The attitudes of five international teaching assistants (ITAs) towards teachers, teaching, and their ITA training course

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The attitudes of five international teaching assistants (ITAs) towards teachers, teaching, and their ITA training course

by

Duane Curtis Litwiller

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Teaching English as a Second Language/Applied Linguistics)

Major Professor: Roberta G. Abraham

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1997

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Duane Curtis Litwiller

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................... vi

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .................................................. 1
  Motivation for the Study .......................................................... 1

CHAPTER TWO: PREVIOUS RELATED ITA RESEARCH .................. 6
  Studies Focusing on ITAs’ Attitudes and Perceptions ..................... 6
  Connection of the Literature Review to My Study ......................... 11

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ................................................... 13
  The Qualitative Paradigm, a Personal Choice ............................... 13
  Choosing the Participants ........................................................... 13
  Collaboration ............................................................................... 14
  Data Collection and Analysis ....................................................... 15
    First round of interviews ......................................................... 16
    Transcription of first interviews ............................................... 18
    Analysis of first interviews ...................................................... 19
    Second round of interviews ...................................................... 21
    Transcription and analysis of second interviews .......................... 21
  The Writing Process ................................................................... 22
  Verification .................................................................................. 23
  Questionnaires ........................................................................... 24
  Member checks ............................................................................ 26

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS ....................................................... 28
  Note on Quotes ........................................................................... 28
  Biographies of the Five Students ................................................ 28
    Song, Ph.D. student in chemistry .............................................. 31
    Ming, Ph.D. student in chemistry .............................................. 32
    Shan, Ph.D. student in chemistry .............................................. 34
    Guang, M.S. student in chemistry .............................................. 35
    Xinhua, M.S. student in mathematics ........................................ 37
  Overview of Recent Chinese History ............................................ 38
    Prior to the Liberation in 1949 ................................................ 38
    From the Liberation to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution,
      1949-1966 ............................................................................ 39
    The period of the Great Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976 ............ 39
    From the end of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1980s .......... 40
    From the mid-1980s to 1995 ...................................................... 41
  My Students’ View of Teachers and Education ............................ 41
    Prior to the Liberation in 1949 ................................................ 41
    From the Liberation to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution,
      1949-1966 ............................................................................ 42
    The period of the Great Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976 ............ 43
      Mao’s influence over the young people .................................... 44
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Biographical data of the five students...................................................... 29

Table 2. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers prior to the Liberation in 1949................................................................. 84

Table 3. Degree of respect and position of teachers from the Liberation to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, 1949-1966......................... 85

Table 4. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers during the Great Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976................................................................. 86

Table 5. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers from the end of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1980s......................................................... 87

Table 6. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers from the mid-1980s to 1995................................................................. 87

Table 7. Foci if my students were to design an ITA training course............................... 91
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of ITA training programs in the early 1980's, a great deal of research has been conducted and papers written on various aspects of, as Kathleen Bailey (1984) put it, the "foreign TA problem." Through these studies and papers we have learned a great deal about the attitudes and complaints of American undergraduate students (and their parents) in courses taught by ITAs, legislative mandates concerning ITA programs, various testing procedures to measure the ITAs' spoken English proficiency, various ITA training programs throughout the country, and the list goes on. What seems to be missing from many of these papers and research projects are in-depth studies of the ITAs themselves. Whereas we now have a fairly good idea of how American students and ITA trainers perceive ITAs, we still know very little about the ITAs themselves, their backgrounds, their attitudes towards teaching, and their needs as they perceive them. It is this issue that I addressed in my research. Through open-ended interviews and questionnaires, I explored (1) the way in which culture and family background affected the views of five of my Chinese students in my ITA training course at a large state university towards teachers and teaching and (2) their perceived needs and their expectations of an ITA training course.

Motivation for the Study

In the second semester of my graduate career in English, I was asked by my phonology professor if I would be interested in team teaching an ITA training course, made up primarily of Asian students, in the fall with her and another graduate student. She explained that the course would involve teaching the students classroom management techniques and presentation skills, as well as methods to improve their pronunciation and intelligibility, to help them function effectively as teaching assistants.
I was excited to teach this course and confident of my ability. The phonology course that semester had taught me some of the common pronunciation problems Asian students have in English and various techniques which could be used to help them improve their intelligibility. I was also confident in my ability to teach them classroom management and presentation skills. As an undergraduate student in engineering, I had been taught by numerous ITAs and was painfully aware of some of their common shortcomings. In addition, I had already successfully taught four courses in the English Department as a TA myself and had received positive evaluations from my students.

I have always believed that to be an effective teacher, it is important to get to know my students, to understand their needs and learn a little about their backgrounds. With this information, I adapt the syllabus to meet the needs of the particular group of students taking my course in a particular semester. The ITA training courses I taught during the data-gathering phase of this project were no exception. At the beginning of the two semesters in order to ascertain my students’ problems with spoken English, I conducted 20- to 30-minute individual diagnostic interviews during which time I recorded the students performing various speech acts, analyzed their speech, discussed the results of the analysis, and chatted informally with the students about their experiences learning to speak English and about what they believed to be their major problems with pronunciation. Prior to this study, I didn’t believe it was necessary to learn more about the backgrounds or cultures of the students in my ITA course, the majority of whom come from China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. Over the years in one way or another, I had “learned” (or so I thought) a great deal about these countries. Of East Asia, I “knew” (actually assumed) that

a) teachers are highly regarded and greatly respected by society,
b) teachers are godlike and should not be questioned,
c) teachers tend to be very formal and maintain a very distant relationship with the students both in and out of class,
d) teaching techniques are so different between our cultures that a fair amount of class time in the ITA course should be devoted to teaching American techniques,
e) most of the students in the ITA course come from urban areas, and
f) these students are teaching assistants because they really want to teach.

I am not sure how or where I learned what I thought I "knew." It is likely that my ideas of the godlike status of Asian teachers and the nature of student-teacher relationships (points b and c) were told me by several of my Asian friends. My belief that teaching techniques must be very different in Asian countries (point d) may be the result of having had several rather ineffective TAs when I was an engineering undergraduate student. Points e and f were most likely simply my own assumptions. The first point, however, that teachers in East Asia are highly regarded and greatly respected by society, is a belief I have held for many years. In fact, it is a belief held by many Westerners. It is possible that we were taught this as early as elementary school when we learned about Asia and the importance of Confucius and his teachings in ancient Chinese philosophy. To review this information, I did a little investigation concerning the teachings of Confucius. Smith (1973) confirms that Confucius greatly influenced Chinese society. According to Smith, “The powerful influence of the Confucian educational system on the life of the Chinese is attested by the fact that it persisted practically without any fundamental change for some fourteen centuries” (p. 186). Smith describes how this influence was manifested during the Manchu Dynasty (AD 1644-1911).

The Chinese regarded the scholar as being at the apex of the social structure. They had a most profound reverence for learning. . . . On his first day at school every boy first made his obeisance to the picture of Confucius and then to his teacher. From then onwards he was disciplined to give respect and obedience to all his elders and superiors in a hierarchy of scholarship. (p. 182)

Louie (1980) states that “traditionally, Confucius had been regarded as the first person to have made teaching into a profession” (p. 68) with Confucius himself being the ideal model of a teacher. Before the Great Cultural Revolution, most people regarded this accomplishment “as his greatest contribution to Chinese society” (p. 68). According to Confucian teaching,
teachers were to play an important part in their students’ lives. “The tie between teacher and pupil is sacred, the teacher ranking, in the scale of upper relations, only after the parents” (Tien-Hsi, 1973, p. 52). These several quotations sum up quite well the beliefs I had regarding teachers and education in China.

Wherever my beliefs originated, I felt that the knowledge I possessed about my students’ cultures and backgrounds was enough to design a course syllabus which would effectively meet their needs and prepare them to teach at an American university. After several semesters of teaching this course, however, I began to realize that a lot of what I thought I “knew” about my students’ cultures was inaccurate.

One of the texts I used in my course had two sections which encouraged discussions about teachers and teaching, one dealing with characteristics of a good teacher in the student’s culture and the other about approachability and teacher presence in the classroom. For each of the sections, there were multiple choice answers or checklists from which the students were to choose the responses that appeared to describe their own cultures and also think about which responses they believed described the teaching environment at an American university. The students would discuss their responses in small groups and then share them with the class. During these sharing periods, I was often surprised by what my students said. Rather than choosing the responses that I had thought would probably describe their cultures, they frequently chose the responses which the authors of the text suggested described U.S. culture. There was also frequent disagreement amongst students from the same country about which responses described the situation in their country’s universities. Although I do not have any written record of my students’ actual comments, I do remember several responses which I found particularly surprising:

- classes at Asian universities are not as formal as I believed,
- Asian teachers sometimes tell jokes or stories in class to keep the students’ interest,
• teachers at the university level in Asia may maintain a distance from their students while in class but will often socialize with them after class, and

• teaching techniques used in Asian classrooms are not always so different from the techniques used in the U.S.

In addition to class discussions, weekly individual conferences with my students gave me the opportunity to get to know each student on a more personal level. Through our conversations, I learned that

• at least two or three of my students (especially those from China) each semester came from very rural areas, and

• most of my students did not want to teach, either in the U.S., or in their own countries.

Little by little it became clear to me that I didn’t know as much as I thought I knew about my students’ cultures and backgrounds. The knowledge I had was mainly based on generalizations and stereotypes; very little was based on fact. Since what I was lacking was in-depth information about my students and their cultures and their views of teachers and their own teaching, I decided that an excellent way to explore some of these issues was via a qualitative thesis which used open-ended interviews as the primary method of data collection.
CHAPTER TWO: PREVIOUS RELATED ITA RESEARCH

As I indicated in the introduction, a great deal has been published in the last two decades concerning issues surrounding ITAs. Searching for and sorting through the literature would normally have been a rather tedious, time-consuming task. Fortunately for me, this task was made easy by a work entitled *The International Teaching Assistant: An Annotated Critical Bibliography* by Briggs et al. (1997). This critical bibliography is a “comprehensive and up-to-date collection of the available publications that deal specifically with international teaching assistants” (p. v) arranged in three sections: (1) papers, books, reports and presentations, (2) dissertations, and (3) manuals, textbooks and videos. Of the 264 publications included in this bibliography, ten studies dealt specifically with ITAs’ attitudes towards and perceptions of various aspects of their role as teaching assistants. In this section I briefly describe each of these ten studies and then discuss the relationship of my study to the previous research.

**Studies Focusing on ITAs’ Attitudes and Perceptions**

Three of the ten studies used questionnaires as their primary source of data to explore ITA attitudes. Ronkowski (1987) explored the oft held assumption that there are “differences between international and American TAs in terms of attitudes about teaching styles, expectations of students, and views regarding the TA-student relationship” (p. 263). To the researcher’s surprise, the results showed that the two groups are more similar than they are different. She expanded the study to include interviews but still failed to show any significant differences. As possible reasons for the unexpected results, she cites the fact that the group of ITAs was highly culturally diverse and she questions the accuracy of self-report. She suggests that future studies of this topic use a quantifiable, observational tool combined with interviews of ITAs and students. Briggs et al. describe a similar but more focused study by Jenkins (1989) which compared the attitudes of both American TAs and ITAs towards their
undergraduate students. Unlike Ronkowski, this study found that there was a significant
difference in attitudes between the two groups of TAs with the American TAs being the more
negative. A study by Smyrniou (1994) examined whether the attitudes of the students or the
attitudes of the ITAs in any way influenced the students' evaluations of their ITAs. The results
showed that there is an ITA problem resulting from the ITAs' language deficiencies and that
students' evaluations of the ITAs can be influenced by the attitudes of the students themselves
and of the ITAs.

The remaining seven studies all report having used qualitative research methods to
explore ITAs' experiences and perspectives. Mascoop (1993) investigated issues of
acculturation of ITAs who were teaching in the U.S. for the first time. She found that
"intercultural interactions between students is a complex phenomenon" (Briggs, et al, p. 148),
that ITAs are a heterogeneous group with varying attitudes towards education, and that
miscommunications in class were at times caused by the students themselves. She
recommends that ITAs not teach their first semester or even their first year in the U.S., that
they be paired up with an experienced American TA, and that more research be conducted to
understand intercultural interactions in classes taught by ITAs.

Briggs et al. describe a study by Meesuwan (1992) which also explored cultural issues,
dealing specifically with the ITAs' "perspectives on the effects of cultural, ethnic, and racial
differences on their instructional communication practices" (Briggs, et al., 1997, p. 150). The
study found that

(1) the international teaching assistants' perceptions of cultural differences are
influenced by their experiences in their native and American societies, (2) their
sensitivity to cultural differences shapes their perspectives on teaching, . . . [and] (3)
effects of cross-cultural disparities are most apparent in their expectations of student
classroom behavior and relations with students. (Briggs, et al., 1997, p. 150)

The researcher recommends that more opportunities be made for ITAs to talk about cultural
differences with other TAs, students, and administrators.
Bauer (1991), in a pilot study, also investigated the concerns ITAs have about communication with their classrooms. Bauer sees this study as a “shift in the ITA research from a concern with administration functions . . . to a concern with personal histories of international students” (p. 420). Three groups of ITAs were included in the study. The first group was in the first semester of an ITA training course and therefore not yet teaching. The second group was in training and either teaching or preparing to teach. The third group had completed the course and were teaching. In all, 38 ITAs representing 10 language groups participated in the study. Data were collected using the Communication Concerns Statement, which focused on ITAs’ worries about their ability to communicate with their U.S. students and the ITAs’ perceptions of their role as TAs. Overall, the results showed that ITAs in all three groups were “concerned with language-related issues and their immediate effect upon student behavior and learning” (p. 425). Due to the small sample size, one of the major limitations of the study is a lack of generalizability. Bauer concludes, “If coordinators were to determine specific instructional needs of their ITAs prior to imposing training programs on them, they might be able to better match their program content to the specific needs of their international graduate students” (p. 425).

Smith and Simpson (1993) report on a qualitative study they performed “to understand behavior patterns that contributed to the process of becoming a successful ITA” (p. 485). Fourteen ITAs from a teaching support class encompassing a variety of teaching experience and cultural and linguistic backgrounds were interviewed and observed over two quarters. In the study, they found that “more successful ITAs gradually took the various aspects of their teaching role and made them ‘fit’ their particular needs” (p. 486), particularly their linguistic, cultural, social and professional goals. In the report, the researchers bring to the forefront two ITAs who were successful at finding the “fit.” The researchers recommend teaching ITAs how to evaluate the requirements of their TA position and their own needs in order to find ways to mesh the two areas.
In another paper, Smith (1993) details one particular case from the Smith and Simpson (1993) multi-case study to “demonstrate how a single case can represent a most compelling interpretation of the process which an ITA might use to become successful” (p. 151). Throughout the paper, Smith describes specific behavior of the ITA who is the focus of the study and includes the ITA’s own evaluation of his experience and how he consciously searched for ways to meet his goals through his role as a teaching assistant. The ability to uncover such rich detail is one of the benefits of in-depth studies of only a few individuals.

The last study I will describe is one by Gökçora (1994). Of the ten studies which explored ITAs’ attitudes and perceptions, it is this study which most closely resembles mine, at least outwardly. Gökçora lists as the general purpose of her study “to reveal the perception of Chinese teaching assistants (CTAs) and of American undergraduates towards teaching and teachers” (p. ii). The participants in the study included 50 CTAs and 92 American undergraduate students, all from departments “where math is used as a medium of instruction” (p. 44). To understand the adaptation process, the 50 CTAs were grouped so as to represent three different stages of the teaching process: (1) CTAs who had just arrived at the university and had not yet taken the TA English course nor taught at an American university, (2) CTAs who had completed at least 10 weeks of the TA English course but were not yet teaching, and (3) CTAs who had completed the course and had been teaching for at least one year. The research questions were as follows: “1. Are there perceptual differences towards teaching and towards teachers among ITAs who belong to the [above] three groups? . . . 2. Do Chinese TAs and their American undergraduate students perceive teaching and teachers differently?” (p. 6). Since my study involves only ITAs, I will include in my review of Gökçora’s study only discussion concerning the perceptions of the CTAs.

Data were gathered for the CTAs using focus group interviewing, which Gökçora reports is defined by Krueger (1988) as “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (p. 18).
Each focus group met once. Gökçora asked the CTAs to respond to the following questions: “1) What is an “ideal university teacher” in my culture?[,] 2) What is an “ideal university teacher” in U.S. culture[,] and 3) How do I view myself as a TA?” (p. 5). The data were analyzed descriptively using the constant comparative method of analysis.

Gökçora found that CTAs realized that American professors have a variety of teaching styles and are generally “free and informal” (p. 81). In addition, they noted considerable interaction in American classrooms. They defined a teacher as “a person who is knowledgeable and conveys that knowledge to students” (p. 81). The most important characteristic of Chinese teachers is “thorough knowledge of the subject matter” (p. 82) followed by interpersonal skills. According to the CTAs, an ideal university professor in the U.S. should be knowledgeable and have up-to-date research abilities, be ambitious and aggressive, be “friendly, approachable and able to devote sufficient time to students” (p. 82), and should make class interesting and exciting. The CTAs from the first group saw themselves as “future helpers for undergraduates” while the second and third groups saw themselves “more like an American professor with free and informal teaching styles.” As far as the ITA development program, the first group “valued learning cultural differences in teaching” while the other two groups “wanted more emphasis to be put on language over teaching skills” (p. 83).

Gökçora notes several limitations to her study, among them (1) a lack of generalizability, (2) the requirement that only volunteers participate in the study, (3) the fact that several of the volunteers were from the same department which “may have contributed to forming consensus more readily in the group discussions” (p. 128), (4) the inability to do a longitudinal study due to time constraints, and (5) the low number of female participants. She recommends that similar research be done using ITAs from other countries and using ITAs from the social sciences. She believes that “individuals’ beliefs and attitudes gathered in a qualitative way seem to be a creative and fruitful area for future research” (p. 129) and that
studies using similar techniques could be performed with American TAs and/or American
professors. She also believes it would interesting to further explore ITAs’ resistance to the
 teachings skills focus of some ITA courses.

**Connection of the Literature Review to My Study**

At the beginning of this review, I wrote that of the 264 publications described in the
comprehensive bibliography of Briggs et al., only 10 deal specifically with the perceptions and
attitudes of ITAs. This points to a real need for additional in-depth studies of ITAs. My study
makes a contribution in this regard. Another area left largely unexplored is the attitudes of
ITAs towards their role as teacher. While Gökçora did ask her ITAs about their definition of
an ideal teacher in China, no study has had as its focus the exploration of ITAs’ attitudes
towards teachers and teaching in their home countries. One of the main foci of my study is the
exploration of this issue. As I mentioned above, Gökçora suggests future research could study
our ITAs’ resistance to learning teaching skills. My study goes one step further and explores
ITAs’ expectations of an ITA training course, whether or not those expectations were met, and
their recommendations for changes in the course. One final aspect that sets my project apart
from the majority of ITA research is the fact that the ITAs in my study are my own students
from my ITA training course. In this respect, I have conducted practitioner research, which
Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) define as

> “insider” research done by practitioners . . . using their own site (classroom,
institution, school district, community) as the focus of their study. It is a reflective
process, but is different from isolated, spontaneous reflection in that it is deliberately
and systematically undertaken, and generally requires that some form of “evidence” be
presented to support assertions. (p. 2)

They go on to state that such research is often done collaboratively. In the next chapter, I
describe how I, too, have included collaboration in my study.

As I have demonstrated, my study does indeed fill a void that exists in our current body
of ITA research. This is, of course, a good motivation to perform such a study. A greater
motivation for me, however, is a personal desire to know more about the backgrounds, attitudes, perceptions, and expectations of the students who take my course. It is my hope that with this increased awareness, I can become a more effective ITA trainer and better meet the needs of my students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

In this chapter, I explain why I chose to explore my research questions qualitatively, and I discuss the particular methodology I used to conduct the research.

The Qualitative Paradigm, a Personal Choice

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) state that “SLA [second language acquisition] has a varied inventory of methodologies with which to deal with questions” (p. 10). As a researcher, I feel most comfortable with the qualitative paradigm. According to Schwandt (1989), “We conduct inquiry via a particular paradigm because it embodies assumptions about the world that we believe and values that we hold, and because we hold those assumptions and values we conduct inquiry according to the precepts of that paradigm” (p. 399). My values and the ways in which I view the world lead me towards the qualitative paradigm. I strongly believe that valuable information can be gained using qualitative research methodology that would be difficult, if not impossible, uncover using traditional quantitative methods.

Since my motivation for doing this study was to have a better understanding of the students in my classroom, the fact that the particular results of my research cannot be generalized beyond the participants is not a problem for me. As Smith and Simpson (1993) state of their own project, “Qualitative research does not seek to isolate laws of human behavior. Its purpose is to describe and explain what is happening for those in the study. We hope the reader will ask, ‘What in this study is applicable to my own situation?’” (p. 495). I have the same goals and hopes for my study.

Choosing the Participants

The semester in which I began this project, I had 12 students in my ITA training class. I explained my project to my class and gave them a little background about qualitative research.
I also explained what motivated me to conduct such a study and what I hoped to gain. I then passed around an informed consent form. (See Appendix A for an example of the informed consent form.) The two main points of the form explained that the participants' identity would be protected and that they would have the opportunity to read a near-final draft of the thesis and negotiate any changes. Eleven of the students in my class agreed to participate in my study; one declined on the basis that he would be graduating at the end of the semester. It was my initial intention to study all of the students who had agreed to the project so I could paint an accurate picture of the entire class; however, in talking this over with two members of my thesis committee I realized that it would be impossible due to time constraints to study all of my students to the depths I planned. Thus, I eventually narrowed the participants to five Chinese men who had been in my class the previous semester. I chose them for the following reasons:

1. These students and I already had good rapport. They were used to sharing with me their opinions and personal experiences in our class discussions and in individual conferences. Choosing these five students would save time since we wouldn’t have to go through the get-to-know-each-other-and-trust-each-other phase again.

2. The majority of students in my ITA training classes tend to be Chinese men. Studying these five students might allow me and other instructors in the ITA training course to better understand the experiences of other Chinese men we may have in future classes.

The five students were pleased to be chosen for my study and looked forward to the extra practice speaking English.

**Collaboration**

Research by its very nature is collaborative. My main collaborators were the actual participants in the study. Each of the five students spent numerous hours sharing their thoughts and feelings with me, helping me understand and interpret their experiences, and giving their input on the final draft of this thesis. This project would have been impossible
without their willingness to participate. Secondary collaborators were my major professor and members of my thesis committee, who helped me narrow the scope of the project and gave me a great deal of advice on the various drafts of this thesis. Another extremely valuable collaborator was a fellow graduate student and friend who was also researching various aspects of her classroom using the qualitative paradigm. We met on a semi-regular basis throughout all stages of our projects to discuss our research and give each other advice on what to do next. We also helped each other clarify our thoughts before our individual meetings with our major professors and acted as each other's sounding board. Although we began our projects at roughly the same time, my collaborator's project progressed more quickly than mine, which actually aided our collaboration. In the initial stages we could focus on her research and the problems she was having. Later when she was in the process of writing up the results, we could focus on my research and the problems I was encountering.

Data Collection and Analysis

The kinds of data collected in a qualitative research project vary greatly depending upon the particular question being investigated. As described in Bogdan and Biklen (1992), examples of data used in qualitative studies include researcher field notes, observations, transcripts from interviews, personal and official documents of the participants, photographs, and even official statistics and other forms of quantitative data. To help ensure that their interpretations of participants' realities are accurate, qualitative researchers often make use of several methods of data collection, a practice referred to as triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). According to Morse (1994), using more than one method to gather data allows the researcher to "gain a more holistic view of the setting" since "different 'lenses' or perspectives result from the use of different methods" (p. 224). When inquiries are made in different ways, the respondents often "flesh out" their previous responses supplying more information, different examples, etc. If respondents appear to contradict themselves, this may indicate areas
of misunderstanding or confusion (especially problematic when working with respondents whose native language is not English) on the part of the respondents, the researcher, or both. In my study, I chose interviews as my major method of data collection since I was mainly interested in my students' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. Later in the project, to triangulate and verify my findings, I also made use of questionnaires. In a further attempt to verify that my findings were plausible and that I hadn't misrepresented my students, I conducted member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which are meetings with the participants to discuss the findings of the research and to give the participants an opportunity to read a near-final draft of the project and negotiate any changes.

In qualitative research the process of data collection, data analysis, and writing is iterative and interactive in nature. As data are collected, coded and analyzed, themes emerge narrowing the focus of the research. At the same time, writing is often begun. To more deeply explore the emerging themes, more data are needed, and the process repeats itself. Rather than attempt to separate the components of this process and discuss each one individually, I will describe the process more or less chronologically as it occurred.

**First round of interviews**

I held the first round of interviews in my office space on campus, where my students were already used to meeting me for individual conferences as part of the ITA training course. To afford us some privacy, I chose a weekend day when the entire office building is usually empty. The interviews were recorded with a high quality tape recorder and later transcribed. Sometimes tape recorders make respondents uncomfortable. This didn't appear to be the case with my students, however, since they were used to my recording their speech as part of the class. During the interview I chose not to take notes. In this way, I could maintain good eye contact and the interview would hopefully seem more like a conversation. Rather than arrive at the interview with a list a predetermined questions directly related to my research question, I
decided to make this first round of interviews open-ended. In this style of interviewing, the researcher “encourages the subject to talk in the area of interest and then probes more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent initiates” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 97). Consequently, the content of the interview and the course of the study are largely determined by the participants. I had used this same interviewing technique in a previous qualitative research project and had been pleased with the results.

When a student arrived at my office, I invited him to sit in a comfortable office chair at the side of my desk. Before the actual interview began, we chatted informally for several minutes. Then I reminded the students of the purpose of my research and what I hoped to gain. Since I was interested in their attitudes towards being a TA, I began the interview by asking the student how he felt when he learned that he would be a teaching assistant at State University. From there I let each interviewee determine the path of our discussion, giving him the freedom to talk to me about what was important to him. I concluded each interview after an hour had passed, thanked the student again for sharing his experiences and thoughts with me, and explained how I would analyze the data and then meet with him for a second interview.

When I asked the five students about their feelings when they learned that they would be TAs at State University, I expected them to express concerns about having to teach, especially the three students who had little or no teaching experience in China. Rather than being afraid of teaching, they all expressed a fear of having to speak English. One of the five also mentioned that his first semester of teaching was tough for him not because he had to teach but because he was unable to talk with his students about things outside the lab because of his unfamiliarity with U.S. culture. The lack of concern of these five ITAs about actually having to teach and their major concern about communicating in English made me begin to wonder if my ITA course, with its equal emphasis in teaching and language skills, really met the perceived needs of my students.
During the very first interview, one of the stories that the student told me gave me an idea of how I could explore my students' attitudes towards teachers and teaching in China. The student got onto the topic of the very low salaries for teachers in China and how this affects the way society views teachers. He explained that although teachers should be respected, because of their low salaries they may not be. In fact, if someone is introduced as a teacher at a social gathering, people may think he or she is "very stupid." I found this statement surprising and revealing. It was directly contrary to the stereotype I held of teachers in China. To explore my other students' attitudes towards teachers and teaching in China, I decided to give each of them the same scenario in the first interview: what would you think if someone came up to you at a social gathering in China and introduced himself as a teaching assistant?

The first round of interviews went well. The students appeared comfortable and relaxed. The only negative aspect of the interviews was the fact that the radiator pipes in my office clanged very loudly now and then, which made conversing somewhat difficult.

Transcription of first interviews

As soon as possible after the first day of interviewing, using an old foot-operated dictation/transcription machine, I began transcribing the interview tapes. This was by far the most tedious part of the entire study with one hour of interview generally taking me between four and five hours. Transcribing any speech is difficult enough. What complicated the process even more for me was the fact that my students were nonnative English speakers who were in my class specifically because of their poor pronunciation. I had to deal with strong Chinese accents, unnatural pauses and hesitations, nonstandard grammar, and unusual word choice. Rather than "clean up" their speech, I decided to transcribe it exactly as it was spoken for the following reasons:

- to lessen the chance of altering the meaning
to preserve the idiosyncrasies in the speech which serve to individualize each student, and
to provide an accurate written record of samples of nonnative English speech.

Although I could usually understand the students' speech on tape (often with the help
of intonational cues and my own memory of the interview), transcribing their speech so that I
would be able to understand it later in written form was challenging. I eventually developed
the following method:

- I made careful use of commas to indicate grammatical phrases as my students formed them
  and ellipses to indicate pauses,
- I capitalized the true starts of sentences when there were false starts and hesitations,
- I used boldface type to indicate words or phrases that my students stressed, and
- I also included notes to myself in brackets to indicate laughter, to mark places where the
  speech was unintelligible, to indicate correct tense and pronouns when I thought I might
  misunderstand later as I read the transcriptions, and to clarify meaning when the word
  choice, word order, or grammar was confusing.

I formatted the transcriptions to facilitate coding and readability. I single-spaced the
body skipping a line each time the speaker changed. To save space I used a one-letter
descriptor to indicate who was speaking rather than typing out the full name. I used a half-inch
left margin and a two-and-a-quarter inch right margin to give me plenty of space to code the
transcript. I included in the header of each interview the page number of the transcript and a
code which indicated the student and the number of the interview. The printed transcripts
ranged from 12 to 20 pages.

Analysis of first interviews

To begin the process of data analysis, I coded each line of the transcripts by writing
words or short phrases in the right margin summarizing the gist of each line of the interview.
(See Appendix B for an example of a transcribed, coded interview. In the transcript the
descriptor, C, used to indicate when the student spoke is the abbreviation of the original pseudonym of the student, which he later changed.) I then transferred this coding in an abbreviated form to a one-page summary sheet for each interview. (See Appendix C for an example of a summary sheet.) Under ideal conditions the transcribing and coding of the first round of interviews could have been completed in about two months. In my case, however, the process occurred over a period of seven months due to a particularly heavy teaching load which left me with little time or energy to devote to this study.

To analyze the data once the transcribing and coding were completed, I read through the five summary sheets searching for recurrent themes which seemed to address my research question. This is the part of the research process where the direction of the study really depends on the particular researcher. Any number of researchers could analyze a set of interview transcripts and find different themes worth exploring. Which themes are ultimately chosen depends on what the researcher finds most intriguing and/or most relevant to him or her and to the participants of the study. In this study, two major themes emerged which I found interesting and which my students seemed willing to discuss:

1. Presently in China, university teachers are not as respected by society as they were in the past.
2. When my students learned that they would be TAs at a university in the United States, they were most concerned about their English, specifically their ability to be understood, to choose the correct words, and to understand the American students. None of my students expressed much concern about actually having to teach.

After I had analyzed the data and identified the themes I might want to explore, I scheduled a meeting with my peer collaborator. We discussed my reasons for choosing these themes and what sorts of questions I could ask in the second round of interviews to elicit more information regarding these themes. We likewise spent time discussing my collaborator’s research project, which by this time was past the data collection stage. I later met with a
member of my thesis committee and my major professor to give them an update on my research and to discuss some questions regarding qualitative research methodology.

Second round of interviews

With the themes decided, the second interviews (which took place one year after the first interviews) were more focused. I began each interview by asking the student to clarify some things he had told me in the first interview that I had had trouble understanding, either because of language or audio problems or because I had failed to ask a follow-up question. I then asked for biographical data, which included questions about the student’s parents and siblings and their levels of education. Next, I explored the two major themes that had emerged from the first set of interviews. I asked for more information about how the status of teachers has varied in China over the years from the student’s own point of view. Although some of the students talked about the situation in the 1950’s and 1960’s, most of the discussions centered around the last three decades after my students were born. Finally, I asked them the following questions about the ITA training course:

1. When you learned that you would have to take such a course, what were your expectations of the class?
2. Which aspects of the class did you like and which aspects did you not like?
3. If you possessed all the knowledge and skills necessary to teach such an ITA training course, how would you teach it? What activities would you include and which skills areas would you focus on?

Each interview lasted roughly 90 minutes.

Transcription and analysis of second interviews

I transcribed and analyzed the second interviews using the same methodology as in the first interviews. Since the second interview was more focused, analyzing the data was
somewhat easier than the first time. Thanks to a lighter teaching load, the transcribing and analyzing were completed in three months rather than seven.

The Writing Process

In an ideal world, I would have begun the writing process immediately after the analysis of the first interviews when the number of pages of transcriptions and summaries totaled only 75. After the second interviews, the number of pages of data increased to over 175. The task of writing seemed daunting. Luckily during this period, my peer collaborator and I were presenting a paper about our qualitative/collaborative projects at an international conference. Needless to say, having to present served as a good motivator to actually start writing.

The introduction and methods chapters fell into place fairly easily. The results chapter, on the other hand, was a challenge to write. I began the process by highlighting on each interview summary sheet the areas dealing with each theme. I could then lay out all 10 summary sheets in front of me and more or less determine an outline for the results section including subsections and subsubsections. My problem now was figuring out a method to organize the actual data to facilitate writing.

One method I tried was to read the highlighted areas of a particular summary sheet which addressed a particular subsection of the results chapter, find the corresponding page of the actual interview, summarize in my own words the data pertaining to the subsection, and include with the summary the code identifying the student, interview, and the page. I did this for one subsection and scrapped the idea. Not only was it prohibitively time consuming, but in the end I would still have to go back to the actual pages of the interviews before I could begin writing the subsection.

The method I finally used was given me by a fellow graduate student. For this method, I photocopied all the interview transcripts, read each interview, and actually cut out the sections
pertaining to the two themes I had selected. As I cut out the sections of interview transcription, I marked the section with the code identifying the student, interview, and the page. At the same time, I decided the subsection or subsubsection to which the section belonged and placed it in an appropriately labeled manila folder. When I had all the interview transcriptions cut up and filed, I was left with about 15 labeled folders which I then organized to form the outline of the results section. I then went through the labeled folders one by one and wrote one-sentence summaries of the sections of interview transcription using a word processor. I then printed out the summaries and cut them into strips arranging and rearranging the strips of summary in a logical, coherent sequence and placing the arranged strips in clear, plastic report binders so I would not disturb the order. The arranged strips formed the skeletons of the paragraphs of the results section. As I wrote the paragraphs, I found the corresponding sections of interview transcriptions and decided which sections to use as quotes and which sections to paraphrase or summarize. I then fleshed out the paragraph with my own analyses and interpretations of the information contained on the strip. To ensure that I wasn’t misrepresenting what my students had told me by taking their quotes out of context, I frequently used the codes I had written on each strip to look up the quote in the original transcripts so I could read the context. For my own reference, I included the codes at the end of any quotes I included in the writing. In later drafts of this thesis, I transferred the codes to hidden text annotations. (See Appendix D for an example of the arranged strips and Appendix E for a copy of the corresponding paragraphs from the thesis including the codes after the quotes.)

Verification

To verify that the information supplied by the respondents was accurately understood and interpreted, I used the methods of triangulation (the gathering of data using several different methods) and member checks (having the participants read and comment on a near-final draft of the project).
Questionnaires

My second data gathering technique consisted of a set of three questionnaires, one for biographical questions and one each for the two themes. (See Appendices D, E, and F for examples of these questionnaires.) I arranged a two-hour meeting after the second round of interviews with all five of the students in the classroom where the ITA training course had met (for nostalgic reasons). As an incentive for them to come to the meeting and to thank them for their cooperation, I ordered pizzas to be delivered after the meeting. Before giving them the first questionnaire, I spent a little time updating them on my progress and explained to them the purpose of the questionnaires. I then gave out the questionnaires one at a time. The first questionnaire involved biographical data of the student and his family. The second questionnaire asked the questions about teachers and teaching in China during various time periods (which had been delineated with surprising agreement by my students during the interviews). The last questionnaire requested information about the students’ experiences as TAs and their reflections of the ITA training course. If anyone was confused by a question, I would give an explanation to all five students. As they finished each questionnaire, I would quickly read over their answers and ask for clarification if I didn’t understand what they had written or ask for more detail if the answer was very short before giving them the next questionnaire.

One set of questions involving the level of societal respect for teachers during a particular period of Chinese history confused my students. The question was worded as follows: “To what degree were teachers respected by society and why?” They didn’t know what I meant by “degree.” I decided to change the question and have them quantify the level of respect on a scale from one (no respect) to ten (highest respect). My students said they preferred a falling scale, which is how grades are given in China, so I changed the scale to be from ten (no respect) to one (highest respect). They didn’t like this scale either since a score of
ten (possibly the equivalent of an F-) would not be given by a teacher in China. Finally, we settled on a scale from nine (no respect) to one (highest respect). When I wrote the questionnaires, I never imagined that the question would cause so many problems.

Another problem I had was when a student would respond out loud to a question. This would usually spark all out debate (perhaps argument is a more accurate term) with the other students insisting, “You’re wrong,” or “That’s not the way it is.” When this would happen, I reminded them that I was interested in their personal perceptions of reality and that very likely each of them had had somewhat different experiences and interpretations of life since they did not come from the same families, had each grown up in different parts of China, and were all different ages. This brief, accidental exposure to group interviewing made me relieved that I had chosen to interview them individually.

After about an hour and a half when most of the students had finished the questionnaires, we took a break for pizza, soda, and chat. Although it had been almost a year since they had taken my course, the rapport between us was the same. We joked with each other and updated each other about our studies and our lives. All five students suggested that when I actually finished the thesis, perhaps I could invite them to my house to teach them how to make pizza. It sounded like a great idea to me.

Since the main purpose of the questionnaires was to verify that my students and I had understood each other during the interviews, I really didn’t expect much new information. When I read through the questionnaires, my expectations were met. The responses were very short with an average length of about two sentences, even though I had specifically requested more. One student did write paragraph-length responses, which I appreciated. Surprisingly enough, the set of questions on level of respect for teachers that I had had to revise three times provided me with some of the more interesting data. My students’ quantifying the level of respect (a classic quantitative technique) was much more informative than the expressions they had used during the interviews, e.g. very respected, not very respected, lack of respect, etc.
Although the responses were so short, they did provide me with some means of verifying what I had already learned and gave me some gap-filling data to insert into the results section, which by this time was mostly written.

**Member checks**

After the writing of the thesis was more or less complete, I scheduled individual meetings with each student to discuss the specific areas of the thesis that they contributed to in order to make sure that I had not misrepresented their words. When the student came to my office, I explained the overall results of my study and the purpose of our meeting. I then began to scan the thesis looking for the portions that the student had contributed to including my summaries and interpretations of his words as well as the quotations attributed to the student. Since I was so familiar with my words and the students’ quotations, I decided it would be more efficient to read the particular sections out loud while the student read the same passage silently. As we read, the student informed me whether or not I had represented him accurately and if any changes needed to be made. While I was reading the excerpts to the student, I would often make comments that I resisted making during the actual interviews, comments regarding the student’s insight, points of agreement or disagreement among the five students, or how I was affected by what I had learned from the students.

The process was much simpler than I had expected. Very rarely did the student request any changes. Most of the changes involved specific dates, degrees earned, locations, etc., regarding the student’s biographical information. Now and then the student would request that I change the wording of his quotations, not necessarily to correct the grammar, but to make it easier to understand. Since the changes the students requested were not substantive, I simply incorporated them into the data. The information reported in Chapter 4 reflects these changes. In general the students seemed pleased, almost excited, to see their “voices” in print, and I
believe they were surprised by how much importance I placed on their thoughts, beliefs, and opinions.

After going through the entire thesis, I then asked the students three questions, the answers to which will be reported in Chapter 5:

1. What did participation in this project mean to you personally?
2. How do you hope this research affects me and other ITA trainers?
3. What questions have remained unasked, i.e. what other aspects of the ITA experience should be explored in future research?

When my students were done answering the questions, we chatted for a while about our individual research woes, our plans for the future, and exactly when I would invite them to my house to learn how to make pizza.
After the second round of interviews, I revised the wording of the two major themes to read as follows:

1. Over the last 50 years of Chinese history, there have been tremendous fluctuations in the way Chinese society, and therefore my students, have valued teachers and education.

2. My students' expectations for the ITA training course and the specific goals I had set for the course were not always in agreement.

In this chapter, I discuss these themes after presenting short biographies of the five students.

**Note on Quotes**

The five students in this study are Chinese. Since English is not their first language, they do, now and then, make mistakes with English grammar, word choice, and sentence structure. Rather than edit their quotes and make them sound like native English speakers, I have decided to let the reader "hear" their voices as I heard them. I have standardized their speech only when necessary to aid intelligibility.

**Biographies of the Five Students**

To help the reader get to know the five students who assisted me in this project, I would like to introduce them in the form of mini-biographies. To maintain confidentiality, the names used are pseudonyms chosen by the students. In addition, I have used the pseudonym, State University, to refer to the university they were attending at the time of this study.

Preceding these biographies is Table 1, which summarizes the personal data of each student, including information about their educational background, their work experience, their teaching experience, their parents, and their siblings.
Table 1. Biographical data of the five students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Ming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth year</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>Small village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University/Degree</td>
<td>Ph.D.- chemistry</td>
<td>Ph.D.- chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td>Primary school, high school ('88), B.S. - chemistry (92), M.S. - chemistry ('95)</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, trade school ('82), B.S. - chemistry ('88), M.S. - chemistry ('95 from university in Illinois)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>(See &quot;Teaching&quot; section below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching or tutoring in China</td>
<td>Helped students in lab while working on M.S.</td>
<td>Primary school teacher ('82-'84), TA ('88-'91), lecturer ('91-'93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching at State University</td>
<td>1 semester - general chemistry lab, 1 semester - chemistry exercise class</td>
<td>(1 semester - general chemistry lab in Illinois) 2 semesters - organic chemistry lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father/Birth decade</td>
<td>1930’s</td>
<td>1930’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schooling</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, military school, trade school</td>
<td>Primary school (1 or 2 years), literacy training in 1950’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Occupation</td>
<td>Communications engineer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother/Birth decade</td>
<td>1936 (deceased)</td>
<td>1930’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schooling</td>
<td>Primary, middle, high school, trade school</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Occupation</td>
<td>Machine repairman</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>7 years older than Song</td>
<td>3 years older than Ming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schooling</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school, trade school (computer)</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school, B.S. - Chinese culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Occupation</td>
<td>Computer operator</td>
<td>Worker in price control department of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>2 years older than Song</td>
<td>4 years younger than Ming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schooling</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school, trade school (sewing)</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school, trade school (chemistry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Occupation</td>
<td>Worker in insurance company</td>
<td>Technician in quality control department of a factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>Guang</td>
<td>Xinhua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>Small village</td>
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<td>Large city</td>
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<td>Ph.D. - chemistry</td>
<td>M.S. - chemistry</td>
<td>M.S. - math</td>
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<td>Primary school, middle school, high school ('82), B.S. - chemistry ('87), M.S. - material science ('90)</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school ('87), B.S. - physics ('91)</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school ('89), B.S. - control science ('93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher at institute ('90-'95)</td>
<td>Researcher at institute ('91-'95)</td>
<td>Computer analyst ('93-'95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Tutored high school students while at institute</td>
<td>4 months informal tutoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 semester - general chemistry lab, 1 semester - advanced chemistry lab, 1 semester - grader</td>
<td>1 semester - analytical chemistry lab, 1 semester - general chemistry lab</td>
<td>2 semesters - math help room, 1 semester - algebra, 1 semester - trigonometry</td>
</tr>
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<td>1940’s</td>
<td>1940’s</td>
<td>1940’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school (5 years)</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school, university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Retired factory worker</td>
<td>Retired professor of Russian and English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940’s</td>
<td>1940’s</td>
<td>1940’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 year of sporadic literacy training in 1950’s</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Retired technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years younger than Shan</td>
<td>1 year older than Guang</td>
<td>10 years older than Xinhua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school, middle school, 2 or 3 years training at company</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school</td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school, B.S. - physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker in insurance company</td>
<td>Worker in sweater factory</td>
<td>Head of computer center of newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 years older than Xinhua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary school, middle school, high school, army (5 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Factory worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Song, Ph.D. student in chemistry

Song's father, born in 1936 to a peasant family, grew up in a small village in Hunan Province. In the 1950's after middle school, he went to a military school to be an electric communications technician in the army. Since several of his instructors were from Russia, he was required to learn Russian. He retired from the military in the 1970's and got something similar to an associate degree in engineering. At the time of this study he was working as a senior engineer for a company which installs communication controls along the routes of new highways.

Song's mother, also born around 1936, grew up in Beijing. After high school, she attended something similar to a trade school and worked in a long distance communication company repairing machines. She died several years ago of a stroke.

Song has two older sisters, neither of whom scored high enough on the national exam to attend university. The oldest sister, seven years older than he, got an associate degree in computers and works for a long distance telephone company. His second sister, who went to a trade school to learn to sew, worked in a suit factory but recently got a new job at an insurance company.

Song was born in 1969 and grew up in Beijing, one of the two largest cities in China. He started elementary school in 1978 when he was eight years old rather than when he was seven because of the changes brought about by the close of the Great Cultural Revolution. He finished high school in 1988 and went to the university to study chemistry. He completed his B.S. in 1992 and his M.S. in 1995. While working on his master's degree, he was asked by his advisor to help students do experiments in the lab. He explained that the work he did at the university in China was not the same as a TA at State University here in the U.S. "Only several students want to do something in the lab and they wanted to familiarize themselves with the chemistry lab. Usually they were undergraduate students." He enjoyed this assignment and he believed that the students liked him "because we help each other do the work and I think
that they like me to give them some advice in the lab because I was more familiar with that.”

After finishing his master’s in 1995, he came to State University that summer to begin his
Ph.D. in chemistry. His first semester he taught a lab class for a lower level chemistry course.
For his second semester, he taught an exercise class for an upper-level chemistry course. In
his third semester, he began work as a research assistant.

Despite the fact that he is not really interested in teaching and that he would make more
money in industry, he plans to go back to China and teach at a university. He said that a
faculty position is more stable than a job in industry and will allow him to pursue his real
interest, namely research.

Ming, Ph.D. student in chemistry

When Ming was growing up, his parents worked as farmers in a small village. Both of
his parents were born in the 1930’s. Although there were no schools in the village where his
father was born, as a boy his father did receive some schooling at the home of his mother’s
(Ming’s grandmother’s) family, who were quite wealthy and hired private teachers from the
city to teach their children. Because of the small number of schools, Ming’s mother received
no education. Later in the 1950’s his father received some literacy training through some
special schools set up by the government after the Liberation. He worked as a community
leader and farmer.

Ming has one brother, three years older, and one sister, four years younger. His
brother received a B.S. in Chinese culture but now works in the price control department of the
government. Ming described him as “a rich man now.” His sister did not score high enough
on the college entrance exam to attend university, but she was able to attend a special school for
advanced training in chemistry.

Ming was born in 1964, began elementary school in 1970 and middle school in 1976.
In 1979 after middle school, he had the choice of attending high school or getting three years of
special training in programs set up by the government to help fill the void in education caused by the Great Cultural Revolution (which will be discussed later). Choosing high school involved a risk. If Ming’s scores after high school weren’t high enough to allow him to go to university, he would have to go back home and work as a farmer. Choosing special training, on the other hand, would guarantee him a job. He chose special training. Because of his very high scores, he received training as a primary school teacher. From 1982 to 1984, he taught first through fifth grade subjects such as math, drawing, physical education, and music.

After one year as a primary school teacher, he realized that teaching wasn’t for him. “At that time, I just feel bored. Also I have a lot of free time, so I just want to take some chance. Then I decided to take the exam.” The exam Ming is referring to is the university entrance exam. To prepare for the exam, he started to study on his own the subjects he would have studied in high school, including English. He believed that his poor English is a result of this self-study. Ming said with a laugh,

Yeah, sometimes you can say my pronunciation is not formal English because I just figure it out on my own. Because in the country you can’t find any good teacher for your English at that time. So sometimes I listened to the radio, ... some special program for English teaching. ... So I have some training from radio, some from myself. Then I got trouble for my pronunciation.

In 1984, he passed the college entrance exams and began a B.S. in chemistry at East China Normal University. He graduated in 1988 and worked as a teaching assistant for medicinal chemistry. At that time in China, TAs were not graduate students but part of the university faculty. Ming explained the duties of a TA:

If you just enter the department as a TA, the first year you can’t give lecture. You just maybe give the instruction in the lab. Maybe the second year, you can give two or three weeks of lecture in the course. In the third year, you will teach half. ... Maybe in four years, you will be promoted to lecturer.

After three years, Ming was promoted to lecturer. Ming explained that it is common for a newly promoted lecturer to have a co-lecturer, a sort of mentor, who sits in the classroom, listens to the lecture, and gives the new lecturer advice and points out mistakes. After five or six years, a lecturer is often promoted to professor. According to Ming, pay and promotion of
university faculty depend on years of experience rather than on one’s ability to conduct research or publish articles. In 1993 after two years working as a lecturer, Ming received admission to a university in the United States, where he began to study for an M.S. in chemistry. Two years later in 1995, he came to State University for his Ph.D. During his first two semesters there, he taught chemistry lab. He is currently working as a research assistant. After graduation, he would like to find a research position in biology or the computer field somewhere in the U.S.

Shan, Ph.D. student in chemistry

Both of Shan’s parents were born in the 1940s. His father had about six years of education when he was young. Later because of his family’s financial situation, he had to quit school and work. His mother may have received one or two years of schooling. While he was growing up, his parents worked in the fields, so they didn’t have much money. According to Shan, “life was not good.” Later his father got a job as a worker in a company, and his mother continued to farm.

Shan has one sister who is two years younger than he. She was not able to attend high school because the family didn’t have enough money to support two children in school. By the mid-1980s, the family’s financial situation had improved, and the sister was able to return to school. She now works for an insurance company in China.

Shan was born in a small, isolated village southwest of Shanghai in 1965. After graduating from high school in 1982, Shan went to university to study chemistry. In 1987 he went to an institute in Shanghai for three years to earn his master’s degree. In 1990 he was given permission to come to the United States to study but government policy at the time required graduates to work in China for five years before going abroad. So from 1990 to 1995, Shan worked as a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. He described what he did at “work”: 
Maybe the work was very easy. I didn't have to spend much time to do work. I just have no work to do; I just stay there. Sometimes read the newspaper, sometimes play bridge. [He laughs.] That sort of thing. When I was at work, too easy.

Whereas some people might enjoy such a job, Shan looked back with bitterness:

But [the job wasn't] good for me. Those five years were really important for me. If I were here, maybe I could have already gotten a Ph.D. I could do every job now. But I wasted my five years there. [He laughs.] It wasn't good.

Although he had plenty of free time at work, his supervisors forbade him from studying English. "They thought that if you didn’t have work, read a newspaper or chat with colleagues was OK, but if you study English, [the supervisors thought,] ‘That guy wants to go abroad. He wants to work there. It’s too bad.’" So he usually spent his evenings studying English and preparing for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).

In 1995 after five years at the institute, he came to State University. Unlike the other four students, Shan had no experience teaching or tutoring in China. The first two semesters there he worked as a TA in an introductory general chemistry lab. His third semester, he was the lab TA for advanced inorganic chemistry. His fourth semester, he worked quarter time as a research assistant (RA) and quarter time as a TA. Rather than teach, his major professor, who was not pleased with Shan’s English proficiency, assigned him to work as a grader.

When he completes his Ph.D. in chemistry, he would like to find a job in California working as a chemist. Since jobs in chemistry are not so easy to find, he believed he may have to change his major to computer science or computer engineering. He has no plans to teach in China.

Guang, M.S. student in chemistry

Guang’s parents, both 54, grew up in small villages about 30 miles from Shanghai. Guang’s father received about eight years of education until he had to stop and begin working due to the death of his mother. Guang’s mother, who came from a very large family, received about two years of schooling. His father, a retired tractor driver, and his mother both work as
farmers, as they have done for the past 40 years. The land they farm belongs to the
government, and they sell a certain amount of the harvest to the government at a reduced price.
Guang has one sister who is one year older than he is. Her scores on the high school exam
were not high enough to allow her to attend high school so she went to work for a sweater
factory.

Guang was born in 1969. After graduating from high school in 1987, he attended East
China University of Technology. In 1991, he was admitted to the Chinese Academy of
Sciences to do research in ceramic and material sciences for the Shanghai Institute of Ceramics,
where he worked for four years. While working at the institute, he was asked by several of his
colleagues if he would tutor three of their daughters. Since he had "a lot of spare time," he
agreed. Guang explained why tutoring was important to these parents:

Education is very important in China, especially for primary school, middle school, and
high school, and the parents really want their children to be able to enter the high
qualified universities. So they spend a lot of money and energies to make their children
to be better and better. So they need some tutor, like me, to guide their children.

Although he sometimes received money from the parents, usually his pay was in the form of
gifts, such as a "beautiful calendar and maybe some food."

Of the five students in this study, Guang’s experience tutoring was probably most
similar to that of a TA at an American university. He normally met with the three girls in his
office at the institute three evenings a week for three hours each time. His office, a space of
about seven feet by eleven feet, had a blackboard, a desk, and a table for each of the three girls.

Guang explained a typical tutoring session (edited to maintain continuity):

I can say that my classes were really informal. First I asked them if they had any
questions or problems. If they had problems, I would solve them and explain for
them. And usually I had quizzes. I gave them half an hour to finish it and then correct
them, look out what happened. Then I know what were their weak points and what
were their strong points, so I can teach them, yeah, have focus. I would explain in
great detail what they should do for these weak points. I want them to find out what
their weak points are and tell them that they needed to read the related parts in their
textbook, that they should focus or pay great emphasis to these parts and do more
exercises.
He also explained that since the girls didn’t all have the same weak points and strong points he would individualize their instruction. He taught them chemistry, physics, and even English, although he limited the English instruction to written exercises, not spoken English. For Guang, the worst part of tutoring was students’ “lack of imagination for physical science.” The best part was that they were very attentive and did everything he asked them to do.

In 1995, Guang got married and came to State University to study for an M.S. in chemistry. During his first semester, he taught a second-year chemistry lab and in his second semester he taught an introductory chemistry lab. He is currently working as a research assistant. When he finishes his degree, he hopes to find a job in a big city in the U.S. doing research for industry. If he can’t find a research job, he would like to work with computers.

Xinhua, M.S. student in mathematics

Xinhua’s father, 63, is a retired university professor of Russian and English. He is the only parent of the five students who has a university education. Although he is retired, he still teaches some courses at the university. Xinhua’s mother is a retired quality technician who previously worked at a large company which produced parts for airplanes. She has a high school education. Xinhua has one sister and one brother. His sister, ten years older than he; majored in physics at the university and is currently in charge of layout in the computation center of a big newspaper. His brother, eight years older than he, served in the army for five years and then got a job as a worker in the same factory where his mother worked.

Xinhua was born in 1972. He graduated from high school in 1989 and went to university where he studied control science, an area he considers to be a branch of applied mathematics. While a student at university, he tutored a high school boy for a time. “The student wanted to go to college, instead he wasn’t very good. So his mother asked me to just tutor him for awhile, so I did so during my summer break.” Twice a week, three hours each time, he informally tutored the boy in physics and math. In the end, however, the student
failed. Xinhua attributed this to the fact that they “actually talked a lot instead of studying.” After graduating with his B.S., he worked for two years as a computer analyst. Although he enjoyed his work, he began to feel his math background was poor. So he decided to come to the United States to get his M.S. in mathematics. When he began his master’s studies, he assumed he would work as a researcher when he finished. He believed his father would like him to be a writer or a poet. If he could choose any profession, he thinks it would be fun to be a philosopher, a scientist, a mathematician, or a musician. When Xinhua finishes his degree, he would like to work for a couple of years in the U.S. as a research scientist and then return to China to become a university professor.

Overview of Recent Chinese History

I have included this section to summarize for the reader some of the significant events in recent Chinese history, thus providing an historical backdrop from my students’ stories. Since a detailed discussion of Chinese history through the eyes of modern scholars is not one of the goals of this research, I gleaned the information for this section from articles by Clubb in Collier's Encyclopedia, Scrivo in the Collier’s 1996 International Yearbook, and Summerfield in Fodor’s China. For consistency, I divide up history here into the same time periods that I use for my students’ stories.

Prior to the Liberation in 1949

In the early 1930s, the Kuomintang (KMT) regime in China had two main enemies: Japan, which was slowly invading various parts of China, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was growing in strength in the rural areas thanks in part to the efforts of Mao Tse-tung. The KMT and the CCP reached an agreement in the late 1930s and joined together in the fight against Japan. While the KMT followed a wait-and-see philosophy with Japan, the Communists “stressed frugality, discipline, organization, and resistance to Japanese
aggression” (Clubb, 1993, p. 328). After the KMT Nationalists suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Japanese, the Communists began to gain the favor of both intellectuals and peasants.

With the end of World War II, the Communists and the KMT Nationalists renewed their fighting. Despite assistance from the U.S., the Nationalists eventually lost to the People’s Liberation Army (as the Communists now called themselves) and retreated to the island of Taiwan. On October 1, 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established under the leadership of party chairman Mao Tse-tung and premier Zhou Enlai.

From the Liberation to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, 1949-1966

After the Liberation with military and financial aid from the Soviet Union, China began to rebuild. Communications were restored, industries repaired, the currency stabilized, and land seized from the landowners and redistributed to the peasants. China and the Soviet Union entered into a 30-year treaty, and trade between the two countries grew. The U.S., on the other hand, demonstrated its commitment to the Nationalists in Taiwan, which greatly angered the PRC.

In 1958 Mao initiated a three-year economic great leap forward, in which “staggering performance goals were established” (Clubb, 1993, p. 330). The great leap forward failed miserably. To make matters worse, relations between China and the U.S.S.R. ended in 1960 when Mao “challenged Soviet Premier Khrushchev’s ideological positions” (p. 330). Soviet technicians returned home and economic contracts were canceled. China decided to follow a policy of self-reliance and seek as allies underdeveloped nations.

The period of the Great Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976

When the party rejected Mao’s proposal in 1965 to “step up the struggle against ‘reactionary ideology’ (Clubb, 1993, p. 330),” Mao began to devise a plan to “purge the
central committee”; a year later the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was unveiled. The plan had two goals: “eradicate cultural elements belonging to the nation’s bourgeois past . . . [and] . . . “control ‘those within the party who are in authority and are taking the capitalist road’” (p. 330). With the assistance of the “youthful ‘red guards’” (p. 330) and the People’s Liberation Army, Mao was successful in destroying his enemies within the communist party. Hurt along the way, however, were the party itself, transportation, and industry.

In 1968, there was so much disorder in China that Mao ordered the PLA to round up the Red Guards and other youth and disperse them to the countryside. After several failed attempts to end the Cultural Revolution and re-establish order in the country and after a failed coup in 1971, a new constitution was finally adopted in 1975. A year after the adoption of the new constitution, Premier Zhou died. Next in succession was Deng Xiaoping, who had been purged in 1966 and rehabilitated in 1973. Mao intervened, however, and Hua Guofeng became premier instead. Deng Xiaoping was once again purged. Mao died in 1976.

From the end of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1980s

When Mao died in 1976, Hua arrested the Gang of Four (leaders of a radical faction), purged the radicals, and “began laying the groundwork for a massive political and economic reorganization” (Clubb, 1993, p. 331). In 1977 Hua was confirmed as party chairman and Deng was restored to his former offices, including first vice-premier. Hua set about devising an eight-year plan for “economic development on a grand scale” (p. 331) which was unveiled in 1978. During the same year China and Japan signed a peace treaty. A year later the U.S. extended diplomatic recognition to the PRC while making it clear it would protect Taiwan from invasion from the PRC.

In 1980 Hua resigned as party chairman, and Deng Xiaoping took over the post. Under the new leadership of premier Zhao Ziyang, chairman Deng Xiaoping, and party head Hu Yaobang, “China embarked on a course of rapid modernization and openness to the outside
world” (p. 332). Excess produce could be sold on the free market, small businesses were encouraged, and control of industry was decentralized.

**From the mid-1980s to 1995**

The economic reforms were “spectacularly successful in stimulating economic growth” (Clubb, 1993, p. 332). National income rose at an annual rate of 10 percent. There were growing problems, however, among them a rising trade deficit, increasing foreign debt, rising inflation, environmental degradation, political corruption, and demands by students and intellectuals for democratization. Hu and Zhao were sympathetic to democratic reform, but Deng was very much opposed. Following Hu’s death in April of 1989, “enormous demonstrations of students and workers, demanding democracy and an end to corruption, took place in many cities” (p. 332). (The largest of these uprisings was at Tienanman Square in Beijing.) On June 4, 1989, the protests were repressed by the army and the police leaving thousands dead.

Summerfield (1994) states that January 1990 marked the end to martial law, and 1991 saw devastating floods in parts of China. Despite continued pressure by the rest of the world to reform, “China began to emerge from the isolation the international community had imposed on it” (p. 92). In 1993, China’s economy flourished, “setting levels of industrial expansion that astounded the world” (p. 92). The following year, exchange controls were abolished. Scrivo (1996) adds that in 1995 China hosted the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, the country tried to control double-digit inflation, and news was out of Deng’s failing health.

**My Students’ View of Teachers and Education**

In this section, I wish to describe through the eyes of my students the various events in recent Chinese history that have influenced Chinese society’s and my students’ views of
teachers and education. At times, these events affected my students and their families differently depending on my students’ ages, where they lived, and their particular socio-economic level. Rather than describe separately how each of my students perceived each of these events, I will combine their stories and highlight instances where their stories deviate.

In the first two time periods I discuss below, none of my students were yet born; therefore, the information in these sections comes from what they remember their parents having talked about. My primary interest is my students’ perception of what occurred, a perception partially formed from the memories of conversations with their parents and families.

Prior to the Liberation in 1949

During this period in Chinese history, children were more apt to be schooled if they lived in a big city or came from a wealthy family. According to Ming, “The city generally have some school, even the college, but generally you need to pay the money for the education fee at that time.” There were teachers in some of the villages, “but government had no school for poor man, you know.” The parents of Xinhua and Song, who were from large cities in China, and the father of Guang, who lived in a village near a big city, all had the opportunity to attend primary and middle school during this period. The parents of Ming and Shan, who were farmers in small, isolated villages, weren’t so fortunate. Shan said, “My father maybe study five years in the school when he was young. I don’t think my mother had any education.” In the village where Ming’s parents grew up, it was wealth that determined whether or not a child received an education. According to Ming,

At that time very, very few schools, government schools, in China. ... A big family, such as a rich family [usually land owners], can hire some teacher, some knowledge man, to teach their kids because they have lots of kids, maybe 10 or 20 in big family. They just hire someone to teach them. They don’t need to go to some school. That’s a family teacher. ... They gave very, very respect to the teacher.

Education was reserved for the children of the wealthy. The probability of a peasant child receiving any sort of education was slim to none.
From the Liberation to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, 1949-1966

After the Liberation, the educational situation in China improved with the establishment of free government-run schools that made education accessible to nearly everyone, even people in the villages. According to Ming, “Then all the poor kids can enter school, get some education.” Ming’s father was able to take advantage of these changes. In the 1950s he attended a brief program, a “special school”, set up by the government to provide some literacy training to teenagers. “He got some education but this was just to let them read something or know something. That’s all. Not for just education, just so they could read the paper or something like that.” Although the government attempted to make more educational opportunities available to the “poor kids,” economics still prevented many peasants from receiving or furthering their education, as was the case with Guang’s parents. According to Guang, textbooks and supplies were prohibitively expensive for many peasants. In addition, the children of the peasants “needed to stay home and work in the fields” if the family was to survive.

According to several of my students, the decade roughly between 1955 and 1965 was glory for teachers. “Their social position was very high” and “their income also was really high compared to other jobs in China,” according to Shan. Ming added that their reputation was the highest during this period. All of this would soon change with Mao Tse-tung’s Great Cultural Revolution.

The period of the Great Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976

Of all the events in recent Chinese history, it was the Cultural Revolution that seems to have had the greatest impact on Chinese society’s views of teachers and teaching. Within the period of a decade, teachers went from positions of utmost respect and admiration to positions of great distrust and hatred. Song summarized the Cultural Revolution this way:

I think the major reason for that Revolution was Chairman Mao wanted to keep his controlling over the government because, you know, this person was a great man in
China, but he didn’t do good things when he was 60 years old. He did something very bad to China because he wanted his power in the government. ... He had several partners. They controlled the government and army at that time. But they wanted to build up the economic building for China, but Chairman Mao usually he trust the communist and he wanted to move China to communist country. But, you know, the education in China is not very well. So people didn’t have any idea about his communism, what real communism is, including Chairman Mao himself. He just, “Oh, everything belong to all of us.” But if this is true, nobody wants to work. [Mao’s partners disagreed with him so he wanted to] get rid of his partners, but it’s not easy to get rid of them, so he used the people because the people trust him. So he used the people. You know the people went out to do something bad to his partners. Then he got the chance to get rid of his partners, but the total country didn’t get any benefit from this movement.

Mao’s influence over the young people

The people who trusted Mao the most and over whom Mao had the greatest influence were the high school and university students. According to Ming, “the Cultural Revolution start from student. Not from workers, from students. First from high school students, then to the university students, then to the workers.” The power that Mao had over the students was enormous. Xinhua recalled, “Chairman Mao said something ridiculous, but young men, teenagers, they believed him.” Song observed, “He used students in the college and high school to get rid of his enemies. So all the students didn’t go to school, and they go out to beat the workers in the government.”

Teachers persecuted

Once Mao had succeeded in eliminating his enemies in the government, he turned his attention to anyone who had education, especially teachers. According to Guang, the government “thought that education can make people bad, bad thoughts. If you receive more education, the people may think more. They may think more about the government, so if the government does something wrong, the people may have insight in that.” Using newspapers, radio, and posters, Mao spread the message to the young people that teachers were a “negative force of the society” that must likewise be eliminated. “The fate of teachers was terrible.”
The students used numerous methods to persecute the teachers ranging from defamation of character, public humiliation, imprisonment, and even murder. To destroy a teacher’s reputation, Xinhua described how posters were used:

They use a very large paper and write something. They think you did very bad things. They list the bad things on the paper and they make a lot of copies of this and post it everywhere. And by doing so, they make you really, really bad. You know your fame has just been destroyed.

Public humiliation was carried out in the following manner:

They can put a very heavy iron plate, just put it on your neck. It’s very heavy so it make you bend like this [indicates a bowing position]. And then make you go from street to street. . . . And then they bring to a place, for example a lecture hall, something like that, and put you on a platform and make you say what the bad things you did. And we call it /PI'D’OU/ in Chinese.

Ming said that it was also common that the students would beat the teachers and make them stand in the sun for long periods of time, which was precisely what teachers had been allowed to do to students who misbehaved. A more serious form of punishment was imprisonment. Guang recalled, “If you have some bad words against the government, you could be put in the prison immediately. And you may not be allowed to teach anymore.” According to Xinhua, the most severe form of punishment, death, was reserved for “the most eminent” teachers, with the murderers being their very own students.

Young people sent to countryside to be educated

Eventually Mao’s influence led to chaos and mass rebellion in the cities. The situation was out of control. As a partial solution to the problem, Mao decided to send the “intelligent” (educated) people, i.e., young people who had received a middle school or high school education, to the countryside to live and work with the peasants. Mao did not exile the youth as a form of punishment. He truly believed there was a great deal to be learned from the peasants, especially hard work and loyalty. According to my students, the official reason for sending the students to the country was to re-educate them. Shan reported,
In this period in China, if someone is intelligent, have high level of knowledge, that person was not good, [at least] politically. . . . They should get revised. The communists thought that they were not like the workers and farmers. . . . They should change their idea. At least politically, they should think that communist socialism is really good.

Xinhua noted, "Students didn’t go to school anymore. They went to the countryside to work with the farmers because Chairman Mao said you can learn much more there than in school . . . ." Although re-educating these young people seems to have been the "official" reason for their exile, Shan believed that other possible reasons may have been a lack of jobs and food in the cities and also "to help the poor people [in the countryside] improve the education."

Education in the cities

For a period of about seven years while the students were rebelling and during their exile, high schools and universities in the big cities were closed. According to Guang, "The schools were there, but no teaching, just there for political events. No more teaching, no more education." If the professors had not been killed or imprisoned, many were exiled to the countryside with the students. Others stayed at the universities and studied or "cleaned the bathrooms, the building, the whole campus," according to Xinhua. Early in the Revolution during the most chaotic years, the elementary and middle schools also suspended classes, but later when the young people were exiled "and the big city is quiet . . . , the small children can go to school," explained Song. "Their teachers were still in the big cities because, you know, the small children couldn’t do anything about the movement."

Eventually, the government allowed some of the exiled youth to return to the big cities to attend university. Song described how the students were chosen.

If you have a good record. For example, your parents are not some rich man before the building of the PRC [People’s Republic of China] and you worked hard during the practice in the fields, you can go back to the big city to get college, but only a small percent can go back to the college to get classes.
One's attitude was much more important than one's prior education. Even peasants and uneducated soldiers were chosen to attend university. According to Shan,

You didn’t have to have a good education. I think I knew some guys who just had elementary level education who got enrolled in university. That’s true. When I entered university in 1982, my supervisor at that time was just graduated at that year who was a guy who enrolled in university within the Cultural Revolution. Perhaps that was the last year that they could get enrolled. That guy was from the army. He didn’t have to have examination because the leaders in the army said, “Oh, you are quite good.” Probably because he worked hard in the army and respected the army.

Needless to say, this lack of academic preparation caused problems, both for the students and the universities. Shan observed,

Most of them [the students], due to their weak background, couldn’t follow the class. It was really sad. Since they couldn’t follow the class, I think the education at that time was forced to lower their level so they can keep up with the study. Because at that time one guy, if he or she can get graduated, it’s not based on the academic education. It also depends on other kind of things, if he or she could work hard in the factories or in the rural areas.

Effects of the Cultural Revolution in the villages

The two students from villages didn’t recall any great changes in the people’s thinking where they lived. Ming said that the farmers’ way of thinking was “very simple.” Their goal was to work hard to support their families. They didn’t get caught up in the revolution like many of the people in the cities did. When asked what the youth in his village who were exiled from the cities did, Ming said, “Nothing. They just, I don’t know, they just give some trouble.” He added with a chuckle, “They just lived.”

Shan agreed that in the villages the Cultural Revolution didn’t influence their thinking very much. Whereas in the cities, teachers were distrusted and even hated, Shan said that the teachers in rural areas were still quite respected. They also earned more than the ordinary people. “Their salaries were still worse than the teachers in the big cities, but they still had a little better life working as a teacher.”

Although the Cultural Revolution seemed to have had little effect on attitudes and thinking in the rural areas, it did have an impact on education in some of the villages. Shan
explained that in the early years of the Cultural Revolution and before, teachers in his village had very little academic training:

And when I begin to study in the school, I think the school is a little funny because in the elementary school in the first year and second year, all the class, we just had one teacher. The teacher taught mathematics and Chinese and something else. Just one-half of the class taught this, then move on to another class. [laugh] . . . But I think the teachers at that time didn’t have much education. Maybe some of them just graduated from middle school.

He went on to explain how the situation changed when he entered the third grade. It was at that time that the exiled city youth began arriving in his village. “They had some high good background relative to the [village] people. They also couldn’t work as hard as the people in the rural areas, and the children needed to get educated. So they just became teachers there.” Education, therefore, improved. Unfortunately, this was not the case in all the villages which played host to the exiled youth. Ming had no recollection of these youth serving as teachers in his village.

The end of the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution ended with Chairman Mao’s death in 1976. Xinhua explained,

There were still some bad guys that were still doing the things like Chairman Mao. But in 1976 another chairman, Chairman Hua, took over the government and actually arrested the Gang of Four and put them in jail. And now everything started to get back into order. That’s the end of the chaos.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution came reforms in education, mostly attributed to Deputy Premier Deng Xiaoping. One of the greatest of these reforms was the establishment of national examinations for those students wishing to enroll in higher education. The effects of the new examination policy were greatest in the villages. According to Shan, “From then on, especially in my community there, in my village, more and more people, students, began to get enrolled in the universities and colleges. So I think that’s improvement in my hometown.” Thanks to the efforts of the exiled youth who taught in some of the villages, students from these villages
were better prepared academically than they had been before the Cultural Revolution. This upward trend reversed for a short period when these exiled youth who had worked as teachers began returning to their homes in the cities. Shan explained what happened. “So most of the teachers, those guys, began to go back to their home place. And then the teachers’ background was much worse than before. I think some of the teachers in my class had worse knowledge than me.” This point will be revisited in the discussion of the long-term effects of the Cultural Revolution.

From the end of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1980s

The end of the Cultural Revolution saw a resurgence in societal respect towards teachers and the value of education. Ming explained that the government first raised the teachers’ salaries and then gave benefits to the schools and to the teachers. The position of teacher was even higher than before. When I asked Guang if there were still people during this period who thought that teachers were “a negative force” in society, he answered, “After then, no more, no more. [During] this period, professors were regarded as the most important part of the society since the government realized that we lacked education.”

Before long respect for teachers and the belief in the importance of education soared. Shan remembered that he began to study very hard in the middle school and high school, hoping to score high enough on the national exam to be able to attend university. “We thought that when we went to university, if we could become a professor or a scientist, it would be really, really good because at that moment their pay was very high and they were honored in the whole society.” Students were encouraged to study the pure sciences and were steered away from the less prestigious areas of engineering, law, and business. Shan also remembered having been told that “if you can study well your mathematics, chemistry, and physics, you can do anything in the world.”
During this period in China a student's future after university was determined by the government, which owned all companies and universities. Ming explained that every year the companies and the universities would inform the government of how many new people they needed. Then from the number of new graduates, the government would distribute the students between the companies and the universities. The best students, those with very high grade point averages (GPAs), were assigned by the government to continue their studies in graduate school, which would often lead to faculty positions at a university, first as teaching assistants, then lecturers, and eventually up the ranks to full professors. The low level students were usually assigned by the government to positions in industry where there was little chance of advancement. The students with very low GPAs were assigned to small companies or were placed in the countryside. Technically a student had the choice to refuse the job assigned by the government, but generally this was not wise. According to Ming,

If you don't want [the job assigned by the government], you will lose the job. Then you need to find a job for yourself. Then you will get a bad, a very bad future for you because your future depends on the government. Because at that time the government paid all the tuition for you in the university. Since they pay everything for you, they will control all your future. So they will give you a job. They train you, and then you will serve for them spending all your life because they pay you.

During this period in China, certain jobs carried prestige due to the nature of the job, not according to the amount of money a person earned since salaries were determined by level, not by job. For example, an entry level chemist in a company would receive roughly the same pay as a TA at a university because their levels were the same. Salaries for various levels didn’t differ by much. Song noted that during this time a professor at a university might make $50 per month and a worker at a factory might make as much as $30 per month, which was enough to buy the necessities, like food and clothing. (Housing was provided by the government.) Therefore, since society knew that assignments were made according to one’s GPA, positions in academia were afforded the greatest respect and honor because people in these positions had to be very smart and have a great deal of talent. Shan remembered that when he saw that several courses were taught by an associate professor or a full professor, he
and his classmates thought, “Oh, their level. They have really high levels. We’re very lucky. We are taught by a professor.” Positions in academia were also honored because the chance for advancement was greater than in industry. According to Ming, who worked as a chemistry TA and lecturer in China, “A TA was hopeful maybe they can get a job as a professor or some high level. There was some possibility they would find success in their major of chemistry. But in a company no.” Not only would a high GPA guarantee students positions in academia, it would also give them the chance to win scholarships to study abroad in the United States, Europe, and Japan. According to Shan, “Many of them didn’t go back. They just stayed in America or in other advanced countries. I think even here [at State University], there are some assistant professors from China who came during that period.”

**From the mid-1980s to 1995**

In the mid-1980s, with the implementation of China’s Open Door Policy, the economic situation in China began to improve. Companies, while still belonging to the government, were able to make more money, which was passed on to the employees in the form of salary increases. Workers were also able to earn more money by having second and third jobs. According to Guang, “People began to realize the importance of money. They can buy things, open businesses, etc. So they again began to make money, think money is everything. So education was neglected again.”

While salaries in many segments of Chinese society began to rise, teachers’ salaries did not increase. Ming said that, unlike companies, which made money, the universities were entirely dependent upon the government for funding, and the government didn’t have enough money to support the universities. In addition, the government did not permit teachers to earn extra money. Wages in academia stagnated. Song reported that an associate professor at a university in a big city might get about $150 per month, which would be considered a good salary for the position. A white collar worker at a factory in a big city, on the other hand,
could get maybe $500 per month. Even a blue collar worker, perhaps by working several jobs, was able to bring home between $300 and $400 per month, more than double the salary of an associate professor. In China, according to Xinhua, this situation where manual laborers make more money than intellectuals in academia is referred to as “hand and head upside down.”

This inequity in salaries, this “hand and head upside down” phenomenon, negatively affected the way society viewed teachers. Xinhua explained,

I think from '77 to mid-80s, this period the teachers were still respected to some extent, to a certain degree. But after that since the growth of the development of the economy and the improvement of the people’s living standard, people want to live better and the criteria of being a success changed a lot. People start to pursue the things that could make them comfortable temporarily instead of pursuing the things that can make them happy all their lives. The main thing is money. People want to make a lot of money, so they can live a very comfortable life. On the other hand, teachers didn’t get a very good salary. . . . Teachers just taught. They got a salary that was fixed. And at that time, workers also became to do some extra work after the formal work. So they can also get some extra money, some of them, not all of them. And I guess the teachers became the class who makes the lowest salary, the lowest money actually. So the people started to disrespect them.

Ming remembered that in 1992 or 1993, on a scale of one to ten with one being the highest and ten being the lowest, a professor’s salary ranked number nine in China. The situation was even worse for TAs, the lowest rung on the ladder to full professor. “If you were a TA, you don’t have enough money to feed yourself. So you can’t live by your salary. You can’t.” The dire financial situation of teachers was so well known, explained Shan with a laugh, that rich people on business who must carry large sums of cash “will act like professors. Then in the train and bus, thieves will not pay attention to them.”

Eventually there was a policy change and teachers were allowed to make extra money. According to Song, some supplemented their university salaries by teaching in an evening school or working as a consultant for industry. According to Xinhua, however, many more teachers “went down to sea,” which means that they quit teaching altogether and went to the commercial world, to companies, to make money. He believed that by quitting their teaching positions, many former university professors have probably made “a lot of money.”
Not only did it become increasingly difficult for teachers to live on their teaching salaries alone, but they also began to lose their position of great respect in society. Unlike the decade following the Cultural Revolution when prestige was determined by a person’s occupation, beginning in the mid-1980s people were respected according to the amount of money they made. According to Shan,

Before [1989] all people maybe think, “Oh, you are a college teacher. You are very knowledgeable.” And they may respect you, but now they are interested in money, you know. Maybe there is a person with lots of money that didn’t get any good education, but people still give him some respect. They still respect teachers but not as good as before because their children should get some education. But they are more interested in money. So a very rich person can get more respect than a teacher.

Guang agreed that a teacher will receive some respect from parents because they believe the education of their children is important. Nevertheless, the salaries of the teachers are low. He considered this a contradiction. “There are people who think that teachers are important to society, but at the same time, teachers are not treated this way by society,” especially when it comes to salary.

Xinhua also felt that there exists a contradiction. “Teachers should be very respected, but it’s not true. Say if you have a party and you meet a lot of friends and you are introduced to other people and you say, ‘I’m a teacher,’ it makes you look very stupid,” he said with a laugh. When asked why a teacher would “look very stupid,” Xinhua explained that although this person must have knowledge in his subject area, “he must lack something else,” namely “the excitement to pursue money.” This would make a teacher different from other people. “People think you are strange, you know, lofty. . . . They won’t want to enter your life, to understand you further. That’s common people, not everybody.” He also believed that they would think that a teacher lacks the courage to find a profession outside academia:

In [their] point of view, young men and young women, probably young men, should join ventures with big companies, like tele-communications, computers, this kind of work. It’s very different from here [in the U.S.], you know. I want to explain to you. People [in the U.S.] would think you are doing a great thing [if you stay in academia], but [in China] if you stay in school, probably they would think that you have little courage.
These common people might also think that a person who chooses to be a teacher is lazy. “Maybe he doesn’t want to work too much . . . because the work of teacher is very easy, very easy. It doesn’t take too much time.” If a professor did great things and became famous, he would command respect. But if he wasn’t famous and didn’t make much money, he would be considered unsuccessful.

Despite the financial difficulties and lack of respect from society, there are people who choose to continue to teach. The reasons are varied. Xinhua said that some teachers continue to teach because of the security inherent with the profession. “If you want to leave it, you must take risks.” He added that other teachers stay in the profession because they “really value the academic position. . . . There are some teachers that really love, really enjoy their teaching and their research.” Song felt that teaching is an attractive profession because there is a lot of free time. With the free time, professors can do research, conduct experiments in the lab, read books and journals, and even do consulting work on the side. Ming agreed that the work schedule is attractive, but said that some teachers enjoy this because “they are easy men. They don’t want some challenge out of school.” He didn’t mean to imply that they’re lazy, just that making money isn’t their main objective in life. Several other reasons he gave for teachers choosing to teach are because (1) they are “too smart,” meaning that they like research, (2) they are “too stupid,” meaning that they are very honest, which “is no way to get a position out of the school,” and (3) they are “too old” to find positions in industry.

To summarize, my five students agreed that China’s economic boom has lowered the importance that society places on teachers and education. Wealth and respect are no longer found in academia but in industry. This has influenced the choices that students now make with regards to their education and their futures. As I described earlier, prior to the mid-1980s a student’s future was decided by the government. After receiving a bachelor’s degree, the best students were chosen to continue their education at the graduate level, do research, and more than likely work the rest of their lives in academia. The less than best students were
distributed to the factories. The students had little say in the matter, but at least they were
guaranteed a job. Since the mid-1980s the situation has changed. According to Ming, the
government can no longer determine a student’s future. He gave this explanation:

Because now the government can’t give a lot of jobs to the students. The students must
find the job by themselves because the company want to become independent from the
government. They want to make some big money by themselves. They just want to
give some tax or give some benefit to the government. They want to be independent.
So the government can’t give some poor student to them. ... If the government
[would give] them poor students, they [would] be angry about that because these
people can’t make some money, can’t give some help to the company. ... Maybe
there are some exceptions, but a lot of students need to find jobs by themselves.

With the freedom to decide their own futures, students generally choose the path that will allow
them to make the most money. This path usually does not include graduate school since the
universities, which are funded by the government, cannot compete with the much higher
salaries of industry. “If the university want to keep some smart student and the high level
student, they can’t because they don’t have support. No money.”

Since the government can no longer guarantee students good jobs when they graduate
and positions in academia are no longer sought after, students feel differently about university
than they used to. According to Shan, there are two groups of students. One group, who
dream of going abroad, will study hard at university, especially English. The other group,
who simply want to find a job, will not study so hard. For this last group, good grades in
university and choice of university are not as important as they once were.

In China, it is very difficult to get enrolled in university, not like here. Here everyone
can go to university if you can pay the tuition fee to the university. But in China it is
very difficult for poor guys to get into university. At least those guys should be very
good in high school. But when they get enrolled in university [and eventually
graduate], usually they will go the factories or companies that belong to the
government. No matter if they came from different universities, they get the same pay.

When I graduated in China, I got the same pay as other guys from other
universities. Maybe some of them their universities were very bad, but we got the
same pay. And sometimes, maybe, if a guy didn’t go to the university and he work
very hard, maybe you got a position not as good as that guy. So they didn’t care if
they studied hard or not.

It is more important for students to study hard and get good grades while in high school to
allow them to go on to university. Once in university, however, it is the diploma that is
important. But, as Shan suggested, even people without little or no education can often get good pay “because in China if a guy can find a good job, it is more dependent on his background, his family’s background and his relations. It doesn’t just depend on his academic score or ability.”

The plight of the professors has also influenced students’ areas of study. According to Guang, “Since professors themselves don’t make much money, most people think, ‘What’s the use of education?’ So most people choose majors that will help them make money, like finance, not fundamental sciences like physics, chemistry, things like this.” Shan found this trend away from the fundamental sciences ironic. As he noted earlier, from 1977 to the mid-1980s the sciences were considered one’s ticket to the future: “If you can study well your mathematics, chemistry, and physics, you can do anything in the world.” Unfortunately, this didn’t turn out to be the case. Shan explained,

A few years ago, I meet some of my classmates from the high school. We found this really too sad that at that time if students got quite good grades and entered into mathematics and those areas, they didn’t get good life. And some of my classmates who didn’t do very well in the national examinations and were forced to study business, and law, and accounting, those kind of areas, they did quite well after graduation. Because now the country needs these kinds of people to continue the development of economics. So they really did a good thing. And those guys who studied mathematics were really sad.

The experiences of people such as Shan’s classmates, whose lives are now more difficult because of their choice to study the sciences, very likely influence the decisions of today’s youth to go into more profitable areas of study. Guang believed that eventually this neglect of the sciences will cause problems for China.

**Long-term effects of the Cultural Revolution**

Several of the students discussed some of the long-term effects of the Cultural Revolution, which are still felt today more than 20 years after the official end of the Revolution. The biggest effects are seen in the universities. The Cultural Revolution caused a ten-year block in education. According to Guang, “In my institute older people above 60 years
old are retiring. But there are no people below this age who can serve the institute.”

Universities and institutes are being forced to promote people who lack the necessary qualifications.

Other effects are more widely felt. According to Xinhua, “The effect of the Cultural Revolution is the shadow is made upon every human being’s mind, which makes Chinese people afraid to do good things. They just want to keep themselves safe.” It’s likely that this fear of doing good may be one of the contributing factors for fewer and fewer university graduates wanting to stay in academia. People are more concerned for their own welfare than they are for society. Xinhua continued, “The effect still remains. . . . I think it formed a habit, actually a philosophy. It shaped the people’s mind. They don’t think like before. It’s a very big problem.”

My Students’ Reflections on Their TA Experiences and the ITA Training Course

In the previous section, I detailed my students’ perceptions of how Chinese society’s respect for teachers and education has fluctuated during the last 50 years of Chinese history. Each of the five students, through his memories and personal experiences, supplied bits and pieces of the story which were melded to form a whole. In this section, I will explore the degree to which my students’ expectations for the ITA training course were met by the specific goals I had set for the course. In doing so, I will discuss (1) what my students thought when they received notification that they would work as teaching assistants at State University, (2) what they felt to be positive and negative aspects of their individual TA assignments, (3) and what they expected from the ITA course I taught, what they thought the strengths and weaknesses of the course were, and how they would design such a course. Rather than combine their stories at this point, I will discuss each student one by one in each of the sections to highlight their individuality.
Their reactions when they were awarded a teaching assistantship

Each of the five had slightly different reactions when they received the news that they would work as a teaching assistant at State University. They also had different expectations of what working as a TA would involve.

Song

While still in China, Song received the letter informing him that he was awarded an assistantship in the Chemistry Department of State University. He was happy with the news because it meant that he would be getting financial aid which would help offset tuition. Since the letter mentioned working both as a teaching assistant and a research assistant, he wasn’t sure what his first assignment would be, although he hoped, actually expected, that he would work first as an RA to give him time to acclimate to the surroundings and to the English language. Although he doesn’t recall exactly what the letter said about the duties of a TA, he thought that the duties must be similar to those of a TA in China, i.e., grading homework or teaching in a laboratory. The letter mentioned something about a recitation class. Song was unfamiliar with this word but guessed that it must be “some class about solving some problems.”

If given the choice, Song would have preferred not to work as a TA. “To say the truth, we don’t want to be a TA because, you know, a TA can cost you a lot of time. And if you be an RA, you can concentrate on research work.” He found doing research work more interesting than teaching, but the Chemistry Department at State University requires all graduate students to work as a TA for at least one semester. When I asked Song how he felt about having to work as a teaching assistant, he laughed and answered, “I had no feeling before I came here. The teaching is not very difficult except for the speaking. If you have very [good] speaking English, you might be good in the class, in the lab.” Although Song had virtually no
prior teaching experience in China except for helping several students do experiments in the lab, having to teach didn’t really concern him. What was important was his knowledge of chemistry. Song continued, “I think if you should be a teacher, for example in chemistry, you should know more things than the student. So I think I can teach well if I have no problem about the language. . . . You know, the chemistry, the theory for the chemistry, is the same. I know what I’m going to talk about, I mean, the material. But the trouble is how to express them in English.” Even if having to teach didn’t cause Song much concern, having to teach in English did.

Having passed the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the GRE in China, Song was confident about his ability to understand written English. He was unsure, however, about his ability to speak English. “We didn’t get any speaking English test, so we didn’t have any idea about speaking English because in China very little chance you can get in touch with Americans.” Even when he did meet Americans, he usually spoke only “several very simple sentences” with them. He also thought that having learned British English rather than American English might cause him some problems.

His doubts about his ability to communicate in English intensified when he actually arrived at the university and began the orientation program of his department, which involved watching experienced TAs and preparing and giving presentations. “After I came here, the speaking English was a disaster for me for the first several weeks. So at that time I thought maybe I should be an RA the first semester.” During the orientation he also became aware of the fact that he lacked vocabulary specific to the laboratory and that at times his pronunciation was difficult to understand, all of which made the idea of having to face a room full of students a little frightening.
Ming

Ming followed a different path to State University than the other four students, who came directly from China. Before coming to State University, Ming spent two years at another university in the United States earning a master’s degree in chemistry. During his master’s program, he worked one semester as a TA and three semesters as an RA. He remembers that the letter of intent that he received in China from the other university specifically stated that as a TA he would instruct a lab. When he arrived at the university, he was assigned to teach a general chemistry lab, where his duties were to “just instruct the lab, just tell the students how to do the experiment and take care of the safety of the lab.” He was required to have one office hour a week. There was no recitation. During the last semester of his master’s, he received admission to State University. As with Song, he knew that he would have to work both as an RA and a TA. From his experience at the other Midwestern university, he had a fairly good idea about what would be expected of him as a TA here.

Unlike Song, who was indifferent about having to teach (except for the speaking part), Ming expressed a much stronger feeling: “I hate teaching. I really hate teaching.” He laughed and added, “I like research, but I have never liked teaching. Even in China.” I found this admission somewhat surprising, especially since Ming had worked so much as a teacher in China, first as a primary school teacher, then as a university teaching assistant and eventually as a university lecturer. As far as his spoken English, Ming knew he had problems, even when he was working towards his master’s degree. Although he said his English improved a little bit during the two years at the other Midwestern university, it still was not good, especially the pronunciation. According to Ming,

My pronunciation is always my problem. I can’t correct all my pronunciation, you know. This is a big memory in my brain. Sometimes even if I know the correct pronunciation or the correct English speaking, but just like Chinese sometimes I speak English. Always some Chinese comes out because no feeling, you know. Just out. Maybe some time later I can give some good speaking, but I don’t think I can get some [improvement] speaking now.
Spoken English was obviously a major concern for Ming. He acknowledged that when he arrived at State University, he felt bad about his spoken English. He attributes many of his problems with English, especially spoken English, to the fact that he was self-taught. He had learned to speak his own brand of English which, more than likely, had become fossilized in the last 15 years. While he had a great desire to improve, he couldn’t seem to find the means.

Shan

When Shan received the letter of admission in China from the Chemistry Department of State University, he was very happy. After five years of waiting, he was finally going to America to study. When I asked him what he felt about having to teach when he had no teaching experience, he said, “I think it made me nervous, but it actually meant that I can get assistantship here so I can study here. Otherwise, I have no other way to do this. Otherwise I could not afford the tuition fee here.” It wasn’t the actual teaching that made him nervous. “Teach is not too bad. . . . I know what’s going on there. I know about reaction, elements, compounds, but I don’t know the English names.” What made him most nervous was having to speak in English. “Although my TOEFL and GRE scores were quite good, I knew my expression in English and listening comprehension were not very good.” He felt that working as an RA would be easier “because in the academic circle maybe the conversation and exchange of ideas is more easier.” Communicating with students as a TA worried him since he had been told by a professor in China who had taught in the U.S. as a visiting professor that the students here were difficult to understand because they did not speak standard American English like what is heard on the Voice of America, an overseas American radio broadcast.

Shan wasn’t sure what working as a TA at an American university would entail, but he assumed that the job would be similar to that of a TA in China. He said that in the last 10 years in China graduate students had been asked to work as TAs as a requirement for graduation. Their duties normally involved grading homework and exams. Sometimes at the end of the
term before exams they would have to hold a sort of recitation to show the students how to solve the problems in the course. Shan also had some firsthand information from friends who had come to the U.S. in 1990 and had worked as TAs. They told him that working as a TA meant grading and maybe a little teaching in a lab. According to them, not much communication was required. Although this is what he had been told, I asked him what he actually found when he arrived. He replied,

Oh, it was terrible. Let me see. I came here at the end of July 1995. Then after one week or two days, I had to have a training, intensive English training. Just taught us how to work as TA here, how to pronounce, how to answer questions. We did it for about two weeks. I was really bad. The first class that we had at that time was that the teacher, the instructor, everyone should talk for 10 minutes about yourself. Oh, God. I have never talked so long before. [He laughs.]

Guang

Guang remembered that the letter he received from the Chemistry Department of State University clearly stated that he would work both as a TA of a lab section or recitation class at the undergraduate level and as an RA working under the supervision of a major professor. He had no idea what his project for the RA would be, but he thought he understood the work of a TA, even though the term "recitation" was new for him. Unlike many foreign graduate students, he was actually looking forward to teaching.

I was interested in the TA position since I told you that I was informal teacher for some high school students. I think teaching is interesting and important, so I'd like to spend some of my time to teach students. And as a TA, I think it's a good opportunity for me to contact Americans. So improve my English also.

Guang obviously valued his experience teaching these youth in China and looked forward to working in a similar capacity here. His positive view of the TA position may also have stemmed from his view of teachers in China. The reader may recall in the discussion of Chinese society's view of teachers and education from the mid-1980s to 1995, it was Guang who stated that there are people in China who think that teachers are important and worthy of respect despite their low salaries. Several times in our conversations he stated, "Teachers are
everything in China,” which is the view many of us in the West believe to be the case in China, though it is not a view shared by the other students in the study.

It is also interesting to note that, rather than fearing the TA position because of the necessity to communicate in English, Guang viewed it as an opportunity to interact with Americans and improve his English. Before coming here, he was fairly confident of his ability to communicate in English. He said that many foreign visitors came to his institute and he would attend their lectures and sometimes chat with them afterwards with little difficulty. When he came here, he knew he had some problems but didn’t think they were very serious. He said, “I didn’t think that my English couldn’t be understood.”

Xinhua

Like Guang, Xinhua was happy when he learned that he would be a TA at State University, in this case for the Mathematics Department. Xinhua explained, “The first impression I had was, ‘Oh, it was not too bad. I can study now. I have the chance to study.’” He had been told this by some friends of his in China who had attended universities in the U.S., so he believed that working as a TA would allow him to put most of his energy into his course work, not his teaching. Since the Math Department does not have recitation or laboratory classes like the Chemistry Department, Xinhua expected to teach a regular class of about 30 to 40 students.

When I asked him what other feelings he had when he learned he would have to teach a math course at State University, he replied,

I thought I would be awkward sometimes because my English was not enough. So I worried about my English very much, but not for the teaching part. I don’t think it’s very hard for me to do the job if I can speak just good enough English to be understandable. . . . That means that I think I have the skill and the knowledge to manage with the teaching part, but I have the fear that I cannot be understandable and just make students very frustrated.

Although Xinhua had very little experience actually teaching or tutoring, he was confident in his ability to teach. When he was working in China as a software engineer he would often
have to explain things to the newcomers, show them the programs, and teach them the structure of the software. He thought that he could explain things very well. He also said that when he was in college there were some graduate students who were hired to grade homework and hold something similar to recitation classes where the undergraduate students could go if they needed help understanding the course material or doing the homework. Xinhua said, “I think I can do it at least as bad . . . as good as they did. It’s not a very difficult way to do.” He did admit that having to teach a class bothered him a little bit, but “at last I knew I would have to deal with teaching a class. I knew this was going to happen and I had to be prepared for this.”

What bothered Xinhua more than having to teach was having to communicate in English. He said that his fear of English had two parts. First there was the listening/understanding part. He said that he realized that he had some problems with listening comprehension when he was put in charge of translating a cassette tape made by IBM into Chinese for a presentation at the company where he worked. Although he could get the gist of what was said on the tape, he couldn’t understand everything. The second part of his fear of English was speaking. Unfortunately in China, Xinhua had had little opportunity to speak with people in English. He lacked confidence and didn’t know how to improve.

Their experiences as TAs at State University

All five students were working in some capacity as TAs during their first two semesters at State University while they were taking my ITA training course. Shan was a TA for three semesters, and Xinhua was still working as a TA at the completion of this study. Although exploring my students’ experiences as TAs here was not the focus of my research, during the course of our conversations some of the students chose to talk with me about their trials and tribulations in the lab or classroom. In this section, I will report some of these experiences,
both positive and negative, to help create a context for the discussion of my students’ expectations of the ITA course.

Song

When Song went into the lab for the first session and had to face more than ten students, he said he felt “only a little nervous.” All he had to do was orient the students to the lab and make sure they had all the necessary equipment. In the coming weeks, however, he began to realize that many of the students had difficulty understanding him. According to Song,

When I told them something, usually the answer was “Pardon me” or “Say it again.” So I didn’t feel very well at that time. And I have no other words besides the words I should say in the lab. When students have some problems, they can ask me. If they had no problems, I stood there for the whole lab.

From a TA evaluation at midterm, Song learned that the majority of his students did indeed have difficulty understanding him and thought his speech was poor. His professor told him he should try to speak more with the students instead of waiting for them to come to him. Song began walking around the lab asking the students if they needed help. Little by little he became more familiar with the lab and discovered where to find the equipment he needed. In addition, he was receiving language training in the ITA course. The situation in the lab improved, and Song felt better in the last half of the semester.

Despite the improvement, Song was troubled by his inability to talk with the students about things outside the lab. He explained,

The students like you to talk something else. A good professor when they teach in the class, maybe after several minutes or after finish a chapter will talk some stories or things like that. So students like this class because it’s not very boring. [Talking about sports or other things will help] the students feel better and they can communicate with you better. That’s a good way to teach. But at the beginning, I have no idea about these things. Just taught what they should do during the lab, then no other words.

When I asked Song why he felt that spending some time talking about things unrelated to the lab was “a good way to teach,” he said that in China this is what a TA does “to be more near
with the students.” Professors, too, will take breaks and tell stories when the students are getting tired. He also observed that American TAs will often talk to the students about sports or current events before the lab or during a break. Song believed that his inability to do so made him boring. He knew that to solve this problem he should spend time watching TV and reading the newspaper, but his heavy course load and research duties left him with little free time.

**Ming**

Of the five students, during the interviews Ming talked to me the least about his experiences as a TA at State University. As I have already mentioned, he had had seven years of experience teaching in China and had already worked as a TA at another university prior to this study and he “really hates teaching.” It’s very likely that teaching wasn’t a topic he enjoyed talking about.

In the questionnaire I gave the students near the end of the study, I specifically requested information about some of the positive and negative aspects of the students’ experiences as TAs here. For Ming, two of the most negative aspects were the low educational background of his students and the students’ attitude towards him. He wrote that the students were “not helpful for English improvement.” He felt that they were unfriendly and that they unfairly blamed their inability to understand chemistry on his difficulties speaking English. On the other hand, he did value the extra teaching experience and he did notice improvement in his ability to speak English.

**Shan**

Shan’s fear of having to communicate in English in the lab was realized. In fact, he listed his inability to communicate with his students as one of the two most negative aspects of
his experience his first semester. (The other negative was not having enough time to do research.) He explained,

When I first taught here, I was a TA in the lab, and maybe half of the time I can understand what the students asked. But sometimes I didn't know how to say in English, and then I just had to show them how I did anything so they can understand. He was able to avoid having to explain to the students what they had to do in lab by demonstrating it to them instead.

Having to teach wasn't all negative for Shan. Of course, he appreciated making more than enough money to survive. He also appreciated the opportunities teaching afforded to practice speaking English. In his second semester as a TA, he noticed his speaking skills improved, and by the third semester he noticed an improvement in his level of self-confidence. He was also able to form friendships with some of his students.

Although having to teach didn't concern Shan much, he did have to make some cultural adjustments in his role as TA. He explained that in China if a student came ill-prepared to lab or hadn't completed his homework, the TA could ask the student to leave. Here, on the other hand, the TA would have to let the student do the experiment, show him the procedure, and probably spend a lot of time answering the student's questions. Another difference that Shan noticed is that teachers in China are generally more strict than here. He said that in China it is common for teachers (especially in high school) to chastise a student for not doing well. "And sometimes [the teacher] would even throw the exam test in your face, 'Why should you do that bad?' But I think in America, that kind of thing would not happen here." He laughed, "But it is a custom in China." He preferred the more laid back style of TAs here. In China it's the teacher's responsibility to make sure the students study hard. If a student doesn't study, the teacher would probably inform the department chair or the student's advisor. Shan had learned that here the responsibility lies with the student:

Whether a student studies very well, sometimes I think it has no difference to me. If that student want to study hard, I can give him a lot of help. I'm willing to give him a lot of help. But if that student didn't want to study well, that's OK. No problems to me. . . . I mean if some student in my class didn't study very well, I will point out. I
will individually tell him what he should do to improve his score, but if he didn’t listen to me two or three times, I will not pay attention to him.

Shan showed a genuine concern for his students and a sincere willingness to help them. He also realized that he couldn’t and didn’t have to control his students’ lives.

Guang

Of the five students, Guang had most looked forward to teaching. His two semesters as a TA, however, were not as positive as he had hoped. Some of the difficulties he encountered were due to his problems with the English language:

Sometimes I feel awkward since the students feel that your English is too bad, so they complain. And they may have asked you during the class, not so friendly . . . or [they may] look indifferent to your lecture. So some problems.

When he was in China, he had expected he would have some problems with the language, but he didn’t think that his students would have so much trouble understanding him. But when he arrived here and actually started teaching, he realized he had some serious problems speaking and understanding English. The negative comments from his students the first semester bothered him, but he believed that “students can exaggerate what they thought” and that a period of adjustment is necessary for both the TA and the students. “At first the students may not understand you, but as time goes on they can get familiar with you and you can get familiar with the students also. So both sides can improve.”

He didn’t attribute all the problems he encountered to his problems with the language. Some of the problems he believed were caused by cultural differences:

And the difference in the culture in the education system also . . . In China students don’t, they can’t, have their own opinion in the class. But here students can stop you at any time if they feel necessary. . . . [In China,] the teacher is everything. Students have to obey whatever the teacher tells them.

Even though the TA orientation in the Chemistry Department and the ITA training course both addressed classroom environment, Guang still found it challenging at times to adjust to the culture of the U.S. classroom.
At the beginning of the first semester, Guang was especially looking forward to interacting with the students, which he felt would help him improve his English. He felt that his English did improve during his two semesters of teaching and that he gained a better handle on dealing with students. He didn’t, however, have the kind of contact with the students he had hoped for. According to Guang,

Yeah, I think improving English is the fundamental thing. Contact with them is the second thing, since before class or after class we don’t have some deep discussions with students. We just tell them what to do for the lab, or for other students, they have recitations. But we don’t have a chat about personal life or other opinions about society.

In the first semester, he valued the “communication with lots of students,” however brief these episodes were. He also believed that his students liked him and thought he was a kind person. His second semester of teaching wasn’t so positive. He was surprised at his students’ poor chemistry background, and even more surprised with their end of term evaluations. Guang said, “The students were tough. . . . Some students gave me one point for the English.” He felt that for some reason this particular group of students simply “did not like international TAs.”

**Xinhua**

Unlike the four students from chemistry who, for the most part, taught chemistry labs for two semesters before working as a research assistants, Xinhua was assigned to work in a math help room for two semesters and then taught algebra for a semester and trigonometry for a semester. Before coming here and working as a TA, Xinhua never thought he would be a teacher. Although he found the lifestyle of a teacher attractive, especially the free time and the independence, he thought that he lacked the patience and the interest required to effectively interact with students. “I guess . . . the interests that I had before was primarily on the subject I was studying, that I was learning, as learner. So I didn’t have enthusiasm on what other people thought.” In fact, he would even avoid talking to people with similar academic
background but whose level of knowledge in certain areas was lower than his. "[If someone's] discussion made no sense, it would make me very impatient and I wouldn’t want to continue."

Even when he knew he was going to be a TA in the U.S., his focus was on having plenty of free time to study, not on teaching. His feelings changed when he arrived at State University:

After I came here, I began to think about, "Oh, my God. I have to be a teacher. I have to think about my students." And I began to find that it's interesting to help somebody and to know what they were thinking because maybe it’s useful to you and maybe it’s very . . . you know, I have to incorporate all the ideas of other people to absorb some knowledge from others. It’s a way to study, and it’s not a waste of time.

This change in attitude developed slowly during the first two semesters when he was assigned to work as a TA in the math help room. Although he had said previously that he avoided talking to people less knowledgeable than he, working with the students in the help room was "very different because they know very little and you are here to help them and you have to . . . to guide them to the point, step by step, very detailed in every detail." What made him impatient was explaining something to someone whose background was similar to his and who "should know this stuff." In addition to experiencing a positive change in attitude during his two semesters in the help room, Xinhua learned different ways to explain concepts to the students, developed a better understanding of the students’ levels, and learned some expressions and greetings in English. The most negative aspects of the experience were his difficulties communicating in English and the fact that some students weren’t serious.

After two semesters in the help room, Xinhua passed the ITA screening tests and was assigned to teach an algebra class, which he said "went OK, just OK." He explained, "Well, I think the thing I didn’t handle correctly was I was too nice to them. They talked with each other in class. It was very bad, and I couldn’t stop it. They skipped classes." He said some of the students also lied. Whereas some Chinese TAs may resist adapting to the less strict style of teaching at American universities, Xinhua may have actually overcompensated: "And the first
time I was afraid of frustrating them, so I actually gave them pretty high scores, unreasonably high score, too merciful. And that’s not good to do.” Xinhua had hoped to win over his students, but his plan backfired. Near the end of the semester several students who were having difficulties in his class stopped coming altogether, attending only if there was an exam. “I didn’t know how to help them.” Concerned that perhaps his English may have caused some of the problems, Xinhua asked the opinion of one of the better students. The student told him that his English was much better than that of the ITA whose course he had dropped before enrolling in Xinhua’s section. Xinhua thus believed that compared to other TAs, his English was OK.

Xinhua’s problems in the classroom fortunately did not sour him on teaching. In fact, it was during the particularly difficult first semester that he “began to realize that teaching is a fun job.” The following semester he taught a trigonometry class, which he really enjoyed. He gained more confidence in his teaching and in his ability to communicate in English and started to tailor his lectures to the needs of the students and arrange his quizzes and homework “so that they are more useful.” Now and then, he still had problems understanding students, especially if they spoke very quickly or if they were from a different part of the country and had a non-Midwestern accent. He also found it difficult at times to interest the students in the material, a problem certainly not limited to international teaching assistants.

Their reflections on the ITA training course

As I mentioned in the introduction, these five students were placed in my section of the ITA training course because of their low scores on the ITA screening tests at State University which indicated that they had problems with intelligibility and comprehensibility. The five students in this thesis study took my class for two semesters.

Before I discuss the students’ reflections on the course, I want to describe the specific section of the ITA training course I taught. Fifty percent of the course was devoted to
pronunciation and communication skills and 50% was devoted to teaching skills and classroom management. All the students in the class met with me three times a week: once for a 75-minute "big class" with all 16 students together, once for a 75-minute "small class" with four students where the students gave presentations and received more individualized attention, and once for a half-hour conference with me in my office where we worked on specific language problems or simply chatted. During their second semester with me, the five students in this study were in the same "small class" where we concentrated mostly on giving teaching presentations.

In the remainder of this section, I will share with the reader what the five students expected from the ITA training course, what they felt were some of the positives and negatives of the course, and how they themselves would organize such a course.

**Song**

When Song learned that he would have to take an ITA training course, he expected to be taught "how to speak English as good as Americans." He hoped that enrollment in this course would give him more opportunities to speak English and a chance "to learn more English words about things during the everyday life." As the reader may recall, Song made this same point when he talked about the difficulties he had during his first semester teaching. He was able to talk to the students about things in the lab, but he didn’t have enough knowledge about U.S. culture and current events to talk about things outside the lab. He hoped that in the ITA training course students would talk with the teacher or with an English speaking partner about daily life as a way to learn new words, common expressions, and slang. He also expected help with pronunciation, one of his biggest problems. "I just want to know what is the right way for saying these words, so I can make Americans understand when I say this word."
In the first semester of the course, Song was happy to get help with pronunciation, but he felt his progress was very slow. He attributed this to the fact that before and after class he usually spoke Chinese with his friends and had little contact with Americans. During the second semester, his rate of improvement was greater because by that time he had chosen a major professor in his department and had joined a research group which included Americans, so he was forced to speak more English. He said he realized that the three or so hours per week of the ITA training class wasn’t enough; to really improve a student should search out opportunities outside of class to speak English.

Song liked the pronunciation textbook and said that learning correct pronunciation is important, but actually improving is difficult. He felt more practice would be helpful. To get more practice speaking English outside of class, Song had an English conversation partner that he met with an hour a week. Between teaching techniques and communication skills, Song believed that communication skills are more important:

I think the big problems are not the teaching techniques. It’s about speaking English. I think most of the students have some idea about the teaching techniques, but they just do not know how to express them very well, to make the students understand them.

He did find giving presentations somewhat valuable because it forced him to speak more English. He also appreciated learning about the customs of American students and the classroom environment at an American university.

If Song were to design an ITA training course, he said that “the first important thing is the pronunciation. ... The second important thing is how to communicate with the students, not a special class, just general communication.” For Song, it is important for an ITA to learn the expressions American use when they talk about daily life. In the class he would have more practice with pronunciation so the ITAs can communicate with the students, and he would also teach them “a little bit about customs here during the class, like how should you say at the beginning of the class, and when you are not sure about something, how to deal with the students.” Activities would include having group discussions and watching TV. He would
especially include watching “the real process of communication of Americans,” for example, how a TA and a student communicate when they meet each other on the street, in a lab, or in a classroom. For Song, it is clear that his priority is everyday communication with Americans. In fact, teaching skills would make up only 10% of his ITA course.

Ming

When Ming received a non-pass on the ITA screening tests, he was not surprised because he knew that his pronunciation was poor. He hoped that enrollment in the ITA training course would help him improve his pronunciation and “speak English accurately.” Beyond that, he really had no other expectations. When I asked him what he thought about the course now looking back, he said, “I learned a lot from this. I’m really appreciate that.” The most positive aspect of the course for Ming was the improvement in his self-confidence:

I don’t know how, but I just gained my self-confidence. I know I can speak English maybe better and better but I don’t know why. Maybe you give me some confidence because every time I come to you, you just give me some confidence because you can understand my speaking, you know. That’s maybe give me some confidence from that. Before that, I don’t think that anybody can say that to me. [He laughs.] That’s a big improvement in my life. . . . There’s a lot of things from that course. From you too, especially from you.

This interaction between Ming and me occurred in the weekly individual conferences. During the conferences Ming preferred to chat rather to work on specific language problems. As we chatted I would correct his speech now and then, especially when I had difficulty understanding him. The conferences provided Ming with a non-threatening environment to practice his English which ultimately improved his self-confidence. One negative aspect of the course for Ming were the mini-teaching presentations. When I asked him why, he replied, “I don’t know. Maybe I prepared very, very little I think. But I don’t like teaching skills. Maybe I hate teaching. That’s the difference.” For Ming, it was more important for him to improve his pronunciation so his students could understand him. He didn’t believe he needed to learn teaching skills since he already had experience teaching in China and in the U.S.
If Ming were to teach an ITA training course, the focus would be “more training for pronunciation.” He would ask Americans to join the class to have discussions with the students to give them experience chatting. He said that a foreigner’s problem with English isn’t just a speaking problem, but also a psychological one stemming from a lack of confidence as he mentioned earlier.

Sometimes I have no confidence about my speaking. This is a big problem, you know. You should talk to people. They should, themselves, understand your speaking. This is the main purpose for give you a lot of confidence, you know. If you have some confidence, even if you speak some incorrect English, you have confidence and you keep talking. Then you always get some experience. But if you always worry about some incorrect English, then you don’t speak English, and then you have no experience. You can’t open your mouth to anybody. [laugh]

Ming believed that an ITA trainer can give the students confidence by showing that they can understand the students’ speech and “give them, every time, give some little correction and then just move on.” This will demonstrate to the students that they are improving and they will feel more comfortable to “open their mouth to Americans,” even if their speech is not perfect. For the course, he would require a pronunciation textbook, teach the students the international phonetic alphabet, and have the students buy some pronunciation dictionary. He would also tape record the students speaking and then correct the problems on tape.

A small part of the class would be dedicated to teaching skills. He would require a textbook on teaching skills and would go over these skills and techniques very quickly. Throughout the semester, the students would give a couple of presentations during which the teacher would critique the presentations and tell the students what skills or techniques they should incorporate into their lectures to be more effective TAs. During the next presentation, the teacher would check to see that the recommendations were followed. Ming believed teaching techniques are rules that need to be followed rather than knowledge that needs to be learned. The majority of the course should focus on improving the students’ ability to communicate.
Shan

Shan expected that the ITA course would teach about culture and help the students improve their individual weaknesses, whether they be pronunciation, expression, or teaching skills. Personally, Shan felt that his pronunciation and expression were poor, so he wanted help in those areas. Teaching skills weren’t a priority. “If I cannot speak very well, [teaching skills] wouldn’t help me very much. The students still wouldn’t be able to understand my speech.” He expected the teacher to point out his mistakes and provide him with a lot of practice so he could learn to correct himself:

You can ask the students give a topic on everything, not just in the field because maybe in the major material it’s maybe a little easier. A social topic, a novel, films, this kind of topic. Then let the students talk about it. Then I think [the teacher] can know which words the students cannot pronounce correctly.

He hoped the teacher would point out during these discussions how Americans might express their thoughts and ideas. It is interesting to note that Shan didn’t want these discussions to center around his major. Like Song, he wanted to learn to speak about cultural issues, things outside of the lab.

In the ITA training course, Shan said he learned a lot about pronunciation and he felt that his pronunciation improved a little. He also began to feel less nervous speaking in front of people and was glad to learn how to be a more effective TA at an American university. Several negative aspects of the course were the emphasis on teaching methods and having to give mini-teaching presentations. He would have liked more emphasis on pronunciation and speaking.

I think it’s not a bad thing to teach the method of working as a TA, but different students have different problems. If the student’s speaking level is quite low, most probably he can’t pass the [ITA screening] tests in the first semester or in the second semester... Classes for that guy should be different from the guy who got a conditional pass... If the students failed the exams or just partially pass the exams, I think in the first semester the major work is just let them get their pronunciation improved, so they can express themselves quite well. Then in the second term or the third term, give them more practice in teaching, the teaching methods.

For the students with low English proficiency, Shan believed pronunciation work should come before teaching methods.
If Shan were in charge of designing an ITA training curriculum, he would have two
distinct classes: one for ITAs with low English proficiency, where the focus would be on
improving speaking and pronunciation skills, and one for higher proficiency students or for
those taking the course for a second time, where the emphasis would be on teaching skills and
classroom management. He believed that teaching low proficiency ITAs teaching skills is
useless if their major weakness is pronunciation. “After their pronunciation expression is
improved, then they can be taught about techniques to handle the situation in class, especially
in undergraduate class.” Due to his scores on the screening tests, Shan took the ITA training
course for three semesters, twice with me and once with another TA. In his opinion, there was
too much overlap in what was taught in those semesters. He explained,

Right now, I think [the ITA training course] has some problems because if a student
didn’t pass [the screening tests], then he can have one semester of study, and if he still
didn’t pass, he can still have another semester of study. But he almost always get, in
all the classes, instruction maybe half of the time on presentations and techniques of
how to handle the class as a TA. So just a repetition of different kind of things.

He believed he would have had greater improvement if the focus in his first two semesters had
been on pronunciation and in his last semester on teaching techniques.

For the actual class, he would require two textbooks: one for pronunciation and one
for teaching methods. He would spend some time talking about cultural differences and what
the students can do to be effective TAs here. For activities, he would have a lot of class
discussions “about everything.” He would have students go to the board and talk about
something that interests them. The teacher would listen carefully and point out some of the
problems the students have, explain how they can improve, and discuss how an American
might talk about the topic. The teacher might also talk about various scenarios the students
might encounter in their daily lives and have the students practice, e.g. how to open a bank
account, what to do if they are in an accident, etc. Rather than placing the students in a
particular section, Shan believed that the students should be able to decide which section they
want to take, and he also feels the course should be open to all international students, not just TAs.

Guang

In the ITA course, Guang expected there would be a lot of interaction with Americans and that the Americans would point out to the students when they made mistakes. He believed speaking with Americans is the best way for a nonnative English speaker to improve. He also thought the class would watch videos and TV, and go to public places to practice speaking English to Americans. He said, “Practice makes perfect and, of course, confidence. We need to have confidence. We can say to ourselves, ‘We can speak well. We have the capability.’”

Of the ITA course I taught, he liked the fact that the classes were informal yet well-prepared. He thought the topics were interesting and he found the presentations useful. Although he never purchased the textbooks, he thought they were good and appreciated the fact that they were available in the media center of the university library. One outside activity he particularly enjoyed was watching a popular video with me during which I would stop the video now and then and explain some cultural issues or point out some of the speech phenomena. On the negative side, he felt that 16 students were too many for one class and that they could have been more carefully divided according to proficiency level. He said he would have found more discussions of classroom culture helpful. “Different culture backgrounds may be a block to effective communication, e.g., to ask question during class, how to address a teacher, etc.”

If Guang were to teach an ITA training course, the first thing he would do is chat with each student to find out in detail what the student’s problems are and then devise individual plans for the students to help them improve. He would then divide his students according to level of proficiency into small classes of four students making sure they are not all from the same country. The students would meet with the teacher twice a week: once in the small class
and once in an individual conference. Rather than have the students give prepared presentations, Quang would give the students a topic and have them present immediately. He doesn’t believe that prepared presentations are very useful “since sometimes students choose some words he speaks well, not the words he cannot speak.” He would videotape the students from time to time and then show the videotape to the whole class pointing out the shortcomings. He would also have the students discuss in groups and he would walk around listening to the groups and correcting problems he hears.

Although he would visit the classes that his ITAs teach to discover their weaknesses and get a feel for the attitudes of the ITAs’ students, he wouldn’t spend much time on teaching skills in his class.

I think if your pronunciation can be improved, your teaching can also be improved. So I think the emphasis should be put on pronunciation, not teaching itself. If you just put everything on teaching, teaching is not the real world, since the words you use, the sentences you use, are mostly found in textbook, not your own opinion.

Guang feels it is somewhat artificial to put so much emphasis on teaching skills. It is like putting the cart before the horse. In his opinion, pronunciation work should come first.

If your pronunciation can be greatly improved, then you make fewer mistakes, then overall your spoken [English] is much better. Then I think your teaching could be much better at the same time. It’s a cycle. . . . When your own self feel that your pronunciation is much better and people feel the same way, you can have great, much confidence in yourself and this can be embodied in your teaching.

For Quang, an important function of the ITA training class should be to improve the students’ confidence level. When the students feel comfortable with their ability to communicate, this confidence will have a positive effect on their ability to teach.

To help the students improve their speech, he would probably require a pronunciation textbook but would prefer to use a video which shows how to actually produce the sounds in the mouth. Key to his students’ improvement would be practice. To provide this practice, he would find an American conversation partner for each ITA. As an incentive for American undergraduate students to participate, the relationship could be reciprocal with the ITA providing the student with free tutoring in math, chemistry, physics, etc., in exchange for an
equal amount of English conversation. He would also give the students topics about
“everything,” not just about being a TA. While they chat, he would listen not for their
opinions but for the mistakes they make. For real life practice, he would organize mini-field
trips to campus or places in the community to talk with Americans. According to Guang, “You
need to contact with the whole society, not just with the lab. So when you contact the society,
of course, your English can be improved. Then in turn your teaching can also be improved.”
Like Song, Guang believed that understanding American culture is extremely important to
overcome feelings of isolation. He explained, “We don’t know what happens in American
society, people’s hobbies, habits, etc., so we feel that we are isolated by this society. So I
think if you can contact the society itself, it could be better.” When I asked him how this could
be done, he replied,

It’s hard. It’s hard. Even for people who have been here for a long time, say several
years, they still have the same feeling, that they are isolated. They cannot be one of the
American circle. So it is hard. But people need to try to make American friends to
have more chance to contact people, to do things with people, to be familiar with
American society.

Xinhua

From an ITA training course, Xinhua expected help with his pronunciation and
teaching skills. He figured there would be a small class, and he expected to talk a lot. One
thing he didn’t expect was a textbook; in fact, he didn’t think a textbook was very useful. In
his opinion, it is more important for the teacher to “put those points in the heads of the
students” and “make them understand the basic elements of the language” rather than rely on
the students to read the textbook since, according to him, most students don’t read it anyway.

Several aspects of the course that Xinhua liked were learning the basic elements of
language (the individual sounds, syllables, phrasing, intonation, linking, and stress, which he
considers the most important), talking about social norms, and exploring cultural differences.
He also liked my approach, which he describes as “very nice” and “informal.” Since I was
also a student and had “a good smile,” he felt comfortable asking me questions and talking with me. What he would have liked most, however, was “intense drills, intense practice”:

Make you think very hard and very violently and very fast. You don’t have a chance to relax because the class is just one hour and 20 minutes every week. Time is very limited. At that time we want to think in English and actually manipulate this language. Actually, that’s the only practice we can get, in my case. So I think practice is the most useful activity.

Although he liked learning the teaching methods in the small class, he “didn’t get much” out of doing mini-teaching presentations. They always seemed rushed to him and he could never make the presentations as smooth as he would have liked. He did, however, like the written comments I gave him about each presentation. When I asked Xinhua if he thought the ITA training course should address problems that TAs may encounter in their classrooms, problems similar to the ones he faced in his semester teaching algebra, he replied, “I think I’m negative to this. I mean I don’t think that [the ITA training course] should address these problems because that’s the classroom role. It should be up to the teacher to decide.” Instead, he would have found it helpful to “examine in detail a good American teacher’s lecture, analyze his greetings, announcement, transitions, and methods of interesting the students.”

If Xinhua were to teach an ITA training course, he would begin by quickly and thoroughly going over the basic language elements. He would repeat this information numerous times throughout the semester to make the students “understand and remember all these things.” He would also include role-plays of campus scenarios and would take the students to public places to practice conversing. He would have the class “discuss one topic very deeply and show many aspects of it.”

My problem is that I can describe one thing in English superficially, but it’s very hard for me to describe it in detail, in-depth. ... I don’t know how to take it apart and analyze it, how to speak. ... I mean the speaking vocabulary, the spoken language is so limited, only a few verbs, only a few adjectives, and only a few adverbs. That’s the only thing we know. Beyond that, it’s all blank.
Xinhua’s feeling of being limited by the language was similar to Song’s problem of not being able to talk about things outside the lab because of lack of vocabulary and lack of cultural knowledge.

Although Xinhua arrived in the U.S. with the hope that his spoken English would improve, he explained how this hope has since faded.

I think everybody when they came here want to improve their language so much. Actually, they think of this matter all the time. They try a lot of ways to do this, but after a while they quit. They just let it be. They don’t put effort into it. It’s the same with me. At the time I would read an article every morning if I had time and try to think of ways I can improve my listening and speaking, but now ... I know I still have a lot of problems, but I quit putting effort into it. Just the habit is gone.

Those of us who have studied foreign languages can understand Xinhua’s frustration. Perhaps he had reached a plateau in his language learning where the tremendous effort necessary for minimal improvement no longer seemed worth it.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I summarize the results of my research, discuss the limitations, and explain what I would have done differently. I then discuss how this study has affected me, both as a person and as an ITA trainer. I also discuss my students’ reflections on their participation in this study. Finally, I provide the reader with some ideas for future research.

Summary of Results

Before discussing my major findings, I remind the reader of the two themes that emerged from my research:

1. Over the last 50 years of Chinese history, there have been tremendous fluctuations in the way Chinese society, and therefore my students, have valued teachers and education.
2. My students’ expectations for the ITA training course and the specific goals I had set for the course were not always in agreement.

Views of teachers and education in China over the last half-century

In this section I summarize Chinese society’s views, according to my students, of teachers and education during five distinct periods in recent Chinese history. At the end of each subsection, I have included a table showing the degree to which my students feel teachers were respected by society during a particular period. The numerical rankings and the explanations were obtained from the questionnaire regarding teachers and teaching in China.

Prior to the Liberation in 1949

Educational opportunities for the parents of my students before the Liberation in 1949 were slim. At that time most of the schools were located in the big cities. In the countryside, wealthy landowners with many children would often hire teachers from the city who would stay with the family in the country and privately teach their children. If the peasant families had
some ties with the landowners, their children were sometimes allowed to join the classes. Usually, however, the peasant children were needed in the fields. Teachers were highly respected and held high positions in society, "as high as lawyers and judges because of their knowledge," according to Ming.

The wide variation in the students' rankings of societal respect for teachers is likely due to the fact that the students are reporting on events that happened two decades prior to their birth.

Table 2. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers prior to the Liberation in 1949

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Degree of respect/Position in society of teachers</th>
<th>Student's explanation of rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Highest 9 = Lowest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>4 / 6</td>
<td>Knowledgeable but not powerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>5 / 5</td>
<td>Small group of knowledgeable people available as teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guang</td>
<td>2-3 / 2-3</td>
<td>Very high degree of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>1 / 3</td>
<td>Because they were knowledgeable, they had high social position and high pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinhua</td>
<td>3 / 3</td>
<td>Relatively high respect because of tradition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the Liberation to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, 1949-1966

After the Liberation, the government set up schools throughout the country making education accessible to everyone, peasants and wealthy people alike. Despite the availability of education, many peasant children still could not attend school because of poor financial situations in their families which required them to stay home and work. Book knowledge was important, but people didn't know how to use this knowledge to help society. In the interviews several of the students told me that these years were very good ones for teachers; however, their rankings of societal respect for teachers appears to contradict this.
Table 3. Degree of respect and position of teachers from the Liberation to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, 1949-1966

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Degree of respect/Position in society of teachers</th>
<th>Student’s explanation of rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Highest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 = Lowest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>6 / 9</td>
<td>Knowledge is not good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>4 / 4</td>
<td>Teachers were useful because of their knowledge to help change society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guang</td>
<td>3-4 / 4</td>
<td>Respected because of tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>4 / 6</td>
<td>Teachers could serve society because of knowledge. Independent thought considered dangerous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinhua</td>
<td>3 / 3</td>
<td>Relatively high respect because of tradition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The period of the Great Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976

During my students’ early childhood in the latter years of the Great Cultural Revolution, Chinese society’s views of teachers and the value of higher education were at an all time low. Teachers, especially university professors, were distrusted, persecuted, and even killed. The most valuable education a young adult could receive, according to Mao Tse-tung, was working in the countryside with the peasants. High schools and universities stopped classes in the cities. In some of the villages, the exiled youth taught in the schools, so education in these villages improved. In other villages, the exiled youth were viewed as nuisances and troublemakers.

From the end of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1980s

During this period, teachers and education were once again valued to some extent. The Chinese government realized that the Cultural Revolution had left the country with a great educational deficit. National college entrance exams made higher education accessible to all
Chinese people, including the children of the rural peasants. The position and the respect afforded college professors were very high. Math and science were the most popular areas of study for university students.

Table 4. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers during the Great Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of respect/Position in society of teachers</th>
<th>Student’s explanation of rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 = Highest 9 = Lowest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 9/9-</td>
<td>Knowledgeable. Could identify what is right. Government didn’t like this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming 8/9</td>
<td>Teacher seen as threat to the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guang 9/-9-</td>
<td>Education wasn’t as important as class conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan 9/9</td>
<td>Teachers were considered reactionaries who were contrary to the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinhua 9/9</td>
<td>Teachers had a very hard time. Some even lost their lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the mid-1980s to 1995

Since the mid-1980s with the advances in the Chinese economy, the situation of teachers in China has steadily worsened. Their wages stagnated making it difficult for teachers to survive. Many of the better or more ambitious teachers left academia for higher paying jobs in industry. Because of the low salaries, teachers have lost the respect of society. They are even the butt of jokes. Receiving higher education no longer guarantees a high paying job. The more popular majors are related directly to making money, e.g., business, economics, and finance.
Table 5. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers from the end of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1980s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of respect/Position in society of teachers</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Highest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>4 / 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>5 / 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guang</td>
<td>4-5 / 4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>2 / 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinhua</td>
<td>5 / 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Degree of respect and position in society of teachers from the mid-1980s to 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of respect/Position in society of teachers</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 = Highest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>4 / 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>5 / 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guang</td>
<td>6-7 / 6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>4 / 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinhua</td>
<td>4 / 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My students’ reflections on their teaching and the ITA training course

In this section, I will summarize my students’ reactions when they learned that they would be TAs at State University, their experiences as teaching assistants, and their reflections on the ITA training course. At the end of this section is a table showing what the foci would be if my students were to design an ITA training course.

Their reactions when they were awarded a teaching assistantship

Although all of the students were happy with the financial aid of a teaching assistantship, several students would have preferred to work as an RA because they thought teaching would be time-consuming and because they thought that communication in the academic circle would be easier. One student looked forward to teaching because it would give him an opportunity to interact with Americans and improve his English. Another student had an outright dislike for teaching. Most of the students expected to grade homework or teach lab course; one student thought he would teach a class.

None of the students expressed a concern about having to teach. In their opinion, as long as they had a strong background in the subject area, the teaching part would be OK. This seems to agree with Gökçora’s (1994) finding that in China good teachers are characterized by “a thorough knowledge of the subject matter” (p. 82). Their major concern was having to communicate in English, since few of the students had much experience speaking English in China. When they began orientation at State University, several of the students commented that “English was a disaster” and that “it was terrible.”

Their experiences as TAs

The majority of the ITAs were quite nervous when they began teaching. The situation worsened when they realized that the students had difficulty understanding them. Teaching, however, wasn’t much of a concern. One ITA was somewhat troubled when his students
complained about his English. He believed that his students unfairly blamed all of their difficulties in chemistry on his problems speaking English. Mascoop (1993) found a similar result, that communication problems in classes taught by ITAs were at times caused by the students, rather than the ITAs. Several of the ITAs in my study noticed some cultural differences. One of the ITAs adjusted fairly well. The one ITA who had looked forward to interaction with the students was disappointed by the lack of communication in class and his students' apparent lack of respect. Several of the ITAs were surprised by their students' lack of academic preparation. Another ITA overcompensated for some of the cultural differences, and his students took advantage of the situation. Although he experienced problems in class, he discovered a real love of teaching and now plans to teach when he finishes his degree. Apparently, this student was able to find a "fit" between his TA experience and his professional goals, as discussed in Smith and Simpson (1993). Like students in Meesuwan's (1992) study, each of the students in my study noticed various aspects of classroom culture here that differed in varying degrees from the classroom culture in China. Finally, one of the ITAs in my study was troubled about his inability to talk about things outside of lab.

Their reflections on the ITA training course

From an ITA course, all of the students expected a lot of interaction with Americans and many opportunities to practice speaking English. They expected help with their pronunciation, or whatever their particular needs were, and a little information about teaching skills. Bauer (1991) also found that the students in her study were primarily concerned about their ability to communicate with their students. In addition to help with communication, the ITAs in my study wanted to learn about American culture and how to speak about everyday life. Several students hoped to go to public places as a class to practice English. One student wanted intense drills and in-depth discussions so he would be forced to think in English.
All of the students appreciated help with their pronunciation, and most feel that they improved a little. The majority thought the pronunciation textbook was good, but they would have preferred more practice speaking. One student commented he liked the informal style of the class, but he thought the class could have been better tailored to the particular group of ITAs enrolled. For one student the most positive aspect of the class was the improvement in his self-confidence, which he attributes in great part to our weekly conferences. None of the students felt the teaching skills part of the class was very important, and they didn’t like giving presentations, although they did like learning about classroom culture. One student did feel the presentations helped him become less nervous speaking in public. The majority of the students explicitly stated they would have liked more discussions about American culture, unrelated to teaching.

If my students were to design an ITA training course, pronunciation and communication skills would be the major focus of all of them, with one of the important goals being improved self-confidence. Teaching skills were not considered very important to my students. The Chinese ITAs in Gökçora’s (1994) study expressed a similar disinterest in teaching skills. My students felt that the topic of teaching should either be covered briefly or put off until the second semester. Table 7 shows the percentage of class time my students would dedicate to pronunciation/communication work and teaching skills. Rather than giving prepared mini-teaching presentations, most of the TAs would have the students give impromptu presentations on some cultural topic. Now and then these presentations would be videotaped and shown to the class. There would be a lot of group work with deep discussions and role-plays, neither of which would be limited to campus or classroom scenarios. The students would also watch the real process of communication between Americans and analyze videos of an American teacher’s lecture. Discussions about American culture and cultural differences would be an important aspect of the course.
My students bring up some good points. I tend to agree that improving pronunciation and communication skills needs to be accomplished before emphasizing teaching skills. The difficulty faced by the instructor, however, is that although none of these low-level students is certified, some are teaching in a lab. Postponing teaching skills till the second semester could be a disservice for such students. I was pleased to learn that the five students wanted culture training. ITA trainers should find more and new ways to provide culture learning in addition to pronunciation practice and teaching techniques since better cultural awareness would help the students overcome feelings of isolation. One of the groups of students in Gökçora’s (1994) study expressed a similar desire to learn about “cultural differences in teaching” (p. 83).

Table 7. Foci if my students were to design an ITA training course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of course dedicated to improving speaking/pronunciation skills</th>
<th>Percentage of course dedicated to classroom management/teaching skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>50% This is the most difficult to correct.</td>
<td>10% Less important than communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>80% Most people have the knowledge to teach.</td>
<td>15% Just teach them the rules and give them a little practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guang</td>
<td>30% Communication practice is more important that learning pronunciation skills.</td>
<td>20% If speaking improves, teaching will improve because of increased self-confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>70% Speaking and pronunciation are the major problems.</td>
<td>30% TAs need to learn how to handle class to compensate for poor speaking skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinhua</td>
<td>40% The basics are important.</td>
<td>10% TAs just need to know these skills; learning to use them takes practice in the actual classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: When percentages do not add up to 100%, the students are implying that the remainder of the time would be used for communication activities and practice.
Limitations

As with much qualitative research, the specific results of this study cannot be generalized beyond the five Chinese men from whom I gathered my data. It is my hope that despite the lack of generalizability the readers of this study can recognize ways in which my results may be relevant to their own situations. Other limitations are due to my selection of the students, who were all Chinese men around the same age. It is possible that Chinese women would have different interpretations of the events in Chinese history as well as different perceptions of their TA experiences here. My five students also believed that the results of my thesis would have been quite different if I had chosen younger students, people who had not experienced the Cultural Revolution. They also believed that the students coming from China nowadays very likely have better English proficiency than they did since these students have likely had English training since primary school. Finally, the results of such a study might be quite different if students were chosen from different parts of the world.

20/20 Hindsight

Once the research is done and the thesis written, it is easy to look back and see ways in which the project could have been better. My study is no exception. There are several things that I would do differently knowing what I know now. First of all, I would keep a detailed research journal, the purpose of which would be twofold: to record exactly what I did and why, and to record my frustrations and revelations. Such a journal would have been very helpful during the actual writing up of the research. Although I can remember quite well what I did during my research, I have a harder time remembering the other options I had and how I chose among the options. Including such information in the thesis could prove useful to other researchers. Recording in a journal my frustrations and revelations would also have helped me better understand myself as researcher. We can learn from our mistakes only if we are able to remember what those mistakes were. My reasons for not keeping such a journal are simple:
other things in my life, including my teaching duties and family obligations, tended to take priority. If I had it to do over again, there would likely be a rearranging of some of my priorities.

Another thing I would do differently is avoid procrastinating. Rather than setting the interview tapes aside, I would make time as soon as I could after the interviews to transcribe the tapes and code the data. Of all the tasks required by my study, I found transcribing to be the most painful; dragging out the process only serves to increase the pain. I would also start writing sooner, after the first interviews are transcribed and coded. I found that writing, even stream of consciousness writing, is a great way to organize my thoughts and begin making sense of growing mounds of data. To help myself avoid procrastinating, I would actually schedule times during the week for thesis work, the same way I schedule time for office hours, teaching, student conferences, etc. Making work on my thesis a regular part of my life would have helped me maintain better control over my progress and would have lessened my level of stress.

Finally, I would have included observations as another form of data. Actually watching my students teach in their classrooms and labs would have helped me better understand the difficulties they experienced as TAs. It may also have given me some insight into why they preferred that teaching skills not be a major focus of the ITA training course. It may also have been helpful to talk to the students’ teaching supervisors and/or ask my students to share with me the feedback they received from their supervisors and from their students’ evaluations of their teaching.

**How This Project Has Affected Me**

Although my study primarily concerned the experiences of five of my Chinese students, this focus helped me become aware of the fact that I had had many false stereotypes about my students and their backgrounds. I have learned not to assume that the “knowledge” I
have about other countries and cultures is accurate. Instead of making assumptions, I now make a point of talking with my students about their experiences.

In addition, the project has helped me understand that the goals I set for my ITA training course are not always congruent with my students’ expectations. Now at the beginning of each semester, I will spend some class time discussing with my students the particular goals we each have for the ITA training course. This will give my students the opportunity to suggest ways I can revise my goals to meet their needs and help me identify when my students may not be aware of their needs. If I continue to teach the lowest proficiency ITAs, I will make pronunciation training and communication/conversation the primary foci of my course. I will also include many of the activities suggested by these five ITAs.

The most positive aspect of this project for me was having the rare opportunity to really get to know several of my students, to hear about their family backgrounds and their experiences in the home country, and to talk with them about the frustrations and joys of being a graduate teaching assistant at State University and a foreigner in the country.

My Students’ Reflections on Their Participation in This Study

During the member checks, I asked my students what it meant to them to play such vital roles in research. They all indicated that they were pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this study. Several students saw it as a chance to get more practice speaking English. Shan said, “It was just like chatting.” Song found it interesting to talk about things in English that he had only thought about before in Chinese. Guang saw the interviews as a way for him to organize in his mind what he had thought about the past, especially the Cultural Revolution, and he also enjoyed “communicating with Dewey.” Ming viewed participation in my research as a way to repay me for all the help I had given him in his two semesters in my course.
The students hoped that this project will help me become a better teacher. Shan said, "I think this will help you and other teachers in this kind of course to really know what the students think, what they want to know about, and what they want out of [an ITA training course]." Xinhua hoped that this project would improve communication between Americans and ITAs and that Americans would learn something about China. "If people know each other better, they can make better decisions. I think there is a lot of misunderstanding for some Americans. . . . If every TA who teaches an ITA training course knows as much about Chinese students as you do, they will do a much better job."

As a final question, I asked the students for any other advice they could give of how universities could better meet the needs of ITAs. Four of the five students said that they would like to see a class on Western culture developed and offered to help the ITAs overcome feelings of isolation. Xinhua explained, "I guess there should be some required courses for ITAs to take to help them get a good understanding of Western culture, especially the ITAs from Asia. Most of them don’t know a lot about Western culture. They’re just foreigners forever." Shan added,

I hope there will be some kind of course to talk about the culture here and just talk about history of America. Why not? I think it’s quite good. Not just do research or experiments in the laboratory. We can learn a lot about American history.

He believed that if such a course were offered, over 60% of international graduate students would take it. Along the same lines, Guang said,

[The university shouldn’t] let them feel that they’re isolated, just teaching and nothing else. It should be a two-way process. The university or the department needs to know what the TAs think and they should provide the kind of environment they need to improve their English to help them gain self-confidence. I think it’s important.

Song wanted to see more opportunities devised to give ITAs "more chance to communicate with Americans and to learn American life." He also felt that host family programs should be expanded and better promoted. Ming hoped that research with the ITAs as the focus would continue. Since students’ cultures and needs are changing, ITA training courses need to change and adapt, as well.
Implications for the Field

I preface the discussion of the implications of my study with a brief summary of the major results. First, contrary to the assumptions I had held of Chinese culture, the particular students in my study came to the U.S. with less than positive views of teachers and teaching. This faulty assumption on my part undoubtedly affected the approach that I, as the instructor, took in the class discussions with my students about their roles as teachers at an American university. Second, my students' expectations of an ITA training course were at times different from the goals I had set for the course. These results suggest the following two recommendations:

1. ITA trainers should keep in mind that the attitudes of the ITAs towards teachers and teaching may be influenced by the culture of their native country and by their own personal experiences. Since cultures are constantly evolving and changing and since stereotypes and assumptions may affect one's teaching approach, ITA trainers should spend some time at the beginning of each semester discussing with the ITAs their cultures, their attitudes, the origins of their attitudes, and their implications.

2. At the beginning of each semester, the ITA training class, including the trainer, should discuss the students' expectations and the trainer's goals for the course. When the expectations and goals differ, the ITA trainer might compromise by incorporating some of the students' suggestions into the course content, which will in turn give the students a sense of course ownership. In the case that disagreements indicate that the ITAs simply do not know what they need to know to be effective teaching assistants, it might be beneficial for the ITA trainer to explain the rationale used to develop the goals.

In addition to these specific recommendations for ITA training courses, I believe more research should be conducted on (1) the effects of culture on students' attitudes and (2) the needs and expectations of our ITAs, in general. The qualitative paradigm using in-depth interviews appears to be an excellent method of exploring these issues.
APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Consent Form

Researcher: Dewey Litwiller
1120 Carroll Street
Boone, Iowa 50036
515-432-9136

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this case study. The purposes of this project are:

1. to gather data for a master thesis in teaching English as a second language;
2. to gain an understanding of your experiences as a prospective or current international teaching assistant.

As a participant in this case study, you will be both interviewed and observed. The information gained from the interviews and observations will be used in the writing of the thesis. The following are the terms of participating in the case study:

1. The information obtained during this project will be used to write a thesis which will be made available to the public.

2. Confidentiality throughout the data collection and in the actual writing of the thesis will be assured through the use of pseudonyms for the names of all the people involved in the study and for all place names which might identify the location of the study.

3. The respondent has the right to withdraw at any time from the study, for any reason, and the data will be returned to the respondent upon request.

4. The respondent will receive a copy of the thesis before the final draft is written and negotiate changes with the researcher.

5. The respondent will receive a copy of the final thesis soon after completion.

If you agree to participate in this project according to the preceding terms, please sign below:

Researcher ___________________  Respondent ___________________

Date _______________________  Date _______________________

I (do/do not) grant permission to be quoted directly in the case study report.

Respondent ___________________
APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIBED, CODED INTERVIEW
Interview one with

D - Before we begin, I want to find out a little bit about your family background.

C - My family background?

D - Yeah.

C - My father is a professor at university.

D - What does he teach?

C - Language, Russian and English.

D - Oh, Russian and English?

C - Yeah, because . . .

D - How old is your father?

C - 63, so he's very old. My mother is an engineer at a big factory which produces parts of airplanes.

D - Commercial airplanes or a military airplanes?

C - I have no idea.

D - No idea.

C - I think it's military. After 1980's, I guess, it changed to commercial because there is not much military need. They are both retired.

D - They're retired? Neither of them teach or work now?

C - I think my father is still teaching some courses and my mother stays home. I have a sister and a brother. My sister is a physics major but after graduation she did some computer work in a very big newspaper and there is a very big computer center. She is just in charge of the layout of the newspaper.

D - The layout of the newspaper?

C - Yeah.

D - Oh, you mean on the page.

C - Yeah on the page. My brother is a worker. He went to army and served in the army for five years. After that he went to the factory where my mother worked and he got a job. That's it.

D - So what are the ages of your brother and sister?

C - My sister is about 10 years older than me and my brother is 8 years older than me.

D - And when where you born?
C - The city where I lived.

D - When?

C - '72.

D - So that would make you . . .

C - 25.

D - Your father taught at a university?

C - Yep.

D - How much did he teach?

C - What do you mean by "how much?"

D - Like how many hours a week when he was teaching full-time.

C - Well, I guess usually he teaches two classes, maybe not, I don't know. At least two, I guess. So at least 8 hours per week.

D - For each class or total?

C - In total.

D - So that's simply in the classroom?

C - Yeah, in the classroom.

D - You add to that preparation time and all the other things that go with teaching . . . One thing that you said . . . let me find it here . . . during the interview. OK, when I asked you about teaching at an American university, when you found out that you would be a TA. When you were in China, you found out that you would be a TA at an American university. You said that you thought that that meant that you would teach a class of about 30-40 students. But when you came here you found out that you didn't have to teach a class your first semester because of your English, right?

C - Of course.

D - Then I asked, "What else did you think?" You said, "I thought I would be awkward sometimes because my English was not good enough, so I worried about my English very much, but not for the teaching part. I don't think it's very hard for me to do the job if I can speak just good enough English to be understandable." Can you explain that a little bit more. Basically you said that you were afraid of the English but not of the teaching.

C - That means that I think I have the skill and the knowledge to manage with the teaching part. But I have the fear that I cannot be understandable and also and just make students very frustrated. Yeah, I think the basic reason is just this.

D - You told me as well that you hadn't had any experience teaching in China. Is that right?

C - Yes.
D - Teaching or tutoring neither?

C - Maybe there was tutoring, but it was privately.

D - Private tutoring? How did you manage the tutoring?

C - The student wanted to go to college, instead he wasn't very good. So his mother asked me to just tutor him for awhile, so I did during my summer break. Not very formal, just informal. I told him about how to prepare but he failed.

D - He failed anyway. How many hours per week did you tutor him?

C - About twice a week and three hours.

D - Each time?

C - Yeah.

D - In what subjects?

C - Everything. Physics, mathematics, yeah. Mainly with physics and mathematics. Because I was not good at chemistry so I don't want to mess up with chemistry. We actually talked a lot instead of studying. Yeah, that's basically the tutoring experience I had.

D - You just told me just a couple of minutes ago that you felt that you had the skill and the knowledge to teach but you lacked the English. What gave you the idea that you had the skill to teach?

C - Well, I think that I can explain things very well. I told you that I worked before in China. I was a software engineer. I can explain things to the newcomers so that they can learn. I can show them the programs. I mean I can make it clear the structure of the software and how to run it. Systematic things about that. And the other thing is when we were at the college, we had some teachers, some we call it just like recitation instructors. They were graduate students. They were in charge of the homework, not just homework, but if you have any problems you can come and they just explain the homework and the problems, like that. I think I can do it as least a bad . . . as good as they did. It's not a very difficult way to do.

D - Was that sort of like a help-room situation that these . . .

C - Not exactly. They actually had a class. Yeah, they occupied an hour every week, I guess. You know, it was a calculus course and we actually did a lot more problems than here. Here students do very little problems. But we did many problems. So that's every week I guess. At least every week. One or two hours. Two hours I guess because we don't have one hour classes at college.

D - Were these graduate students called TAs, lecturers, . . .

C - We called them teachers. They don't even be assistant professor.

D - This was part of their duties as graduate students?

C - Yeah, they can earn some money, I guess. In our department it was like this.
D - So when you heard that you would be a TA, the fact that you would have to teach, did that bother you?

C - A little bit.

D - Why did that bother you a little bit?

C - The language part ...

D - And the teaching part?

C - Yeah the teaching part, yeah. And at last I knew I would have to deal with teaching a class. I knew this was going to happen and I had to be prepared for this.

D - Can you tell you a little bit more about your fear of the language. You said that you were afraid that you wouldn't be understandable to the students. Why did you feel that?

C - From experience.

D - What kind of experience?

C - Sometimes I couldn't get understood.

D - Where?

C - You mean ... of course in Ames.

D - Oh, no. I'm talking about when you were in China. When you heard that you ... unless I misunderstood ... when you heard that you would be TA, you weren't nervous about the teaching part, you were worried about the English part when you were in China.

C - Yeah.

D - Why were you worried about the English part? Why did you think you would have problems with your English?

C - OK. For the fear of English, I guess there are two parts. The first is the understanding part, that is the listening part. The other part is speaking. For the listening part, I have been in charge of translating one tape into Chinese because our manager wanted to make a big show at that time and he wanted to translate a tape that was originally made by IBM into Chinese and I was doing that. You know, I could not understand all the tape perfectly but I knew what was going on for the most part of it, so I did the job. Also at that time there was an engineer from IBM Hong Kong and he helped me a little bit, about an hour, explain sometime. For example, Calgary. It's a city in Canada. You should have heard of it, but I didn't. I don't know the cities, and I couldn't spell the name of it, and he told me. Something like this. It was very helpful for me. And I finally did the job. Also there are some German teachers. Also some IBM employees went to China and they taught us class. I can understand them because the used very simple language. But I understood I would have some listening problem. That's one part. The other part is speaking. Very little chance, very few chances to speak, talk with people so I didn't have any confidence in it. So I didn't know how to improve it at that time. I know that watching television doesn't help much; it doesn't help you to speak fluently. I think that clarifies the thing.
D - OK. Another question I have is something you said sort of typical of teachers in China. Let's see... OK, you were talking about the standard of living of teachers is not very good in China because they don’t make very much money...

C - And they’re not respected like before.

D - This is the point that I want to explore. Can you give me sort of a time line? When do you think this happened that teachers began to lose respect?

C - The starting point was the end of the Cultural Revolution. Have you heard of it?

D - I've heard of it, only heard of it.

C - The starting point is that because at that time teachers were persecuted by their students.

D - So what year would that have been, roughly. Can you give me sort of a time? When was the end of the Cultural Revolution?

C - The end of the Cultural Revolution was 1976. There were 10 years from 1966 to 1976. After that... In my opinion, things are getting worse and worse. Maybe in a few years... Well, it doesn’t change much I guess.

D - You said that at the end of the Cultural Revolution which would have been around '76, the teachers were persecuted by the students...

C - The period's during 1966 to 1976. During this time the teachers... Yeah during this time. After that the Cultural Revolution came to the end, but you know the effect of the Cultural Revolution is the shadow it made upon every human being's mind. Which makes Chinese people... how to say... they don’t dare to do good things. Because they want to just keep themselves safe.

D - Safe in what sense?

C - You know there are a lot of movements, in the Chinese language we call it “movements.” If you did something and someone want to lay you down, they can just...

D - “Lay you down” What does that mean?

C - Attack you, I guess. That’s the word I can think of.

D - Physically, verbally?

C - Not verbally. We call it /dazabau/ which means we use a very large paper and write something. They think you did very bad things. They list the bad things on the paper and they make a lot of copies of this and post it everywhere. And by doing so they can make you really, really bad. You know your fame has just been destroyed. I know that's mental attack. So people don’t want to interfere with anything that they don’t have to. That’s very, very, very, very big problem.

D - This happens now as well?

C - This has been over.
D - When did this thing happen that people, if they wanted to attack you, they would make a poster and tell...

C - That period. But after that, the effect still remains and people...I mean, I think it formed a habit, actually a philosophy. It shaped the people’s mind. They don’t think like before. I think it’s a very big problem. And also because the teachers had been persecuted. Actually most of the teachers. I guess at that time it’s not a respected job as before.

D - So you are talking at the end of the Cultural Revolution that they were persecuted. How were they persecuted? The same way, with posters?

C - Worse than that. There are a couple of ways to do that. For example they can put a very heavy iron plate, just put in on your neck. It’s very heavy so it makes you bend like this [indicates a bowing position]. And then make you go from street to street a lot of students and they show something, and then they bring you to a place, for example the lecture hall, something like that; and put you on the platform and make you say what the bad things you did. And we call it/pidoU/ in Chinese. I think it is similar to persecution we call that treatment.

D - Why would the students do this? How would they choose the professors or teachers to do this to?

C - As far as I know, the targets were the most [unintelligible] professors.

D - The most what?

C - The most eminent, excellent. The best teachers because during this Revolution the guys who were killed or went through a lot of difficult things are mostly the very best people.

D - And they were being killed or being hurt by whom?

C - By the others. [laugh]

D - By the not-so-excellent people?

C - Yeah, there are a lot of things that you can’t clarify. You know Chairman Mao said something ridiculous, but young men, teenagers, they believed him. But it was not true from the point of view of now. They just did what he said, but it was wrong. For example, he said that a very small part of land can produce a huge amount of crops. That’s impossible. It was 10 times above the now product of the same area of the land. So that’s impossible, but people believed him. They want to increase the production of iron of China. So what did they do? They smashed their cooking stuff. [laugh]

D - Their pots and pans?

C - Yeah, and melt it. So they didn’t have tools to cook with so they established big dining facility so people can all go there [laugh]. That’s a very interesting story. Something like this. Students didn’t go to school anymore. They went to the countryside to work with the farmers.

D - What kind of students? Who were the students?

C - High school students and university students.

D - Why did they go to the country instead of to school?
C - Because Chairman Mao said you can learn much more there than in school if they went to the countryside [laugh] and work with the farmers.

D - So who went to the university?

C - No one. I'm not sure about... At least for seven or eight years there was no enrollment at the universities.

D - Literally?

C - Literally.

D - During this period what did the teachers and the professors do? How did they survive?

C - They studied.

D - So you said that they studied the documents of the government everyday?

C - Yeah, everyday and do some cleaning work.

D - Cleaning work? What do you mean?

C - Clean the bathrooms, the buildings, the whole campus. And also a lot of the teachers go to the countryside and work with the farmers.

D - Voluntarily or were they forced to go?

C - Superficially they went voluntarily.

D - Volunteers with quotations marks.

C - There was chaos all over the country. And the university started from 1977, I think.

D - Started again?

C - Yeah, to enroll students.

D - Starting in 1977 who were the professors and who were the students who went to university?

C - There were examinations to select the students. The professors were still there. Yeah, they were teachers.

D - So the professors who had been professors returned to teach.

C - Right. If they hadn't died.

D - If they still were around. So before 1966 teachers were respected.

C - Yeah, I think so.

D - Then during 1966 to 1976 the reputations of the teachers started going down because Chairman Mao started publishing documents saying that education wasn't important at the universities.
C - Yeah, what he actually said, I guess, is that politics are most important, something like this. Knowledge is... some sort of destroys the importance of knowledge.

D - What happened in 1976? Why is that the end of the Cultural Revolution?  

C - Chairman Mao died in 1972. He passed away. There were still some bad guys that were still doing the things like Chairman Mao. But in 1976, another chairman, Chairman Yua, took over the government and actually arrested the Gang of Four and put them in jail. And now everything started to get back into order. That's the end of the chaos.

D - So what has happened in the last 20 years with education and with professors at the university and the people's respect or lack of respect of the teachers?

C - I think from '77 to mid-80's, this period the teachers were still respected to some extent, to a certain degree. But after that since the growth of the development of the economy and the improvement of the people's living standard, people want to live better and the criteria of being a success changed a lot. People start to pursue the things that could make them comfortable temporarily instead of pursuing the things that can make them happy all their lives. The main thing is money. People want to make a lot of money, so they can live a very comfortable life. On the other hand, teachers didn't get a very good salary. Of course, at the end of the '80's everybody got a not very good salary. You know, some government officers they can steal money from people because people sometimes want to beg them to do something, so they actually had a lot of extra money. But teachers just taught. They got a salary that was fixed. And at that time, workers also became to do some extra work after the formal work. So they can also get some extra money, some of them, not all of them. And I guess the teachers became the class who makes the lowest salary, the lowest money actually. So the people started to disrespect them.

D - And how did this affect the teachers?

C - There is a very famous term, a very hard term. In China we call it "Go to sea" or "Going to sea" which means the teachers don't do their teaching anymore. They went to the commercial world. They went to companies to make money. That's a very big phenomena in China. Actually a lot of teacher do so, so they actually made a lot of money.

D - You said a lot of teachers did so. What about the teachers that didn’t? Why would they have chosen not to go?

C - There are a lot of things that you have to carry on. One thing is in China, same as here, you know the position of teacher is fixed, insured in some sense. If you want to leave it, you must take risks. And also if you are a full-professor, and I think being an academic member, you really value the academic position. So some of them... and of course there are some teachers that really love, really enjoy their teaching and their research and everything. You know, the teachers who went out to go to do something else they... I think some of the reasons is that they didn't think they did the best in their positions. And also they feel a little discomfort with the other people, I guess.

D - What do you mean "other people"?

C - In China, the relationship of the colleagues, especially in university, is very hard to maintain. You know there are very few people who can get along with everybody. Usually there are groups and they split the power, they split everything. If you want to do something but their counterparts they object and block you. This makes people very frustrated after several times. They don't think that they can do something. So they just decide to leave and make money. It's very competitive.
D - Sort of along those same lines, something else that you said. I said, "If you were at a party and you met a teacher, what would you think? Say that I introduce myself to you. I'm Chinese. And I said that I am a teacher. What idea would you have about me?" You said, laughing "This guy maybe doesn't have much ability" and that he must lack something.

C - [laugh]

D - OK. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

C - Yeah, in common sense people think that you should make a lot of money. Being a teacher means, almost means, that you make a very poor salary. From this point of view, people disregard you. What did I say?

D - You said that the person doesn't have much ability and must lack something, probably in a social sense.

C - Yeah, in a social sense. He lacks the ... the excitement to pursue money. And people will think that you are a different kind of human being. And people think you are strange, you know, lofty. You don’t want to get along with other people. That's what I meant.

D - Why do they think that you wouldn’t want to get along with other people?

C - Because you’re different from other people. And everybody has his interests, and if your interests are not ... they tend to think that they do not have common interests with you. So they just, they don’t ... I think that they won’t want to enter you life, to understand you further. That’s common people, not everybody.

D - OK. Let me change the scenario a little bit. Say you’re also a professor at the university and we are at a party or some kind of gathering and you learn that I am also a professor at the university. What would you think of me, yourself being a professor?

C - There are some things that I want to clarify. One thing is are the two in the same field? Are these two professors very famous?

D - No, they’re not famous and they’re not in the same field, but let’s say they are both in the sciences.

C - OK. Then they may have a good talk.

D - So what would their impression be? You said that a common person would say, "You’re kind of strange." They wouldn’t tell the person, but they would think “He’s a little bit strange. He doesn’t want to interact socially with other people. He doesn’t value money, which is really strange.” Now what would the other teacher think. You’re a teacher. The other person’s a teacher. What would you think in your mind? Would you think the same thing?

C - No I don’t think it's going to be the same thing. It’s hard to imagine. People will ... I think they’re ... at least ... I can’t find the word ... They sympathize with each other. They know the bitterness of the other. I think they understand each other.

D - What do you mean, "They understand each other?"

C - They have the same situation and they know ... I guess they must have gone through the same experience. That’s very important. So they understand the decisions the other one made.
It's very hard for me to imagine how they think in their mind because I don't know actually. And also I didn't have the experience of being a teacher.

D - What did your dad say about being a teacher?

C - I know one thing that is very important for a teacher. Teachers in general still value the position, I mean in US the tenure. The professors, associate professors, the positions, they value it. They want to climb up the ladder because there are very few positions so they must struggle, compete with each other to get higher. That is what I have most heard about.

D - I'm going to sort of switch topics a little bit. Going back to that idea of not being afraid of teaching necessarily because you said you felt that you had the knowledge and the ability to explain things, you lacked the English. When you took the SPEAK/TEACH in the summer of '95 you didn't pass. You knew then that that meant that you would need to take a course called University Studies 180. What did you expect or what did you hope from that class, and don't worry about the fact that I was your teacher. Nothing you say will offend me. Actually it will be incredibly helpful. What did you expect that class would be and did you hope that that class would be, recognizing your own weaknesses?

C - I think first of all I hoped I could pass the exam the next time. At the same time I think everyone wants to actually improve their speaking, I think most of them. The main effort, the most important is the speaking part. The spoken language. That's what I hoped. Actually the hope has been faded. Yeah, as time goes by.

D - What do you mean "faded"?

C - I think everybody when they came here wants to improve their language so much. Actually they think of this matter all the time. They try a lot of ways to do this. But after awhile they quit.

D - They quit what?

C - They just let it be. They don't put effort into it. It's the same here with me. At the time I would read an article every morning if I had time and try to think of ways I can improve my listening and speaking, but now . . . I know I still have a lot of problems, but I quit putting effort into it. Just the habit is gone.

D - Let's get back a little to the 180 class. When you found out the fact that you did not pass that you would take 180, what were your thoughts about this class 180? Before you had the first class session. What did you think about this class? What must it be like, what you would probably do and learn and what you hoped that you would do and learn in class?

C - For me, it was not very big surprise. What was in my mind at that time was actually very similar to the class that we had. And I knew that we would have a small class, just a few students.

D - How did you know that?

C - I thought so. And I expected to talk a lot. A lot of discussion, I guess, in the class. Actually, I didn't expect a textbook. I don't think a textbook is useful to tell the truth.

D - You didn't think then or you still don't think that a textbook is useful?

C - I still don't think so. The point is if you can put those points in the heads of the students, they know it. But they don't read the textbook, at least most of them. So if you can teach them and
make them understand the basic elements of the language, they will know on their own. But if you
don't, they won't have the knowledge.

D - So what were the things that you like the most about the 180 class . . . I suppose talk about the
first semester 180 class . . . and what you liked the least?

C - Well, the basic language elements I think that they are very important.

D - What do you mean by “the basic language elements”?

C - The phoneme, the sounds of English?

D - The phoneme, the sounds of English?

C - The syllable, starting from the syllable. OK the first thing is to make sure they make the
correct syllable, the second is stress, for me. Actually stress is the most important thing of all, I
guess. And then the groups, group your words, group your phrases, and the intonation, and
concatenation?

D - Linking?

C - Yeah, linking. These elements are very important I think.

D - So that was something that you felt was valuable about the class, that you learned these things.
What did you feel wasn't so positive? Some things about the class that you would have preferred
that we didn't do or that we did differently?

C - I haven't thought of that before . . . . I don't know. Sometimes I felt the class is not very
tight. I mean there are a lot of times that students just went off the track. My mind just went
somewhere else. What I wanted the most was intensive drills, intensive practice.

D - What do you mean by “intensive drills”?

C - Make you think very hard and very violently and very fast. You don't have a chance to relax.
Because the class is just every week, one hour and 20 minutes. Time is very limited. At that time
we want to think in English and actually manipulate
this
language. Actually, that's the only
practice we can get, in my case. So I think the practice is the most

D - OK, so you said that you knew that that class was your only opportunity to really practice your
English. What are your opinions about the small class in which you gave presentations?

C - I think this is very good opportunity for the people, but it varies a lot from person to person. I
didn't get much from the presentations. I think I'm a shy person. And, I don't know, I
always couldn't master the feeling, control the feeling of the presentation to make it smooth and to
make it like what I wanted. Just every time it seems to me it's a rush. I didn't get much. But I
think it may be helpful to other people. It's very hard to say exactly, very hard to judge.

D - But you eventually passed the SPEAK/TEACH test. Or you got a conditional and then you . . .

C - I'm certified.
D - Oh, you're certified now?
C - So I didn't need to take 180.
D - You got certified after the second semester of 180?
C - Yeah.
D - Oh, I had forgotten that. Yeah, you were the only one actually.
C - The only one?
D - Yeah, the only one of our class... at least the only one of the five, of you five, that got certified... Can I keep you a few minutes longer?
C - Yeah.
D - Good, because this is getting interesting now. All of what you say is interesting but this is a topic that I didn't expect to explore... How long have you been teaching in the classroom? Was last fall your first time in the classroom?
C - Yeah, about four months.
D - Tell me about... How was teaching last semester in the classroom?
C - At first I was very nervous, then I was... it went OK. Just OK.
D - Just OK? Why just OK?
C - Well, I think the thing I didn't handle correctly was I was too nice to them. They talked with each other in class. It was very bad, and I couldn't stop it. They skipped classes. And the first time I was afraid of frustrating them so I actually gave them pretty good scores, unreasonably good scores, too merciful. And that's not good to do. The only good thing, I had about five or six very good students. For me it's very good.
D - How many students total did you have?
C - About 26. Some of them didn't make progress. [laugh] Eventually, they didn't come to class anymore. They just went to class if there was an exam. Otherwise they didn't go. I didn't know how to help them.
D - How about your English? Their ability to understand you and your ability to understand them?
C - I asked one student about it. He said my English was much better then the one he had because he dropped a course in order to take mine. But he's a very good student. He sat always in the first row. Otherwise I don't know. I think that compared to other TAs I'm OK. There's one TA who is from Korea. I think that he has a couple of years of teaching experience, but he still has a lot of trouble. Last semester he told me 9 out of 10 problems the questions asked by students he cannot understand.
D - What's his name?
C - [redacted]
D - He's a former student of mine.
C - A former student?
D - Yeah. Interesting.
C - I was so surprised. And I asked, "How do you handle it?" And he said, "I just ask them to go to the office." Because he has a wife and kid at home and he goes home and stays at home most of the time. Especially on Monday, it's an especially hard day for him because after two days of speaking Korean, it becomes very difficult for him to manipulate the tongue. I can understand this, too. I do the same but it's much harder for him.
D - Have you received your evaluations back yet? Your course evaluations?
C - No. Sometimes I have the problem too. If the student speaks too fast, yeah, it's really hard to understand. I have a black girl this semester. She's from Illinois. In exam one, she got the lowest score, 33. I can't understand her speech, literally. Too hard for me. The other people are OK.
D - Did you have the listening course here, 101E?
C - No.
D - You didn't.
C - Very few people go to 101E.
D - Yeah, not too many people in 180. No, not too many people. You explained to me that you experienced some difficulties last semester teaching. How could 180 be made different to address some of these problems that you encountered in class. Actually, the majority of the problems that you encountered had nothing to do with speaking English. Right?
C - I don't understand your question.
D - You don't understand. You talked about some of the difficulties of your class last semester, such as being too easy, grading too easy, being too nice, people talking during class and you can't stop it, people not attending class, these kinds of things. Problems that we never talked about in 180. What is your opinion about how 180 could address these problems that you had, and should 180 address these problems?
C - I think I'm negative to this. I mean I don't think that 180 should address these problems because that's the classroom role. It should be up to the teacher to decide. And also there are various needs from students. I think only in mathematics they actually need to teach. In other departments, I don't think so. Recitation section, no that's another story. Last year there were a lot of new math graduate students who came. Many more students than in the year before, '95. I don't know if you know this but it's the truth because we changed chairmen. He has an emphasis in applied mathematics. And he enrolled a lot of applied math students. It takes time to know how to handle things correctly.
D - But that shouldn't part of 180?
C - I don't think so.
D - One more scenario. You are now me. You have all the knowledge I have about English. All the technical knowledge, how the language is formed. You are me, OK? Perfect English, whatever. Well, perfect in parentheses. Having taken 180, how would you teach 180? For example, I've taken mathematics and I had a mathematics graduate student TA. I took 140 and 141, and 165 and 166, they were all TAs. After the course I got A's in all of those, so I knew quite a lot about those courses. I could think back, "Oo, this is how I would teach it differently." How would you teach 180 differently?

C - The first thing I would do is go over the basic elements very fast and very clearly. Do the best to actually put these things into the students' head. And then, all the rhythm repeated over and over. What I mean is if you repeat these things three times, four times in one month, it will be enough to make them understand, and remember all these things.

D - What things?

C - All these basic elements. Just repeat. And then do some practice I think.

D - What kind of practice?

C - I think reading a paragraph and linking, that's very good. And also the campus scenario, play, role-play which is nice and very useful also. We should go into one topic and go deeply, just one topic.

D - What do you mean "one topic"? For the role plays?

C - Not the roles. We can just discuss one topic very deeply and show many aspects of it. For example, I think most people are interested in movies so we can just talk about movies, in a very deep sense for foreigners. We can talk about the history of the movies. From there... ask them to write something, they don't need to write but they prepare something they like. Introduce a movie you like, your favorite movie, to your classmate. And you can actually make... after every student gives his story you can make a conclusion and also inspect the movie subject in many ways. It's a very big topic, and there are a lot of things you can talk about. My problem is that I can describe one thing in English superficially, but it's very hard for me to describe it in detail, in-depth. I guess that's a very big problem for every foreign student. Yeah, that's basically the problem I have. A lot of times if I want to describe something in-depth, it's very hard. I know I fail every time.

D - It doesn't really depend upon the topic?

C - No, no.

D - Just the fact that you're doing it in-depth. Why do you find it difficult?

C - I don't know. It's just... I don't know how to take it apart and analyze it. How to speak. Just know how to... I think the vocabulary is so... I mean the speaking vocabulary, the spoken language is so limited. Only a few verbs, only a few adjectives, and only a few adverbs. That's the only thing we know. Beyond that, it's all blank.

D - How could 180 help you with that?

C - I'm not sure actually. It's very hard to do.
D - Perhaps just forcing you to do it will help you do it? If we talk about something in-depth, just the fact of having to do it in-depth, you will learn more about how to talk in-depth? Or is this something that I should actually teach, techniques for talking in-depth?

C - No. Both ways. Students must go in that direction and actually do the thing. And make themselves be comfortable with describing one thing, and take it apart and analyze it.

D - Now while they are doing this . . . I could see this is something that would work well for the small class, right? These discussions? . . . while they are doing this, should the teacher now and then stop and correct their speech or do you think that should just be a time to speak?

C - I think one that you did very good is . . . yeah you can just write down something on the paper and give it back. It's very nice. I think if they want to improve their speech, it's their responsibility to take the advice and make the correction themselves.

D - Do you think it's necessary to explain to them verbally as well or just write it down on paper and give them to them? At the end of the presentations, I would explain what I had written on the paper and then give the paper to them.

C - Writing down I think is enough, unless they don't understand.

D - That's the tough part. I can't write fast enough.

C - Just tell them . . . I think one way to solve this problem you can tell them, "If you don't understand what I have written down, just ask me." I think your approach is very nice, so that is a very good part. So students do not feel uncomfortable to ask you.

D - What is my approach?

C - I think your approach is very nice. I do not feel uncomfortable to ask you questions and to talk with you.

D - Why?

C - You are a student. And you're informal. That's good. And you smile, a good smile. Yeah, that's it I think. In other words, you don't seem like a tough teacher, and also the students don't consider 180 as a very . . . well, as a very important course, they don't think so, but they all want to get something out of it.

D - Most of the students want to get something out of it. [laugh] Well, I think that's enough for now.
APPENDIX C: SUMMARY SHEET
Second Interview with Xinhuq

If profs had survived, they taught
8 Mao died in '72 (?); in '76 Gang of 4 arrested.
'77-mid-80's: teachers respected; mid-80's: $ more important
Tchers' sal. lowest, so disrespect; many tchers left for factories.
Others stayed-security, love of teaching & research
Academia very competitive

9 Soc. says you shld make money, thrfr tchers lack drive, are different
Tchers wid sympathize w/each other

10 Tchers still value position
in 180, wntd to impr. speech & pass S/T; now hope has faded.
180 was similar to expectations; expected small class, no text (not useful)

11 Basic speech elements imp: stress, syll., grouping, intonation, linking
Criticisms: class not tight, wntd intense drills, more practice, didn't get much from presentations.
Certified after 2nd semester

12 Tght in classrm Fall 96, Sprg 97
Class went OK; was too easy.
Was satisfied with his speech, esp. compared w/other TAs

13 Sometms can't understand fast speech.
In 180, shldn't address tchng techniques bc each stud. has different needs.

14 If he tght 180, wid go over basic elements quickly, repeat thm, some practice, role-plays

Good to choose one topic and explore it at depth; topic not important.
Good bc they wd help w/vocab. which tends to be very limited; beyond this, blank

15 Force students to talk in depth, analyze topic, take is apart.
Teacher shld listen and write comments for each student.
Writing down is enough
Likes Dewey's approach; students feel comfortable to talk, informal, student like them
APPENDIX D: ARRANGED STRIPS OF TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS
• Interest in money began around Tienaman Square time. [a2-15]

• Economy started to move very fast 1984-86, but teacher's salary remained the same [b2-17]

• Change in attitude was in 1990 with Open Door Policy, importance of money, education is negative again. [d2-7]

• More thorough explanation of change in salaries and lack of gov. support for universities [a2-4]

• Example of low salaries for teachers. [a1-5]

• After mid-80's criteria for success changed, people want comfortable life, workers could earn extra money, teachers could not, teachers lost respect. [e2-8]

• In 1993 TA can't survive on salary because prices rose after 1990. Teachers' salary number 9 of 10. [b1-11]

• Story about rich man using disguise of teacher to be safe from muggers [c1-10]

• In China if you don't have money, you don't have anything. [b1-12]

• Reputation depends on money. [a2-15]

• After 1986 teachers were allowed to earn extra money, many quit. [b2-18]

• College teachers have extra jobs. [a2-15]

• Teachers quit to go work for companies [e2-8]
APPENDIX E: CORRESPONDING PARAGRAPHS FROM THESIS
From the mid-1980s to 1995

In the mid-1980s, with the implementation of China’s Open Door Policy, the economic situation in China began to improve. Companies, while still belonging to the government, were able to make more money, which was passed on to the employees in the form of salary increases. Workers were also able to earn more money by having second and third jobs. According to Guang, “People began to realize the importance of money. They can buy things, open businesses, etc. So they again began to make money, think money is everything. So education was neglected again.”

While salaries in many segments of Chinese society began to rise, teachers’ salaries did not increase. Ming says that, unlike companies, which made money, the universities were entirely dependent upon the government for funding, and the government didn’t have enough money to support the universities. In addition, the government did not permit teachers to earn extra money. Wages in academia stagnated. Song says that an associate professor at a university in a big city might get about $150 per month, which would be considered a good salary for the position. A white collar worker at a factory in a big city, on the other hand, could get maybe $500 per month. Even a blue collar worker, perhaps by working several jobs, was able to bring home between $300 and $400 per month, more than double the salary of an associate professor. In China, according to Xinhua, this situation where manual laborers make more money than intellectuals in academia is referred to as “hand and head upside down.”

This inequity in salaries, this “hand and head upside down” phenomenon, negatively affected the way society viewed teachers. Xinhua explains,
time, workers also became to do some extra work after the formal work. So they can also get some extra money, some of them, not all of them. And I guess the teachers became the class who makes the lowest salary, the lowest money actually. So the people started to disrespect them.

Ming remembers that in 1992 or 1993 on a scale of one to ten with one being the highest and ten being the lowest, a professor's salary ranked number nine in China. The situation was even worse for TAs, the lowest rung on the ladder to full professor. Ming says, "If you were a TA, you don’t have enough money to feed yourself. So you can’t live by your salary. You can’t." The dire financial situation of teachers was so well known, explains Shan with a laugh, that rich people on business who must carry large sums of cash "will act like professors. Then in the train and bus, thieves will not pay attention to them."

Eventually there was a policy change and teachers were allowed to make extra money. According to Song, some supplemented their university salaries by teaching in an evening school or working as a consultant for industry. According to Xinhua, however, many more teachers "went down to sea," which means that they quit teaching altogether and went to the commercial world, to companies, to make money. He believed that by quitting their teaching positions, many former university professors have probably made "a lot of money."
APPENDIX F: PERSONAL INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE
1. **When** was your father born and **where** did he grow up (city or village)?

2. **How much** education did your father receive?

3. **What, if anything,** prevented your father from receiving more education?

4. **What** was your father’s profession?

5. **When** was your mother born and **where** did she grow up (city or village)?

6. **How much** education did your mother receive?

7. **What, if anything,** prevented your mother from receiving more education?
8. **What** was your mother’s profession?

9. **Where** did you grow up (city, province) and how big was this city (or village)?

10. **Which** universities did you attend in China (name of university, city) and what was your major?

10.5. Did you have any TAs while you were in university? If yes, what was your opinion of them?

11. What kind of work experience, if any, did you have in China? Please explain.

12. There are numerous graduate schools in China. Why did you want to come to the US for your degree?

13. If your parents could choose any profession for you, which profession would they choose for you and why?
14. If you could choose any profession for yourself (independent of your education), which profession would you choose and why?

15. Where do you hope to find a job when you finish your studies here in the United States and why?

16. What do you realistically think you will do for a profession when you finish your graduate career?

17. Do you have plans to teach at a university in China? Why or why not?

18. What would your parents think if you decided to teach at a university in China?
APPENDIX G: TEACHERS/TEACHING IN CHINA

QUESTIONNAIRE
What do you know (or think) about teachers, teaching, and education during the following periods in Chinese history in the village or city where you grew up?

- **The period before 1949:**
  1. To what degree were teachers respected by society and why?
  2. What position did teachers have in society and why?
  3. What did people think about teachers and why?
  4. How important was education during this period and why?
  5. During this period if a person had access to higher education and was qualified, would he/she desire to eventually teach at a university? Why or why not?

- **The period from 1949 to 1966**
  6. To what degree were teachers respected by society and why?
7. What position did teachers have in society and why?

8. What did people think about teachers and why?

9. How important was education during this period and why?

10. During this period if a person had access to higher education and was qualified, would he/she desire to eventually teach at a university? Why or why not?

- The period from 1966 to 1976

11. To what degree were teachers respected by society and why?

12. What position did teachers have in society and why?

13. What did people think about teachers and why?
14. How important was education during this period and why?

15. During this period if a person had access to higher education and was qualified, would he/she desire to eventually teach at a university? Why or why not?

- The period from 1976 to the mid-1980s

16. To what degree were teachers respected by society and why?

17. What position did teachers have in society and why?

18. What did people think about teachers and why?

19. How important was education during this period and why?
20. During this period if a person had access to higher education and was qualified, would he/she desire to eventually teach at a university? Why or why not?

- The period from the mid-1980s to 1995 (or whenever you left China for the US)

21. To what degree were teachers respected by society and why?

22. What position did teachers have in society and why?

23. What did people think about teachers and why?

24. How important was education during this period and why?

25. During this period if a person had access to higher education and was qualified, would he/she desire to eventually teach at a university? Why or why not?
APPENDIX H: TA EXPERIENCE/ITA TRAINING COURSE

QUESTIONNAIRE
Your experience as a TA in this university and the 180 course

1. Tell me about your TA assignments in the last four semesters:

**Fall 1995 - TA (yes/no) - Your TA duties?**

What were two of the most positive aspects of your TA experience during Fall ‘95?

1. 

2. 

What were two of the most negative aspects of your TA experience during Fall ‘95?

1. 

2. 

**Spring 1996 - TA (yes/no) - Your TA duties?**

What were two of the most positive aspects of your TA experience during Spring ‘96?

1. 

2. 

What were two of the most negative aspects of your TA experience during Spring ‘96?

1. 

2.
Fall 1996 - TA (yes/no) - Your TA duties? ______________________________
What were two of the most positive aspects of your TA experience during Fall '96?
1. ________________
2. ________________

Spring 97 - TA (yes/no) - What were your TA duties? ______________________________
What were two of the most positive aspects of your TA experience during Spring '97?
1. ________________
2. ________________

What were two of the most negative aspects of your TA experience during Spring '97?
1. ________________
2. ________________
7. When you arrived here and learned that you would have to take University Studies 180, what things did you expect to do and to learn in the 180 class?

8. What were three things that you liked and found most helpful in the 180 class and why?
   1.
   2.
   3.

9. What were three things that you did not like and found least helpful in the 180 class and why?
   1.
   2.
   3.
10. What could have been taught in the 180 course to make your TA experience more positive?

**Scenario:** Imagine you possess all the knowledge and skills necessary to teach the 180 course. In your section, you have 16 students, mostly from Asian countries, who received a non-pass or partial pass on the SPEAK/TEACH tests.

Tell me how you would teach the class to best prepare the ITAs for their teaching assignments:

11. **How** would you organize the class? (class meetings, small groups, conferences, etc.)

12. **What** activities you would include?

13. **What** kinds of textbooks would you require?

14. **What** percentage of the time would you focus on improving speaking/pronunciation and why?

15. **What** percentage of the time would you focus on classroom management/teaching skills and why?
REFERENCES


