi at N.Stracuzzi@neu.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this research project.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There will be no cost associated with your participation in this study.

I agree to take part in this research
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of person agreeing to take part</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person agreeing to take part</td>
<td>Printed Chosen Name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of person who explained the study and obtained consent of above person</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed name of person above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Introductory Material

1. Tell me about yourself. Where were you born? Where did you grow up? Who is in your family?
2. What is the primary language used in your home?
3. What countries have you lived in and for how long?
4. What passport/s do you hold? When would you use each of those passports?
5. When did you first enroll in X International School? What grades did you attend at that school?
6. What adjustments did you need to make when you first enrolled in that school? What challenges or surprises did you face?
7. Did you attend other international schools besides X International School? If so, where and when?
8. If you are in university, in what country do you attend school? If you are heading to university, in what country will you attend school?

Details of Identity Development

1. If someone asks you where you are from, what do you say? Can you explain why you say that? Where is home? Why does x feel like home, rather than y?
2. How does your family influence the way you think about who you are? Do they expect you to present yourself in a certain way? If so, can you tell me how? If no, can you explain that?
3. When you get together with your extended family (cousins, grandparents, etc.) do you feel like you fit in? Can you describe what that looks like? In what ways do you feel like
they the same/different from you? Do you think that is the same for others in your extended family?

4. How has your schooling influenced the way you think about who you are? What part of your schooling influenced you in that way?

5. Can you tell me how you've changed the way you think about yourself over the past few years. Has this change in the way you think about yourself caused you to present yourself differently, and if so, how?

6. How has your family/school/ethnic background shaped your identity or your sense of self?

7. Tell me about some experiences that you think helped shape how you think about yourself as a person. Early years? Later years? Transition years?

8. How do you see your schooling experience having shaped your view of yourself different from other students who did NOT go to an international school? What do you mean? Why do you say that? How so?

9. If you are in university, who do you hang out with mostly? Can you tell me why? Have you noticed what nationalities/languages are present in those relationships? Why do you think that is? In what ways do you feel that you "fit" or "don't fit" with those friends? Why do you think that is?

10. Describe your transition to university. Can you tell me about the most positive part of this transition? Can you describe the most negative part of this transition? Can you tell me about any surprises you experienced during this transition?

11. How do you think X International School could have better helped you with your transition to university?
12. Now that you have had all these experiences, what kinds of advice might you give to other students who will be transitioning to university?

13. In thinking about the future, how do you picture your life over the next 5-10 years? In other words, after graduation, what will you be doing? Where will you be living? With whom? What will your life be like?

Third Culture Kid (TCK) Questions

1. Have you ever heard the term Third Culture Kid? Where did you first hear that term? Do you know what it means? What does it mean to you?

2. In what ways do you think you are like the way that you understand TCKs? In what ways do you think you are different from your understanding of a TCKs?

3. In which culture (x or y) do you think you are the most comfortable? Can you tell me why you feel the most comfortable in that culture rather than the other culture?

Closing Questions

1. Is there anything else that you want people to know about you that has not been covered in these questions? Is there something that could better help others understand your unique cross-cultural or TCK identity?

2. Do you have any questions for me?