

# A Preliminary Phenomenological Investigation on the Challenges and Strategies toward the Culture-Language Integration in Chinese as a Foreign Language Education in American High Schools

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## Abstract

A teacher cannot teach a language thoroughly without teaching the cultures of its speakers. Many foreign language teachers worldwide have encountered an abundance of challenges while promoting the culture-language integration. The Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) teachers in the USA are no exception. The purpose of study was to investigate the following question: what are the CFL teachers' perceptions and experiences on the culture-language integration in American high schools? This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of six qualified in-service CFL teacher participants and illuminated common challenges and strategies these teachers encountered and used to resolve these challenges of culture-language integration. Additionally, we have found more strategies used to further resolve the specific challenges reported by each individual participant uniquely toward the inclusive essential Chinese cultural content and their selecting criteria for the culture-language integration in American high schools. These practical findings will definitely provide clear strategic guidance and directions for many educators worldwide in advancing the culture-language integration in CFL and other foreign language education in the USA and other countries.

**Keywords:** Chinese culture-language integration, Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), challenge, strategy, American high school

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Introduce the Problem*

We can't teach a language separately from the culture of people whose language is being taught because a language intrinsically reflects the culture of the people who invented it (Poltoratzky & Poltoratzky, 1959). Indeed, language and culture working together can serve mutual understanding across different language speakers (Ochs, 1990). Furthermore, Kramsch (1993) revealed that language and culture are interconnected with the three primary characteristics including (1) language expresses cultural reality (e.g., people express facts and ideas, and reflect their attitudes through words), (2) language embodies cultural reality (e.g., people give meanings of their experience through the means of communication), and (3) language symbolizes cultural reality (e.g., people view their language as a symbol of their social identity). In addition, by conveying an interesting metaphor expressing that language is like flesh and culture is like blood, both language and culture stay together making a living organism, Jiang (2000) confirmed that language and culture cannot exist without each other. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape.

There exists a widespread phenomenon for the foreign or second language (L2) teachers to teach well in their classrooms. Is there any way to improve this phenomenon? Can the integration of culture and language enhance an L2 education? Is it important to include culture into an L2 teaching and learning?

### *1.2 Describe Relevant Scholarship*

In foreign or second language (L2) education, since the 1960s, many educators have realized the importance to include culture into an L2 teaching and learning. Thanasoulas (2001) stated "the role of culture in the foreign language education was enhanced" and "more attempts of language and culture integration take place in a more communicative approach" (p. 5). In addition, the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP, 1996, 1999, 2006) has been calling for teaching culture in the L2 classes to contribute to cross language and culture competencies in the 21st century. Does the inclusion of culture into the L2 teaching and learning classrooms help students' learning? Payne and Gay (1997) found that it helped in "promoting students' better understanding toward a complex human system of which they are a part" (p. 223), and they further recommended integrating "mutual clues like images, music, language, dress, customs, and beliefs into a foreign language learning process to provide students interconnectedness with their cultural systems and others' world" (p. 223). Nowadays, we can see more and more advocated L2 educators have put their efforts into the integration of culture into their language classrooms.

Everything is usually hard in the beginning before it gets easy. Same as the process of culture-language integration in the L2 teaching and learning that remains a challenging task for many language educators. Crozet and Liddicoat (1999) reported that the culture-language integration does not yet to be the prevailing approach in an L2 education due to (1) the disagreement on the extent to which the teaching of culture is achieved, and (2) what are the appropriate cultural materials to be included in the L2 curriculum. Lavrenteva and

Orland-Barak (2015) further stated that the L2 teachers encountered many constraints (e.g., institutional barriers, language acquisition pressure, curriculum implementation, textbooks availability limits, and limited access to pedagogy) while attempting to have a culture-language integration in the L2 classroom.

No exception, in Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) education, many problems that hindered the culture-language integration in the CFL education were also recognized. Moore et al. (1992) noted “referring to teaching culture, there is a lack of consensus among teachers on what the ideal curriculum should be; on which skills should be emphasized; and on the proper emphasis on and ways of teaching Chinese culture” (p. 119). Zhang (2004) pointed out “without a consistent guideline on teaching culture in CFL, teaching and learning directly result in the confusions of implementing this notion into Chinese education” (p. 35). Wang (2006) reported two issues “(a) the lack of congruence between a large proportion of cultural subjects in teaching practice and the lack of theoretical guidance; (b) the confusion that exists in current model of teaching and textbooks” (p. 572). Wong (2012) stated “the lack of cultural pedagogy and the dearth of professional training results in the fewer interests among Chinese teachers to teach culture” (p. 67). Poole (2015) presented two challenges on (1) how to select the proper material and conduct appropriate instruction, and (2) how to assess the effectiveness of culture-language integration. Moloney and Xu (2015) explained “in the field of CFL, it is still primarily dominated by a traditional pedagogic approach” (p. 6). Diaz (2016) said “the lack of mature approaches of teaching culture in CFL class has put Chinese teachers in a situation of unprepared to fulfill this mission of culture-language integration” (p. 115). Some other scholars (Lee et al., 1993; Li, 2004; Wei, 2017) argued that the traditional Chinese educational system trains the majority of the CFL teachers working in the United States of America (USA), and they are not well-equipped to meet the needs of American students. They often use a pedagogy of a teacher-centered model, which contradicts the student-centered approach commonly used in American schools. This is a cultural problem in itself. Most of these CFL teachers emphasize pure academic knowledge installation and cultural inheritance, which push them to use memorization and high-stakes tests on students to accomplish these goals of the foreign language learning process. The prevailing conventional contents and pedagogies of CFL education in the USA have failed to motivate Chinese teachers to integrate both the language and its culture in one class.

In summary, with these dilemmas, consequently the teaching of Chinese is somewhat compromised because teaching Chinese culture is not fully included or integrated into the course. It remains a superficial situation for the CFL teachers to integrate culture into their CFL classes.

### *1.3 State Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design*

While so many obstacles have been recognized in the previous studies, the advocated CFL teachers still believed that the culture-language integration in CFL education in American schools is very important, they were reported to be willing to make commitment and efforts to proceed with this integration (Hu, 2010; Cheng, 2015; Mohammad & Hu, 2015; Ruan, 2017; Wei, 2017).

But what are the appropriate content materials to be selected and should be included and how to proceed the culture-language integration? Although many CFL educators have recognized the importance of integrating culture into CFL education, there is a shortage of related research in this area and the research on the culture-language integration in CFL education remains in its preliminary stage and it is still a recent phenomenon. Very few practical studies have been conducted to guide and support the culture-language integration in CFL education. The authors of the study are interested in finding answers for these phenomena. Therefore, this study aims to probe the phenomena of culture and language integration in the field of CFL education in American schools. Under this principle, the purpose of the study was to investigate what are the Chinese teachers' perceptions and lived experiences toward culture-language integration in their CFL courses in American high schools. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed for this preliminary study:

- 1) What challenges do Chinese teachers perceive and what strategies do Chinese teachers develop and use to resolve challenges in culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools?
- 2) How do Chinese teachers determine cultural content to include in CFL education and criteria to select quality cultural materials?

## 2. Method

For the present study, we used a qualitative methodological framework, called “Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis” (IPA, Smith, 1996) that focused on the collaborative interpretation from both the participants and the researchers. IPA has the following unique features which benefitted this qualitative study:

- It offers insights into “how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon” (Brocki and Wearden, 2006, p. 88);
- It is “well-suited for exploring hidden reasons behind the complex, interrelated, or multifaceted social processes” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 105);
- It is ideal “for studying context-specific, unique, or idiosyncratic events or processes” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 105);
- It provides “a thorough examination of the lived experience in its own terms” (Smith and Osborn, 2015, p. 41); and
- It allows us to “study subjective experience and it offers a highly structured approach to exploring lived experience” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 26).

IPA was an ideal methodological framework for this study, as it was context-specific, explored how participants make sense of a particular phenomenon (culture-language integration), and analyzed a complex, multifaceted process.

### *2.1 Identify Subsections*

For the study, we used a purposeful sampling method in phenomenological methodology to locate a group of qualified CFL teacher participants, as suggested by Patton (1999 & 2002) that a purposeful sampling method can help to generate an in-depth study from the information-rich cases in which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry.

### *2.2 Participants Characteristics*

To participate, a CFL teacher is required to meet the criteria as follows: (1) be a native Chinese speaker, (2) be a certified high school teacher who was currently teaching CFL in a public school in the USA, and (3) be needed to have at least five years of teaching experience in CFL education and had accumulated experiences of teaching language and culture in their CFL classes. In the process of recruitment, we used a survey to choose the qualified sample participants prior to the interview process.

In terms of the size of sampling, how many participants will be appropriate for phenomenological qualitative research? Morse (1994) suggested at least six participants while Creswell (1998) recommended the number to be between five and twenty-five participants. Therefore, we decided to interview a group of six qualified CFL teachers to participate in this study.

### *2.3 Sampling Procedures*

The participants in this phenomenological qualitative study were six in-service CFL teachers who taught in public high schools in the midwestern United States. Participation in the study was voluntary. All the participants were female native Chinese speakers who were born in China or Taiwan. After moving to the USA, all of them became certified CFL teachers in the USA, had at least five years of CFL teaching experience, and had accumulated experiences of teaching both language and culture in their CFL classes in the USA. The year of overall teaching experiences within and/or outside of the USA ranged from 10 to 15 with a mean of 13.

In any research study, ethical issues relating to the protection of the participants were of vital concern (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This study was approved by the authors' University Institutional Review Board (IRB). A written consent form was received from each participant. In the process of data collection, all the participants were notified about the research purpose, procedure, methodology, confidentiality, and other related issues involved in IRB. All data collected were secured in Survey Monkey server and in well-protected personal computer. The participants' names, identities, personal information, supporting statements, and related information were confidential and anonymized with pseudonyms in the process of data analysis and results reporting.

### *2.4 Research Design*

To develop a more complex understanding of the phenomena being studied, the usage of multiple data collection methods was needed in qualitative studies as a deliberate strategy

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Therefore, a set of multiple data including survey and interviews was developed to collect data for this qualitative study.

The survey was adopted from a previous study (see Social Science Education Consortium, 1999) which consisted of two categories. The first category included demographic information about a participant's name, age, gender, ethnicity, born country, teacher training background, current teaching school (public, private, name of school, zip code, grade levels of teaching), and question on a participant's number of years of teaching experience. The second category contained twelve questions regarding a participant's existing experiences, ideas, and concerns on the culture-language integration in the CFL education. In addition, questions on a participant's interest and willingness to join the next stage of an interview were included in the survey as well.

The interviews were established containing 25 self-designed questions with intention to understand the participants' teaching background in CFL education, perspectives on the importance of teaching culture in CFL, driving forces and determination toward the culture-language integration in CFL education, teaching language and culture experiences toward the culture-language integration, perspectives about their students' experiences and benefits received from the culture-language integration, and other information regarding the culture-language integration in CFL education.

All the interview questions were developed by the leading author (one of the co-authors of this article, who is a CFL teacher with substantial experiences in teaching Chinese culture and language in both high school and college levels of CFL classrooms in the USA). The same lead author also administered all the survey and interviews for the data collection in the beginning and at the end of study.

The procedure for data collection included two stages. First, using the Survey Monkey, the survey was posted online for three-week to a state level of Chinese Teachers' Association. The timeline for a participant to complete this survey is about 10-15 minutes. As a result, after the survey, six qualified candidates were chosen, and all agreed to be interviewed for the next stage of data collection. The second stage for the data collection was the interviews. The interviews were conducted individually and held online using Zoom. Each individual interview was completed during a 45-60-minute period. With the permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded, and draft memos were written by the lead author. We used the individual interview with an "attempt to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of the subject's experiences, to uncover their lived world" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 1). Creswell and Poth (2018) further echoed that a significant benefit of collecting data through individual interview is that it offers a tool to capture in-depth information from the participant's perspective of an event or experience.

### *2.5 Data Analysis*

The data analysis in this study was guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The lead author transcribed the interviews verbatim while his memory was fresh and sought clarification from participants when points were unclear (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010),

ensuring accuracy (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). However, we did not seek participants' comments on the research findings and interpretation, aligning with IPA's emphasis on the sense-making process by both participants and researchers (Smith et al., 2009). Conducting data collection and analysis concurrently allowed for the themes emerging from the analysis to be reconfirmed or refuted by new data, maintaining a dynamic and reflective approach to the research process (Morse et al., 2002). This iterative process ensured that the analysis was deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the participants while being refined through continuous reflection and new insights.

For the purpose of the study, the collected data were analyzed in two stages including (1) data organization, sortation for the organized data, and transcription, and (2) data coding.

First, in the stage of data organization, sortation for the organized data, and transcription, the source data used for this stage comprising the participants' responses to the survey and interviews. Each participant was recorded. To acquire the accurate wording from each participant, the lead author listened to the recording very carefully, sometimes multiple times. The lead author deleted all repetitive words such as um, you know, so and so, etc. For clarity, the lead author even checked with the participant(s) as needed. After the data was organized, the lead author sorted the organized data sequentially, and then transcribed manually the sorted data into a Word document. The transcripts were read multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the data transcription. In addition, the transcripts were sent to all participants to be checked to ensure authenticity and accuracy as suggested by Creswell (2013) that member checking is an integral part of creating trustworthiness in qualitative research. After receiving the participants' verifications for the transcripts, the lead author conducted the data coding in the next stage.

Next, in the data coding stage, the verified transcripts were coded using a streamlined codes-to-theory model provided by Saldaña (2013) (1) to establish coding schema, (2) to create codebooks, (3) to look for emergent patterns, and (4) to produce overarching themes.

### *2.6 Trustworthiness of the Study*

Trustworthiness in qualitative studies is vital as it relates to the validity and reliability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). To establish the credible measurements of trustworthiness, the study adopted three key strategies as follows:

The first strategy was “member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018)”. The transcripts of the study were submitted back to participants for their review. By doing so, it supported the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring the accuracy of the interpretation of participants' accounts.

The second strategy was “triangulation between the survey and interviews”. We analyzed survey and interview data with specific attention to finding similar patterns across both data sources (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This strategy supported us in determining the most salient patterns in our data and developing a trustworthy analysis.

The third strategy was “memoing (Creswell & Poth, 2018)”. During the process of the study,

the lead author wrote many reflexive memos to monitor how his subjectivity impacted the research process. Further, the lead author also wrote analytic memos focused on survey and interview data.

These strategies bolstered trustworthiness by ensuring the research was credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable, as advocated by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019). By implementing member checking, triangulation, and reflexive and analytic memoing, the study ensured a rigorous approach that enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

### 3. Results

The following results review themes from the participants who were CFL teachers in the American high schools. The analysis explores two major themes including (1) the common challenges that the Chinese teachers perceived and mutual strategies that the Chinese teachers developed and used to resolve the challenges in culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools, and (2) the different perceptions and strategies used to resolve to the specific encountered challenges regarding (a) the essential Chinese cultural content to include and (b) the criteria to select quality cultural materials in culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools.

The results found were summarized based on the CFL teacher participants' perception, experiences, challenges they have encountered, and strategies developed and used to resolve the challenges in a common way for the common encountered challenges or in a different way for the specific encountered challenges related to the essential Chinese cultural content to include and the criteria to select quality cultural materials in culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools.

#### *3.1 What Challenges Do Chinese Teachers Perceive and What Strategies Do Chinese Teachers Develop and Use to Resolve Challenges in Culture-Language Integration in CFL Education in American High Schools?*

While developing and implementing a culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools, the participants experienced abundant difficulties and challenges. However, they were willing to devote their experiences, knowledge, commitment, time, and efforts to explore solutions to address these problems. They have reported most of resolutions from the angle of cultural perspectives rather than from the academic perspectives in which most of the previous studies did. Here are some similarities of difficulties and challenges all the participants encountered and how they have tried to resolve these problems using similar ways. These issues and strategies used are numerous, and some of them are interrelated.

The first common challenge was the lack of an inclusive culture-language curriculum in the CFL education. All the participants revealed that a lot of multicultural schools nowadays called for a culturally responsive curricula in CFL, but just having a culturally responsive curricula was not enough to meet all the needs for today's schools. Teaching culture should be the central part of CFL teaching and learning in American schools rather than just being

considered as a facilitator to assist students' achievement of cross-language proficiency. To resolve these problems, they believed that an inclusive curriculum integrating both Chinese culture and language is in need. By doing so, it could ensure all students are included within all aspects of the CFL educational needs and be acknowledged with their unique differences in culture and social status. It could recognize both the teacher's and students' roles and values in the curricula. It would provide a means for both teachers and students to incorporate each other's values into the curricula, thus promoting teaching and learning in the field of CFL education. For example, Chang noted:

*I don't have much financial support or resources to develop a culturally related curriculum in my CFL class. Without funding, I cannot even invite a cultural teacher who is an expert in Chinese culture to give a lecture in my class. The second difficulty was time. My frustration was that I did not have enough time to develop cultural teaching in my CFL class... Therefore, I feel like I just scratched the surface of culture by using the limited resources I had... Another challenge I faced while integrating culture in my CFL class was the lack of qualified cultural texts... Most of these textbooks were linguistic-based, and they lacked a two-sides view of introducing another culture. As a result, I found very few texts from these books to teach culture. As a result, I used many authentic materials in my Chinese class, but I knew I needed quality texts to lead me to a deeper level of integrating culture into CFL teaching and learning.*

A second common challenge was the lack of decent quality of Chinese cultural content and instructional materials in the process of Chinese culture-language integration. All the participants revealed that they could not find quality cultural content and materials to cover both Chinese and American cultures while developing and implementing a culture-language integrated curricula and instruction. Otherwise, they would reduce misunderstandings with their CFL students while teaching culture in the CFL classes. To solve these problems, the CFL teachers in this study had tried their best to find useful resources and textbooks of decent quality of cultural materials from self-exploration on the Web, from experienced CFL teachers, from institutional libraries, from professional development workshops, and so on. Nevertheless, so far, they have not had enough decent quality of common cultural resources and textbooks to be used in their CFL classes. For example, Zhao said:

*I searched for many textbooks made in mainland China and Taiwan regarding teaching culture. These textbook makers don't have any experiences and knowledge to teach Chinese outside of China and Taiwan. Their views of CFL teaching are outdated and hard to catch up with the needs of foreign language education overseas in the 21st century. For example, I attended a CFL teachers' training in one of the top universities in China... The professors who conducted this professional development thought they were the most excellent experts in the subject. Still, they only know how to teach Chinese students the Chinese language in the territory of China.*

Chang expressed a similar opinion:

*I am dissatisfied with the present textbooks. These textbooks are either*

*linguistic-centered clichés or a piece of political rhetoric. So, I just ignored them and used self-decisions to look for materials in my CFL curriculum.*

A third common challenge was the lack of a quick teaching philosophy that could help the CFL teachers' believing philosophy rooted from the East and be transmitted quickly to the teaching philosophy used in the West. Prior to teaching in the USA, all the participants were educated and trained in Chinese institutions where they focused on traditional authorized and memorized teacher-centered teaching philosophy rather than on conventional heuristic student-centered teaching philosophy popularly adopted in the western institutions. It requires a period in transiting the teaching philosophy from the East to the West. To alleviate these problems, they have tried their best to adjust their teaching philosophy into the student-centered to develop CFL materials based on American students' mental and cognitive development and focused on effects toward students' engagements, motivation, and lifelong learning. All are also willing to develop effective rubrics to assess these effects in the future when requested. For example, Dong noted:

*The most challenging issues about culture teaching in CFL classes are from the Chinese teachers themselves. I know a lot of Chinese teachers do not recognize the importance of culture in foreign language teaching. They are remaining their old view and doing the traditional pedagogy. These Chinese teachers need to break through their old mindsets and views and learn new cultural things, including themselves and the students, and the world.*

A fourth common challenge was the usage of the obsolete CFL educational principles as well as educational guidelines, and assessment criteria used in the CFL education. All CFL teacher participants reported current educational philosophy and its guidelines in CFL education rooted from the East lag the needs of the times in the USA. In addition, they desperately need a fundamental theory to testify the effectiveness and relevance toward Chinese culture-language integration in CFL education. Due to the dearth of principles and theories from the CFL educational philosophy, and standards as well as assessment criteria available from the CFL educational system, it is hard to guide CFL teachers to transit the integrated culture-language curricula to an effective instruction in CFL classes. To remedy these problems, they have compromised to consider students' interests, values, and comforts as the guidelines to select self-believed suitable cultural materials and texts to be used in the CFL culture-language integration classes. However, they did not know how these curricula could help the CFL students achieve cross-culture proficiency because they lack related assessment criteria in CFL education. For example, Dong expressed:

*Another issue I had when integrating culture into my class was the lack of theories for assessing its effectiveness. Because of this dearth, I do not have a clear picture of which method is appropriate to be used to check students' understanding of my cultural integration. In addition, I do not have guidance to use formative and summative assessments to check the effectiveness of my application of this method.*

A fifth common challenge was the disequilibria of ideologies, mindsets, cultural values, views of culture, cultural beliefs, and cultural understandings between the CFL teachers and

American CFL students. In terms of what the core value of Chinese culture is, there exists different views among the CFL teachers themselves, that it is not surprised to see there exists the discrepancy between the CFL teachers and CFL students. While designing and/or integrating culture into the CFL curricula and instruction, all CFL teacher participants revealed that in terms of cross-cultural fluency, there exists a huge gap of cultural understanding and perspectives (e.g., ideologies, mindsets, cultural values, views of culture, and cultural beliefs) between CFL teachers and CFL American students. They disagreed on many cultural issues due to the inevitable different perspectives absorbed from different social, cultural, and academic learning environment; different educational system; different point of cultural view; different outlooks or modes of culture behavior; and different family culture value from different contexts and different countries during their growth process. For example, these CFL teacher participants selected the essence of Chinese culture into the culture-language integration with a hope to best benefit students' CFL and culture proficiency. However, some American students perceived culture as an indicator of racial identity, therefore, they tried to maintain their own born culture and they were extremely cautious to learn another culture. To overcome these problems, the CFL teachers chose an alternative method by using the student-centered (instead of teacher-centered) approach to involve CFL students in materials and curricula selection. By doing so, they hoped to reduce or even avoid cultural conflicts or debates with students resulting from these disequilibria of ideologies, mindsets, cultural values, views of culture, cultural beliefs, and cultural understandings. For example, Yang said:

*I could not find exquisite materials to teach culture in my CFL class. I could not find the best quality texts with a common ground for teaching different cultures. Many textual materials are filled with biases, partial ideologies, or misunderstandings about each other's culture... If I used these kinds of materials to teach students about Chinese culture, students would think this is how all the Chinese cultures are.*

A sixth common challenge was the lack of social networks supports from the American administrative offices. To facilitate culture-language integration in CFL education, all the participants hoped to receive more of the social capital resources such as in social networks supports from the American federal government; from the local, state, and national educational departments, institutions, and schools; from the community; and from a variety of local or nation-wide professional organizations. To remedy these shortages, they tried to receive culture teaching materials and resources and professional development opportunities by building social networks with local Chinese communities; CFL community; educational administrators in their schools, foreign language teacher colleagues, and/or even with their Chinese relatives. They received positive experiences and felt better by building these social networks to promote culture-language integration into CFL curricula and instruction in the USA. For example, Chang noted:

*I hope I can be provided support from the American government, educational departments, schools, and professional organizations to help my teaching culture in the Chinese class. So far, they did not do well...*

Finally, a seventh common challenge area was the lack of professional development

opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding toward American culture. All the participants reflected that they received insufficient professional development opportunities that hinder their availability on developing and implementing quality culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools. Because all the participants were raised and educated in China or Taiwan and immigrated to the United States later in their adulthood. They have established the concept of Chinese culture in their early life, and it is not easy for them to change and adjust to a new American culture. Consequently, there exists a huge misunderstanding of culture concept and racial discourse between the CFL teachers and CFL American students. In addition, cultural matters are so complex and dynamic that new things appear, and learning is needed every day for both CFL teachers and students. Therefore, it is likely to require an ongoing process of teacher professional development and support outside the classroom to promote American cultural fluency. To alleviate these problems, they have requested to the authorities (e.g., teaching schools, local districts, state agencies, etc.) to allow them to join or immerse themselves in the appropriate professional development and/or training opportunities with other colleagues and/or counterparts in the similar disciplines or areas. By doing so, it will help them to gain more knowledge and core value of American culture with a hope to have an effective culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools. For example, Zhao noted:

*I feel that most Chinese teachers lack the knowledge to know students' cultural backgrounds... Also, some Chinese teachers here are really bad at the adaptation to professional development. These teachers are so proud of the so-called five thousand years of Chinese culture that they never realized how to adapt themselves to cultural concepts and transfer their teaching culture into acceptable ways for American students. They don't put themselves into students' shoes, and they are just not open-minded world people in terms of cultural proficiency.*

### *3.2 How Do Chinese Teachers Determine Cultural Content to Include in CFL Education and Criteria to Select Quality Cultural Materials?*

Among the seven common challenges found by the CFL teacher participants, the most critical common challenges (listed as the second common challenge in section 4.1, above) that requires further strategies to be dug out by the participants are related to the good quality of Chinese cultural content that need be included and the quality culture materials that need to be selected for the culture-language integration.

Although the participants tried their best to find good resources of good quality of cultural content and materials from varied avenues (e.g., self-exploration, expert CFL teachers, institutional libraries, workshops), nevertheless, so far, they did not have enough good quality of cultural resources to be used in their CFL classes. However, all the participants did not give up and are willing to continue to try to resolve these challenges individually. Based on the participants' teaching experiences in their daily life from different schools and circumstances, each participant has perceived and tried to resolve these challenges in a different manner. These challenges that were treated differently by each participant were summarized into two areas as follows: (1) the essential Chinese cultural content to include in

culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools, and (2) the criteria to select quality cultural materials in culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools.

### 3.2.1 The Essential Chinese Cultural Content to Include in Culture-Language Integration in CFL Education in American High Schools

All The challenges encountered by the CFL teacher participants containing the problem on what are the essential cultural content that should be included toward the culture-language integration into the CFL curricula and instruction in American high schools. All the participants have acknowledged that American students would receive many benefits from the Chinese culture-language integration into CFL curriculum and instruction. However, what are the essential Chinese cultural content that should be included into the integration remain debatable among these participants. Here are example perspectives used by each individual participant to respond to this phenomenon and to use different strategies trying to resolve this challenge encountered during the culture-language integration.

The first different strategy used was adopting the current societal materials rather than adopting the ancient Chinese literary resources to teach culture. Chang believed that teaching and then comparing the current societal issues (e.g., immigration issue) among distinct cultures could connect with American high school students with their daily lives. Consequently, it could help to facilitate students' understanding and acceptance for the learning content, to promote their critical thinking toward their own culture, and to foster mutual admiration among diverse cultures. Chang noted:

*I prefer to use the current societal issues to teach culture rather than the old cultural materials from the traditional Chinese pieces of literature. For example, I used a Chinese movie by Li Qunxing to connect to the issues around immigration occurring in today's American society, such as fake marriage, human trafficking, and transgressions... I let students debate if they agree that illegal immigrants should stay in the United States... In this way, I left students to think critically about this cultural issue and understand other's cultures. Students are also thrilled that you respect their independent thinking and ideas. Meanwhile, students have cultivated cross-cultural competencies such as mutual respect, understanding, and love.*

A second different strategy used was applying the traditional Chinese cultural materials in the CFL education. Unlike Chang, Yang thought that the traditional Chinese cultural materials (e.g., Chinese architecture) represented an orthodox of Chinese cultural legacy, therefore, they should be used as essential materials to be included in the integration. By doing so, it helped her to discuss, analyze, and compare a variety of Chinese and American cultural topics in her CFL classes. Yang said:

*Traditional Chinese cultures are the primary sources of my curriculum selection when teaching culture... For example, when I introduce Chinese architecture, I present to students all these sorts of Chinese buildings, discuss this topic, and analyze cultural comparisons. I also ask them to draw the typical Chinese architectures on a sheet of*

*paper and share their desirable architectures or building based on what they learned from this class. These traditional cultural topics are always welcoming in my Chinese class, and they are constantly working to help me teach culture.*

A third different strategy used was employing materials that can connect to students' real lives and to the mindsets of their learning mentalities. Zhao contested that when selecting and using culture materials, a CFL teacher should be situated at the students' perspectives rather than at the teacher's perspectives. The materials chosen should be able to stimulate students' language learning interests rather than to kill their enthusiasm. Furthermore, the chosen materials should be practical and able to connect to students' real lives and mindsets of learning mentalities (e.g., acceptance of mistakes, failure, challenges, and feedback). If students are happy with the chosen materials, they will continue to learn Chinese culture and language. Therefore, a CFL teacher could create a learning window for American students to know the Chinese culture unconsciously. Zhao stated:

*I always choose materials from students' perspectives rather than the scholar's perspective. I know that I use these materials to stimulate students' language learning interests rather than killing their enthusiasm.*

A fourth different strategy used was embracing a full dimension of variety of materials to teach culture. Dong stated that the materials used to teach culture should help students to learn a variety of culture knowledge at a maximum. Therefore, the instructional culture materials should include a variety of subjects such as human history, customs, traditions, geography, arts, paintings, lunisolar calendar, architecture, agriculture, and so on. Even personal individual materials (e.g., traveling photos, brochures, artifacts, portfolios) could be used as valuable contents to teach Chinese culture because they were easy to connect to students' living experiences. Dong indicated:

*I viewed traveling materials as another essential content to teach culture, and I selected cultural materials from my traveling portfolios to teach culture. For example, I included my traveling photos, brochures, artifacts in my CFL curriculum. Students like these sorts of stuff and listen to stories of my cultural experiences in these places. I also borrowed materials from some successful travelers in China to teach culture in my CFL class.*

A fifth different strategy used was adopting the materials that could convey the essential positive value of Chinese culture in teaching culture. Every culture has its own unique value of merit. Liang expressed that the materials used to teach Chinese culture should be able to convey the key unique value of Chinese culture so that students would be beneficial from learning the good parts of Chinese culture and then to enhance their own knowledge and add it to their own culture. Liang mentioned:

*I see embedding key cultural concepts as a critical concern in the CFL curriculum when teaching culture because these concepts convey the essential cultural knowledge and value of the culture. As well, they represented the highlighted essence of the culture. Therefore, I selected these materials and used them in my CFL curriculum.*

Finally, a sixth different strategy used was utilizing the common rather than the debatable materials among diverse cultures in teaching Chinese culture. There exist some commonalities between the diverse cultures. Fang emphasized that the instructional materials used to teach culture should include components that are common to other cultures. By doing so, students will be more willing to learn other culture (i.e., Chinese culture in this case) and understand the content better by beginning learning the commonalities between their own culture and other cultures. Specifically, for those students who were reluctant to lean other cultures in the beginning, hopefully, we can help them to change their attitude or mindset and then to accept other cultures and to gain knowledge from a diversity of inclusive commonality among a variety of cultures. Fang noted:

*I see the essential cultural materials in the CFL curriculum as having common ground. Therefore, I avoid using any debatable materials to prevent me from getting involved in any conflicts or troubles. Starting from this view, I chose materials that connected students in the school settings. Because cultural materials have a broad category, you cannot randomly select a cultural topic that is new to students' daily lives. So, I used these materials because they had a familiar background in the school setting.*

### 3.2.2 The Criteria to Select Quality Cultural Materials in Culture-Language Integration in CFL Education in American High Schools

In terms of the criteria that are needed to select quality cultural materials toward the culture-language integration into the CFL curricula and instruction in American high schools, each of the participants perceived differently either. Teaching Chinese culture in the USA is different from teaching Chinese culture to Chinese students in China. All the participants agreed that there is lack of quality Chinese culture materials that can be selected from the traditional Chinese textbooks because most of them were designed by local Chinese educators in China and to be used for students in China rather than to be used for American students, not even to mention they could connect to American students' daily lives. Furthermore, most of these textbooks were outdated, were old cliché, were dull and unattractive to American students, had one-sided point of view instead of having a multiple or global views, and focused on linguistics or language only. Thus, it is hard for the participants to find appropriate criteria from these textbooks to guide them to select quality Chinese cultural materials for the culture-language integration into the CFL curriculum and instruction in the US. Consequently, they are in need to have established their own criteria toward how to select quality cultural materials based on many years of experiences in teaching Chinese culture in the American classrooms. Below are some of the individual perspective and different strategy used by each of the participant to resolve this challenge regarding the needed criteria to select quality materials for the culture-language integration; though, these self-exploration criteria could not be perfect without the real field of experimental research and testimony.

The first different strategy used was employing a criterion that could be used for various levels of students. While there is no one size that fits all, Chang identified that a

differentiation criterion is needed when selecting quality cultural materials to be included in a culture-language integrated curriculum and instruction. Therefore, it could meet the needs of serving various levels of language proficiency students. For example: For the high language level of students, Chang used the cultural materials that allowed students to compare the differences among diverse cultures and then to create and perform an artifact based on their own cultural understanding. For the lower language level of students, Chang used the materials (e.g., Great Wall, Chinese Kung Fu, Chinese food, Chinese tea culture, and Chinese calligraphy) that could promote students' interest and attention to learn Chinese culture and language. This echoes one of the main ideas of Confucianism regarding teaching in line with a student's own ability. Chang stated:

*Referring to the criteria for selecting quality materials to teach culture and language together...I used a differentiated method among different levels of CFL students. For the high language level of students, I used materials that could do cultural comparison and performance. With the help of these materials, I ask students to do an artistic project and require them to perform their cultural tasks in class. Students must introduce their own culture and make the cultural comparison to other cultures. For the lower language level of students, I used the cultural materials which highlighted Chinese cultures such as Great Wall, Chinese Kongfu, Chinese food, tea, calligraphy, etc. I used these materials to draw students' attention to Chinese culture and then learn Chinese culture and language.*

A second different strategy used was making use of a criterion that could provoke students' understanding of the authentic Chinese culture from different angle of views. Yang stated that using a criterion with single-sided point of view of Chinese culture will generate confusion, biases, and misunderstandings toward Chinese culture for CFL American students. Therefore, Yang has set up her own selecting criterion (e.g., attractive, engaging, and interacting) from multiple angles of view for a specific topic of Chinese culture. By doing so, she found many quality and welcoming materials (e.g., Chinese music, Chinese food, Chinese paintings, Chinese martial arts, and Chinese entertainment activities) to be selected to teach Chinese culture and language. Yang said:

*I observed that there were very few textbooks of CFL education about teaching culture without confusion, biases, and misunderstandings... I don't want to use these biased texts with wrong ideologies in my CFL class. If I used these texts to teach students Chinese culture, they would think this is how all the Chinese culture looks and negatively influences students' understanding of Chinese culture. So, I started to form my standards to choose cultural materials in my CFL class. For example, I set up attractive, engaging, and interacting criteria. By implementing these criteria, I found many welcoming materials to be used in the CFL curriculum to teach cultures, such as music, food, paintings, martial arts, and entertaining activities. Students all had a lot of fun with these materials.*

A third different strategy used was adopting a criterion that could follow students' own natural aptitude or ability in learning Chinese. Zhao believed that when selecting appropriate cultural materials for the inclusive culture-language integrated curriculum and instruction, a

CFL teacher should pay attention to follow students own natural aptitude or ability in learning Chinese. The example criterion could include a student's cognitive and language development levels, knowledge understanding situation, learning interest, motivation, understanding of the advancement of today's society, and so on. This also reflects the same fundamental Confucianism educational philosophy on teaching in line with a student's own aptitude, as listed above. Zhao mentioned:

*You have to know that the materials you used to teach culture matter a lot to students' cross-cultural understanding and language proficiency. So, I chose the materials which match students' cognitive development and understanding. These materials must also have interests to draw students' attention... The last criterion of choosing cultural materials is to use only progressive culture rather than conservative culture. I did not mean to teach students advanced culture which asks them to march on the street; I mean I used the material that reflected the progress of human society.*

A fourth different strategy used was drawing upon a criterion that can help students make comparisons among different cultures. Dong stated that the chosen quality cultural materials in the inclusive CFL curriculum and instruction should be able to be compared with each other among diverse cultures. By doing so, the students can learn from making comparisons among different cultures, specifically, by comparing their own culture with other cultures. This student-centered approach could help students to learn Chinese culture by connecting with their own personal experiences and daily lives derived from their own culture comparison and resulting from appreciating each other's culture values. Dong noted:

*I taught Chinese clothing and connected it to famous brands like LI NING in China and NIKE in America. Then I compared the differences and similarities between these two brands. I asked students many questions about this topic: why do they like NIKE shoes rather than other brands? What are cultural factors influencing your choice of shoes? What are the cultural symbols of NIKE? I also see the cultural connection, comparison, and expansion as gauges to measure students' cognition both in knowledge and culture.*

A fifth different strategy used was exploiting a criterion that can facilitate students' life-long learning. Liang addressed that one should consider whether the chosen cultural materials to be included in CFL curriculum and instruction that can facilitate students' life-long learning in Chinese culture and language. Example of life-long learning features include whether the chosen materials could engage, motivate, develop, and guide students in learning Chinese for a long-run in their lives. Liang stated:

*Your teaching materials must connect students' learning interests and motivation. The next word I want to say is connecting. Use materials that focus on cultural similarities rather than differences. Students are not doing academic research to look for significant differences between different cultures. Let them experience the similarities between these cultures and enjoy the fun process. They will generate motivation to continue learning a foreign language and culture. If you stress many differences between these two languages and cultures, you jeopardize their curiosities, and their*

*learnings will not be lasting.*

Finally, a sixth different strategy used was applying a criterion that could treat students as an actor rather than as an audience. Fang deemed that only students who experienced another culture could know how to understand that culture. She stated that the traditional CFL textbooks concentrated on linguistic education and viewed culture as a facilitator to achieving this linguistic educational goal. Furthermore, these traditional cultural textbooks treated students as a culture recipient or an audience rather than a culture performer or an actor in experiencing the Chinese culture. Therefore, CFL students would receive very shallow levels of Chinese cultural understanding just from reading these textbooks. Fang noted:

*I don't use the traditional textbooks to guide my search for cultural materials in my CFL curriculum because they are not working. These texts are designed for linguistic learning, not for cultural learning. From my point of view, only students who experienced another culture know how to understand that culture. The traditional texts for teaching culture are not designed to achieve these goals.*

#### **4. Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to investigate what are the Chinese teachers' perceptions and lived experiences toward culture-language integration in their CFL courses in American high schools, and two research questions were investigated.

The first research question of this study was the common challenges and mutual strategies used to resolve the challenges that the Chinese teachers perceive toward the culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools. Based on the participants' real-life experiences, for the answers to the first research question, we found that all the participants have experienced abundance of difficulties and challenges in the process of Chinese culture-language integration. The challenges found from this study were summarized as follows:

- 1) The lack of an inclusive culture-language curricula in the CFL education;
- 2) The lack of good quality of Chinese cultural content and instructional materials;
- 3) The lack of a quick teaching philosophy that could help the CFL teachers' believing philosophy rooted from the East and be transmitted quickly to the teaching philosophy used in the West;
- 4) The usage of the obsolete CFL educational principles as well as educational guidelines, and assessment criteria used in the CFL education;
- 5) The disequilibria of ideologies, mindsets, cultural values, views of culture, cultural beliefs, and cultural understandings between the CFL teachers and American CFL students;
- 6) The lack of social networks supports from the American administrative offices; and

- 7) The lack of professional development opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding toward American culture in the process of Chinese culture-language integration.

Because all the participants were willing to offer their knowledge, time, and efforts to resolve these common challenges, they have found some practical strategies in this study with an intention to resolve the encountered common challenges together. These strategies were described and embedded into each one of the seven challenges separately.

These findings of the challenges are consistent with previous research studies. However, most of them were focusing on academic perspectives rather than from culture-oriented perspectives. We are happy to share the challenges and strategies found by the participants in the study that were perceived from the participants' culture-oriented perspectives. For example, what is the primary reason to cause these challenges from the culture-oriented aspects? As found in this study, the primary reason caused these challenges perceived by the participants may resulting from a conflict of cross-cultural fluency between these CFL teacher participants and American students when teaching culture in American high schools. What is cultural fluency? Livermore et al. (2015) defined cultural fluency as the ability to understand people's basic norms and perspectives from other cultures and recognize the context and cues of how they communicate, adapt, and respond in ways that help achieve a shared meaning. In addition, Carter and Carter (2021) described that the cultural fluency involves awareness of several dimensions of different cultures and uses of these elements for cross-culture communication, therefore the cross-cultural fluency "enables the communicator to convey meaning across cultures" (p. 255). In the field's practice, due to the cross-cultural fluency conflict, these CFL teachers have unfortunately experienced many phenomena such as argument, frustrations, confusion, stereotypes, and even humiliation while teaching culture to American students. By using the strategies found from this study, we hope not only to enhance the cross-cultural fluency between the participants CFL teachers and American students during the process of culture-language integration in the USA, but also to be able to provide guidance to other CFL counterparts in the field of CFL education, as well as to the language educators and stakeholders in the field of foreign language education in the USA.

Moreover, among the seven common challenges this group of participants have identified, we have realized one specific common challenge that needs further attention; therefore, we have laid it out as the second research question. The second research question of this study was the strategy used differently or uniquely by each individual CFL teacher participant to resolve the specific encountered challenges regarding (1) the essential Chinese cultural content to include in culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools, and (2) the criteria to select quality cultural materials in culture-language integration in CFL education in American high schools. For this second research question, why the strategies used by each individual participant were perceived and reported differently? To answer to the second research question, in addition to figure out what are the strategies that have been found from this study, we're also curious to know the reasons leading to using different strategies by each individual participant to resolve the challenges related to the Chinese cultural content and quality culture materials selection. In the following sections, for each one of these two areas

related to the essential Chinese cultural content and the criteria needed to select quality culture materials, we will first lay out the strategies we have found from this study in each area, and then we will discuss the reasons that led to the differences among this group of CFL teacher participants.

In the first area regarding the strategies used to address to the essential Chinese cultural content that should be included in the culture-language integration, to resolve the challenges encountered by the participants, the strategies we have found from the study containing (1) adopting the current societal materials rather than adopting the ancient Chinese literary resources to teach culture, (2) applying the traditional Chinese cultural materials in the CFL education, (3) employing the materials that are able to connect to students' real lives and to the mindsets of their learning mentalities, (4) embracing a full-dimension of variety of materials to teach culture, (5) adopting the materials that could convey the essential positive value of Chinese culture in teaching culture, and (6) utilizing the common rather than the debatable materials among different cultures in teaching Chinese culture.

Why the strategies used by each individual participant were perceived and reported differently in this first area. The reasons that led to the differences among this group of participants may resulting from different personal beliefs on what is the core value of Chinese culture. In fact, there was never a consistent understanding of the core value of any kind of culture because we are all human beings. Everyone could understand and define the core value of a culture in a different way. Personal belief on what is the core value of Chinese culture could affect everyone's perspective toward what are the essential contents that should be included in the CFL curriculum and instruction. If we can empower the CFL teachers with cultural capital (i.e., the "knowledge of the norms, values, beliefs, and ways of life of the groups to which people belong" as explained by McNamee and Miller in 2004), it may help them to find out the core value of Chinese culture with a hope to gain consensus perspectives on what are the essential Chinese cultural content that should be included in the Chinese culture-language integration.

In the second area in terms of strategies used to resolve the challenges on the necessary criteria that the participants used to select quality materials in the culture-language integration, the strategies we have found to resolve these challenges from the study including (1) employing a criterion that could be used for different levels of students, (2) making use of a criterion that could provoke students' understanding of the authentic Chinese culture from different angle of views, (3) adopting a criterion that could follow students' own natural aptitude or ability in learning Chinese, (4) drawing upon a criterion that is able to help students making comparisons among different cultures, (5) exploiting a criterion that can facilitate students' life-long learning, and (6) applying a criterion that could treat students as an actor rather than as an audience.

Why the strategies used by each individual participant were perceived and reported differently in this second area. The reasons that led to the differences could resulting from the John Dewey's educational progressivism that focusing on students' learning that should be based on their experiences learned from inquiry and exploration rather than from the

repetition learning and facts remembering. Many CFL teachers incorporated the educational principle of Deweyan progressivism to guide the criteria in selecting the quality materials. Furthermore, most of them considered education as a social mechanism to prepare students for modern life's social, political, and economic realities rather than using education as a byproduct to maintain existing social orders and to extend fixed social beliefs and norms. From this aspect, some of the participants appealed for calling a separation of the traditional Chinese cultural texts, which acclaimed following traditions but blocked cultivating critical thinking among students. Based on these perspectives, most of the Chinese teachers were reluctant to select criteria using the textbooks directly written by authors and published in China. They claimed that most of these kinds of textbooks still embraced the traditional linguistic perspectives and were not eager to include Western learners' culture into the CFL curricula and instruction for the Western learners. Under this phenomenon, no matter how hard the CFL teachers proclaimed that they were adopting student-centered pedagogy in the culture-language integration, the textbooks they used remained teacher-centered, linguistic-focused, and academic-oriented.

## **5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The study was completed with limitations. Our findings could be constrained by the following limitations. First, it was limited by the nature and size of its sample. Because the participants for this study are CFL teachers who are teaching in American high schools, by the nature, there are few K-16 foreign language programs available in the USA, not to mention in the American high schools. Looking further, the CFL is just a part of foreign language programs available in American high schools. Due to the limited number of foreign language programs, as a result, it constrained the number of 6 participants who voluntarily participated in this study. Although, as suggested by Morse (1994) and Creswell (1998), we have six of the sample size which is appropriate for our phenomenological qualitative study, future studies could be enhanced by inviting more high school CFL teacher participants to join the study to increase the sample size, which would improve the generalizability and power of trustworthiness of the study.

Second, our study was conducted with all female CFL teachers who are working in the school setting. In the traditional Chinese society, the teacher occupation has been viewed as a female job because most of the characteristics of being as a teacher were considered as feminine in popular perception (Zhou, 2023). People usually think that a teaching career would fit better for a female than a male. Part of these reasons may result from the schools' prestigious working environment that fit better for female and the reduced teaching schedule with long summer and winter breaks that could help female teachers better on taking good care of their family at the same time. Of course, the teaching compensation and payment are manageable. That is why it happens often that there are more female than male teachers in most of the school settings in the Chinese educational system. Therefore, it is not surprised to see there are more female than male CFL teachers in the American high schools, which consequently restricted the gender selection for the study. Nevertheless, the findings of our study are

particularly encouraging considering the limit gender selection availability and still make a significant contribution in identifying abundance of challenges and strategies to resolve the challenges in the Chinese culture-language integration in the American high school. However, with the sample was solely all female which made it impractical to investigate gender-related differences in performance. As gender also plays a vital role in the phenomenological research regarding cultural studies, a sample includes both females and males would allow the examination of different perspectives between gender and culture aspects on the Chinese culture-language integration. Revision of the further research efforts in this area could be improved by including both female and male American high school CFL teachers participating in the study if one wants to generalize the findings related to gender-related differences in advancing the research outcomes.

Third, all our participants were from the public school system in the USA. While we can take the advantages by analyzing data from the same public school system, we would miss the opportunities to compare the various aspects perceived by other CFL teachers who are teaching in different school systems, such as private schools. Due to the different funding resources, socioeconomic status, mission statement, management mechanism, and so forth between public and private school systems, it may result in different cultural understanding and perspectives toward the culture-language integration in the CFL education in the American high schools. Future studies may include CFL teacher participants from both public and private school systems to generate different perspectives to compare and identify the similarities and differences from these two groups of CFL teachers. By doing so, we hope to provide CFL teachers to develop more solid strategies for the culture-language integration in the American high schools.

Finally, the study took place in a Midwestern state in the USA by reason of taking the advantages of the lead author's professional organization affiliation. It not only restricts the number of qualified participants, but also limits the diversity for the data collection. Because the policy (e.g., gender ratio of CFL teacher) and support levels (e.g., frequency and scope of professional development) to the CFL teachers and programs could be different among different states in the USA. Different teachers' real-life experiences may result in different perspectives toward the culture-language integration in the CFL education in the American high school. Future studies may expand the sample scale to recruit more qualified participants from many states as much as we can so that we can collect a greater number of participants with a diversity of data to be analyzed for better research outcomes.

In summary, future research would benefit from increasing the sample size, examining potential gender-related differences, identifying similarities and differences between different school systems, and considering the relative merits of expanding the sample scale to multiple states in the USA.

## **6. Significance of the Study**

The study was conducted based on the CFL teacher participants' lived experiences from their

front line of authentic teaching in the American high school, the challenges they encountered and strategies they have found are genuine and first-handed. Thus, the findings from the study could be viewed as significant and valuable.

Furthermore, to answer the first research question, from this study we have found 7 common challenges with mutual strategies used to resolve these challenges encountered by the participants toward the culture-language integration into the CFL curricula and instruction in American high schools. In addition, to answer the second research question of this study, we have found 12 strategies used to resolve the challenges encountered by the participants during the Chinese culture-language integration, 6 for resolving the challenges on the essential contents that should be included in the culture-language integration, and the other 6 for resolving the challenges on the necessary criteria used to select quality materials for the Chinese culture-language integration in the CFL education in the USA. Although, to answer the second research question, the strategy used by each individual participant is different from each other, however, after we have put the 12 strategies found from the second research question together with the 7 strategies found from the first research question, it results in a collection of 19 practical strategies in all. Altogether it works!

All together with these authentic findings from this study, the results are trustworthy to be used to resolve the challenges encountered not just only by this group of CFL teacher participants, but also by other CFL counterparts, by other foreign language educators and administrators, as well as by language policy decision makers and stakeholders in the USA.

Without any doubt, the significant findings resulting from this study could provide clear guidance and directions specifically for those who were struggling with teaching culture in their CFL classes. And/or even for those teachers who are struggling in teaching culture in foreign language courses. It works when we collaborate in finding the strategies to resolve the encountered challenges we faced during the Chinese culture-language integration in the American high schools. It shed light on the significance of the study in the fields of CFL education as well as other foreign language areas in the USA and worldwide.

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### **Authors contributions**

Dr. Song authored the original dissertation. Dr. Li assisted with data collection and analysis of the dissertation. Dr. Wang, the First Advisor of the dissertation, supervised and guided the entire dissertation project and identified key portions of the dissertation for development into a manuscript suitable for journal publication. Dr. Song and Dr. Wang collaboratively and substantially rewrote the manuscript, producing the final version submitted for this journal publication. Dr. Clonan-Roy served as the Methodologist for the dissertation, reviewed the manuscript, and provided feedback. All authors proofread and approved the final manuscript for publication.

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### **Data availability statement**

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**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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