Community and technical colleges in the United States are experiencing an expansion of racial and ethnic diversity in students, faculty, and administrators. From 1996 to 2006, the number of Asian female college students increased 55.3%, from 13,184 to 20,477. The number of Asian male students increased 48.9%, from 9,731 to 14,493 (Aud et al, 2010). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, Asian/Pacific Islander students made up 7% of students in the 1,032 U.S. public two-year colleges, only 1% of U.S. higher education administrative positions (including executive positions) are held by people of Asian descent (AACC, 2010). It is crucial to recognize the complexity of diversity and unique needs of each individual, as the colleges are designed to help students achieve their educational and personal goals. As a new emerging group in higher education, Chinese immigrant women who are middle-level administrators play a role as important as that of other leaders. Yet current the literature include very limited information about this population. In addition, addressing the barriers and challenges that these women overcome will assist administrators as they work to create more effective work environments.

This study explored the work experiences of adult Chinese immigrant female middle-level leaders at West Coast community and technical colleges. Because this is an emerging population,
the numbers of these women is continuing to grow, however, the number of mid-level leaders
who are Chinese immigrants is small and consequently the population for this study was limited.
Of the five participants, all five were born in Mainland China or Hong Kong, they are between
28 and 50 years old. Except one participant, who currently holds a working visa, the other four
women became U.S. citizens within the past ten years.

Five Chinese immigrant female administrators were interviewed in this case study. A case study
is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its
real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not
clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p.18). This research method provided a tool for this study to explore
the life experiences and perspectives of this emerging population. Therefore, a descriptive
holistic multiple-case study with single units of analysis was used as a research method. The
constant comparative analytic process offered a more comprehensive hermeneutic framework
and provided an in-depth understanding of the status of adult female Chinese immigrants in
middle-level administrator positions at community colleges in Oregon and Washington.

The common factors that were shared among these female administrators that influenced them
were mentoring from their peers and supervisors, networking within their workplaces and in their
communities, and being reflective practitioners. Language barriers, limited professional
development opportunities, and work-personal life conflict were identified as work-related issues
that impact their ability to grow in their positions.

The results of this study indicated that, according to these participants, more needs to be done to
help them grow professionally and to provide support for their unique needs. Additionally, this
study contributed to fill a gap in the literature by offering a thoughtful review of middle-level
Chinese female adult immigrants who work at West Coast Community and Technical Colleges.
In addition, this study also provided insightful information to administrators in community and technical colleges who seek to improve the diversity awareness of minority populations, especially the Chinese American female administrators on campus.
The Experiences of Middle-Level Chinese Female Adult Immigrants Working at West Coast Community and Technical Colleges

by
Lin Zhou

A DISSERTATION
submitted to
Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Presented December 1, 2014
Commencement June, 2015
Doctor of Philosophy dissertation of Lin Zhou presented on December 1, 2014.

APPROVED:

Co-Major Professor, Representing Education

Co-Major Professor, Representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Lin Zhou, Author
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge to all those who supported and guided me through the experience of the doctoral adventure. First I would like to thank the five Chinese American women for the time and effort they spent to accommodate this study through meetings, phone calls, and emails. The journey would not have been possible without them.

I am grateful to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Alex Sanchez, Dr. Shelly Dubkin-Lee, Dr. Michael Dalton, Dr. Jeff Morrell, and Dr. Sandra Flower-Hill, for their encouragement, advice, and guidance. My sincerest thanks to Dr. Sanchez, who provided important feedback and direction to make sure I was on the right track. Dr. Dubkin-Lee, I am so very grateful for your quick responses when I was lost and the confidence you gave to me to complete the program on time. Thank you.

Special thanks go to Dr. Marcia Somer, a CCLP graduate, the person who provided me the idea about starting a research study on Asian American middle-level administrators in community and technical colleges. She brought a wealth of perspective to my study. I enjoyed learning from her.

I am indebted to my mentors and friends, Dr. Mike Metke, Dr. Sharon McGavick, Dr. Ron Langrell, Dr. Lee Lambert, JD, Dr. Andrea Olsen, JD, and Mr. Greg Roberts, who were always there for me when I need guidance and advice. They are my role models, and they have helped me develop my leadership skills that I practice every day.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my parents, Zhiyun Xu and Xianjie Zhou. Their unconditional love and support make me the luckiest daughter in the world. Even when I was a little girl in China, I wanted to make my parents proud. They were extremely excited about my starting my PhD and now completing it. Dad and Mom, this dissertation is dedicated to you!
Finally, I would like to give praise and thanks to my wonderful husband, Jason Zhu, who is my best friend in the world. Your wisdom, patience, sacrifices, and encouragement have given me the strength to complete this journey. You have been with me every step of the way. It was you who instilled in me the desire to learn and helped me develop to my fullest potential. Thank you.
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Section One: Focus and Significance

Middle-level administrators in community and technical colleges play a key role in providing quality educational experiences to students. They act as “agents” to handle day-to-day operation of departments and are required to effectively connect the entire campus of faculty, students, and staff, as well as business, industry, and community partners. Besides heavy workloads, these middle-level managers face various issues like those other administrators face, such as changes in funding resources, changes in technology, and diverse populations (Bailey, 2008; Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010; Watba & Farmer, 2006, Yeh, 2007). As Bailey (2008) noted, more research and investigation on community and technical college administrators will help colleges prepare the next generation of administrators for leadership to meet the challenges they will face.

In higher education, Asian/Pacific American (APA) women hold a smaller share of middle-level administration positions, particularly in relation to the numbers of Asian/Pacific Islander students in higher education (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Community College Students, Faculty, and Administrators by Ethnicity (adopted from Aud et al., 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian/Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native</th>
<th>Non-Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Students enrolled in degree-granting institutions</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators (Executive/Administrative &amp;</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In fall 2008, Asia/Pacific Islander students made up 7% of students in the 1,032 U.S. public two-year colleges (Aud et al., 2010). Included within the 17% of minority faculty, APA faculty were only about 4%. This percentage represented about half of the percentage of students of the same ethnic group. Furthermore, APAs held only 3% of executive, administrative, and managerial positions. Therefore, the number of female APA administrators in middle-level positions was even smaller (AACC, 2010). Finally, of the limited APA middle-level administrators, the number of female Chinese adult immigrants who work at West Coast community and technical colleges was even smaller.

The focus of this research was on middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges, including deans, associate deans, directors, associate directors, and managers. Sandwiched between the executive leadership and faculty and staff, the middle-level management positions tend to be demanding and complex. Careful attention must be paid to the middle-level administrators, as they are the ones who run the day-to-day duties: “transfer, career preparation, community education, and support services” (Bragg, 2000, p. 75). In addition, as many senior administrators approach the ends of their careers, filling key leadership openings is vital for community colleges (Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010; Shults, 2001). Understanding the roles and responsibilities of middle-level management will help community and technical colleges provide the foundation for moving colleges ahead academically as well as prepare future leaders (Gillett-Karam et al., 1999; Shults, 2001; Wild, Ebbers, Shelley, & Gmelch, 2003). As a result, the population this study focused on was middle-level administrators at community
and technical colleges. More specifically, the focused population of this study was adult Chinese immigrant women who work in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges. Hence, Chinese Americans are used throughout this paper to encompass the Chinese ethnic groups. In addition, adult immigrants were defined for this study as U.S. residents who were born and raised in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan.

To adequately support the noticeable number of Asian students, especially Chinese students, it is essential to hire more Chinese administrators to “assist in attracting, socializing, and helping students matriculate” (Dean, Bracken, & Allen, 2009, p. 151). Minority students need to see more leaders on campus who share similar experiences and culture-specific values (Dean et al, 2009). Such a connection can significantly help students overcome cultural obstacles and contribute to individual learning successes. In addition, characteristics of women of color in higher education have been well documented (Berkel & Constantine, 2005; Ebbers, Gallisath, Rockel, & Coyan, 2000; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Jones, 2005; Opp & Gosetti, 2002). The roles of adult Chinese immigrant women who hold middle-level administrative positions have not been as thoroughly studied. This study would fill that void.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Chinese adult immigrant women who hold middle-level leadership positions at West Coast community and technical colleges. The intent of the study was to identify which factors influenced these women to enter community and technical college leadership positions and to determine the workplace issues they might face.
Along with an increasing diversity in the United States as a whole, the population of students, faculty, staff, and administrators from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds in community and technical colleges has also grown. Many colleges have demonstrated the value of diversity in enhancing the quality of learning for students by hiring more females and people of color for administrative positions (Opp & Gosetti, 2002). The important role that community and technical college female middle-level administrators play needs to be recognized, as they work closely with students and faculty and serve as mentors and role models.

According to statistics from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Asian people hold only 3% of higher education administrative positions (including executive positions) (AACC, 2010). As a result, middle-level female leaders who are adult Chinese immigrants occupy less than 1% of the overall leadership positions, as they are just part of the overall education administrative positions category. Yet, more than 7% of current college students are Asian (Aud et al., 2010). There was a need to research the experiences of adult Chinese immigrant female administrators, with the purpose of providing information that might lead to an increase in the number of the middle-level Chinese American female administrators to provide support to the increasing numbers of Chinese students.

**Research Questions**

To capture the whole picture of Chinese adult immigrant female middle-level administrators in community and technical colleges, I asked them several questions to help me understand the experiences and challenges they encountered at work. The research questions examined in this study were:
1. What are the life experiences of female adult Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

2. What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these female adult Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges?

3. What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

The questions were developed based on the following: personal background, practical issues, and underdeveloped literature on middle-level Chinese adult immigrant female administrators in community and technical colleges.

First, as an Asian woman who was born in China and came to the United States at age 30, it was in my personal interest to explore how my colleagues who were like me think about their professional lives as middle-level college leaders. I had a desire to be a voice for middle-level Chinese American leaders, as they have contributed significantly to community and technical colleges without much recognition. This study allowed me to widen my perspective and enhance my personal development. As a result, I am able to help other emerging community and technical college leaders develop new perspectives and strategies appropriate for the growing diversity issues related to Chinese students, faculty, and administrators.

Second, more and more adults are immigrating from Asia to the United States to work and study (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). It is a huge life change for these people, as they must start over
as adults in a country without family and friends. Traditional values and family structure continue to play an important role for Asian people, especially Chinese women. Recognizing their cultural beliefs and values helps identify the characteristics of female Chinese American administrators.

Finally, compared to other leaders in higher education, female administrators of color face distinctive barriers (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009). However, the literature is limited on the specific population that this study focused on: adult Chinese female immigrant middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges. It is important to understand the work-related concerns this population faces, such as competencies relating to language and lack of appropriate training, encouragement, and support from their institutions.

**Significance of the Study**

The study of adult Chinese immigrant women who hold middle-level leadership positions at West Coast community and technical colleges was significant for the following three reasons:

- There is limited literature available on this topic. The study was particularly relevant in the area of challenges that middle-level adult Chinese immigrant female leaders face.
- The study will provide useful information to administration in community and technical colleges that seek to improve the diversity awareness of minority populations, especially the Chinese American female administrators on campus.
- The study was of personal interest to me. It reflected my personal experience as a Chinese American woman working at a technical college on the West Coast.

These areas of significance are discussed in the paragraphs below.
Limitation in Literature

Most of the literature on how Asian Americans work and live in the United States focuses only on second- or third-generation Asian immigrants and Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders (Chou, 2008; Fong, 2002; Hyun, 2005). Regarding Chinese immigrants, there is limited published literature on those who were born and raised in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan and moved to the United States as adults. Therefore, it was difficult to locate relevant literature on Chinese female adult immigrant leaders.

In the last 20 years, there has been an explosion of scholarly literature focused on the slow movement of female leadership with different ethnic backgrounds into higher education (ACE, 2007; Jones, 2005; Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Schwartz, 1997). However, absent from this literature is any considerable attention to Asian female administrators in community colleges, especially those who are adult Chinese immigrants to the United States.

This study aimed to add to the understanding of the status of community and technical college adult Chinese female immigrant middle-level administrators in literature. Additionally, the study attempted to remedy the deficiencies identified above and provide a unique contribution to the scholarly literature.

Information for Community Colleges

Although Asian Americans in the United States share physical and cultural characteristics, research indicates that adult immigrants face greater challenges in the workplace than later generations. For example, language barriers can prevent the new immigrants from career advancement, while Asian-Americans who were born in the United States may not have the same issue (Abouguendia & Noels, 2001; Han, Kim, Lee, Pistulka, & Kim, 2007; Qin, Way &
Rana, 2008). Accordingly, there is a need to distinguish between the experiences of adult immigrant leaders from those of Asian-Americans born in the United States. Understanding such differences can help guide community and technical college leaders with specific leadership practices.

In today’s community colleges, the number of international students, especially those who are Asian-Americans, has increased greatly. In fall 2008, Asian students made up 7% of U.S. public two-year college populations (Aud et al., 2010), and the majority of these students were women. According to Aud et al. (2010), from 1996 to 2006, the number of Asian female college students increased 55.3%, from 13,184 to 20,477. The number of male students increased 48.9%, from 9,731 to 14,493.

Minorities made up 17% of U.S. faculty, and only 6% were Asian and Pacific Islanders in two-year colleges in 2008 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The percentage of Asian college administrators, at about 1%, was significantly less than the percentage of Asian students and faculty; furthermore, their representation was much less than that of other ethnic groups. Because male and female, first, second, or later generations of Asian-Americans comprised this 1% of administrative positions, it was notable that the share of adult Chinese immigrant women was even smaller. As a result, there was a need to address the issue of underrepresented first-generation Chinese adult immigrant female college leaders.

**Personal Interest**

As an Asian woman who was born in China and came to the United States at age 30, it was my personal interest to explore how colleagues who are like me think about their professional lives as middle-level college leaders. I had a desire to be a voice for middle-level, first-
THE EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE LEVEL ADULT CHINESE

generation, adult Chinese immigrant female college leaders, as they have contributed significantly to community colleges but with little recognition. This study allowed me to widen my perspective and enhance my personal development. As a result, I am able to help other emerging community and technical college leaders develop new perspectives and strategies appropriate for the growing diversity issues related to Chinese students, faculty, and administrators.

I also wanted to be a role model and mentor for other Chinese women who immigrated to the United States and needed help overcoming barriers to career advancement or seeking educational opportunities in community and technical colleges. I wanted to use my experience to advise Asian female professionals, especially Chinese Americans, to empower them to take charge of their professional and personal growth.

Summary

The lack of literature on adult Chinese female immigrant leaders in West Coast community and technical colleges was one of the reasons I was interested in this study. It was important to understand that the issues and challenges that first-generation Chinese female adult immigrant administrators face are different from those faced by other female leaders in community and technical colleges. This study will add to the literature on understanding this group of women.

Additionally, as a middle-level administrator in a community or technical college, I had often felt lonely, because I did not see many Asian women, especially first-generation adult Chinese immigrant administrators, in the system. In 2009, in Washington State, Asian Americans were about 7% of the total statewide population, which was about double the national
average of 4.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). However, the representation of Asian female leaders in community and technical colleges did not reflect this percentage.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Chinese adult immigrant women who hold middle-level leadership positions at West Coast community and technical colleges. The intent of the study was to identify the factors that influenced these women to enter community and technical college leadership positions and to determine the issues they might face.

The major research questions were: 1) What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges? 2) What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these adult female Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges? and 3) What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

This study helped me and others learn the life and professional experiences of these adult female Chinese immigrant administrators who were working as middle-level leaders at West Coast community and technical colleges, including colleges in Washington, Oregon, and California. I was interested in finding the work-related issues they face. I believe that the experiences I discovered will be a meaningful contribution to the literature on community and technical colleges and to the practices at these institutions, and that they can enhance professional career development for middle-level administrators.
Section Two: Literature Review

The scholarly review of the literature for this research concluded that there was a limited number of research studies focused on female adult Chinese immigrant leadership in community colleges. To gain depth about the experiences of community college female Chinese American administrators, a review of materials focusing on the changing demographics and cultural perspectives and values was included. Additionally, the literature review studied leadership diversity in community colleges. Furthermore, the research focused specifically on Asian women who were first-generation adult Chinese Americans and held leadership positions in community and technical colleges.

Approach to Review

To conduct the literature review, I used both electronic and print media, as well as library reference systems to locate sources. Besides using the Oregon State University Library and University of Washington Bothell Library, I also searched Seattle’s King County Library system for books that relate to leadership, Asian culture, minority issues, and diversity. I found only a few books relevant to my study. However, I found several dissertations from the Oregon State University library that focused on similar topics. I was able to absorb useful information and ideas from these studies.

The main database system I used to conduct the research for my reading assignment was EBSCOHost, a scholarly and multidisciplinary full-text searching system. Within EBSCOHost, the specific databases I used were Academic Search Premier (scholarly journals in academic disciplines), ERIC (digital library of education literature), and Professional Development
collection (journal articles for professional educators). These online resources provided access to primary literature materials, which made the research process more efficient and effective.

Because the general topic of my dissertation is first-generation adult Chinese immigrant female leadership in community colleges, I excluded any literature relating to Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. In addition, I did not include non-English literature in this study due to concern for the accuracy of translation. Furthermore, I felt it is not relevant to cover literature on higher education systems outside the United States, as education systems in Asia are quite different. To boost the search engine ranking and narrow the yield, it was important to find the right keywords. I used the following four groups of keywords to look for articles from the databases:

Group 1: Leadership, Management, Administrative, Administrator
Group 2: Community College, Technical College, Higher Education
Group 3: Female, Women, Chinese, Asian, First Generation, Minority, Color, Culture, Diversity
Group 4: Mentor, Network, Professional Development, Relationship

Definition of Terms

**Asian American.** The definition of Asian American by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) included individuals of East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian origin: Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Asian Indian, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistani, Thai, Indonesian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Malaysian, Mongolian, Nepalese, Singaporean, and Burmese.

**Adult Chinese immigrant.** For the purpose of this study, adult Chinese immigrant was defined as a U.S. resident who was born and raised in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan.
First-generation immigrants. For the purpose of this study, first-generation immigrants were considered to be those immigrants who were born and grew up outside of the United States and settled in the United States as adults.

Middle-level administration in a community college. Garza Mitchell and Eddy (2008) defined director, dean of instruction or/and student services, and department chair as the middle-level leaders in a community college. For the purpose of this study, middle-level administrators were considered deans, associate deans, directors, associate directors, and managers at community and technical colleges.

Minority. For the purposes of this study, a minority was a sociological group that has a smaller population than the controlling majority group and that does not make up a politically dominant voting majority of the total population of a given society (Minority, n.d.).

Structure of the Literature Review

Based on the literature review, three main themes emerged: (a) Asian Americans in the United States (background, culture, and values); (b) gender issues in community colleges; and (c) the status of adult Chinese immigrant female middle-level administrators in community colleges.

The first section provides a profile of the Asian American in the United States. Statistics and review of Asian culture and values are used to discuss the current demographics, the cultural perspective, and social influences of the Asian American community. The second section addresses the issue of administrative diversity in community colleges. There is much literature focusing on diversity in community colleges, including diversity of students, faculty, staff, and leadership. This section explores relevant research focusing on diversity among community college administrators. The last section of the literature review is designed to illustrate what
adult Chinese immigrant female middle-level administrators in community and technical colleges said about their professional lives. Due to the small volume of scholarly literature on this topic, the study included a review of the experience of middle-level administrators, both male and female, working as deans and department chairs in American community colleges.

**Asian Americans in the United States: Background, Culture, and Values**

To develop a better understanding of Asian Americans within higher education, the first step was to be aware of the history of Asian Americans in the United States as well as their background, culture, and values. Each of these elements provided specific evidence to understand the Asian American population, including those who work as academic leaders in community colleges.

About 200 years ago, the Chinese were the first Asians to arrive to the West Coast of the United States. Not long after, the Japanese started to move to Hawaii and California to work in the agriculture industry. About 100 years later, immigrants from the Philippines came to the United States as refugees. After the Vietnam War, more than 130,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos landed on U.S. shores. In the early 1980s, new immigrants from other Asian countries such as India and Pakistan started coming to the United States (Johnson, 2010).

Two hundred years after the first immigration, the population of Asians in the United States is rapidly increasing. According to the U.S. Census (2007), more than a quarter of the United States’ foreign-born population comes from Asia. The number has been increasing for the past 50 years. In 2008, the population of Asians alone was about 13.5 million (U.S. Census, 2009). In 2009, the Census Bureau projected that by 2050, the Asian population will increase from 4.65% to 7.84% of the total population (Figure 2.1.).
Figure 2.1. U.S. Population Projections: 2010–2050 (adopted from Ortman Guarneri, 2009)

With the increasing Asian population, many researchers have recognized the importance of understanding the family values and cultural and racial identity among Asian students in U.S. community colleges. For example, one study was conducted with 169 Asian-American and African-American female college students. The results showed that family and close relationships are important to both Asian and African women (Berkel & Constantine, 2005). For them, greater relationship harmony scores reflected greater life satisfaction. As a result, the women who were more satisfied with their lives also were more likely to be successful in college. Thus, the research findings provide a general picture of how Asian-American women define themselves in terms of the closeness of their relationships with others and how these relationships impact their lives. Despite the importance of this research, the limitations of the study cannot be omitted. First, the participants were all from one university, and generalizing the
results beyond the participants in this study could be inaccurate. Second, one of the methods the researcher used was self-report. It is possible that some participants did not answer the questions honestly. Next, the researchers used purposive sampling to conduct the study. There was concern about samples (169 African American and Asian American women) that were not easily defensible as being representative of populations due to potential subjectivity of the researchers. To examine the relational variables and life satisfaction in the sample of the participants, other methods could have been used, such as focus groups and interviews. Overall, however, the Berkel and Constantine (2005) study offered a thread that ties Asian American women from diverse cultures and family backgrounds with their college lives.

For many Asian women, education is a way to achieve greater gender equality in the United States (Lee, 2006). Traditionally, Asian girls are supposed to stay close to home to help their parents with housework and look after their siblings, while boys are considered more important and are able to go to school. Wing (2007) used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to conduct a study on minority students. She reported that Asian students are high academic achievers and are outperforming white students. Both Lee (2006) and Wing (2007) showed that Asian female students work harder than their peers of other races because they are under family or cultural pressure to perform to achieve their dreams. Even though the researchers focused only on Asian female students, it was possible that this study, which focused on Asian female college administrators from common cultural backgrounds, would produce similar results.

Besides the influence they received from their own cultural background, having career role models was also important for Asian students, both male and female. Karunanayake and Nauta (2004) conducted a study with 220 students from one university in the Midwest. They used a
chi-square analysis to determine whether students selected career role models whose race was similar to their own and whether minority students had fewer role models than Caucasian students. According to the results, racial minority students identified with their own race role models. Therefore, with the increased number of Asian students, there may be a need to increase the number of Asian administrators in community colleges. Lack of same-race role models could result in barriers for Asian students and could affect their career development (Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004).

Similarly, a 2008 report on Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) indicated a need to pay closer attention to the poor representation of AAPIs in higher education. This research was conducted by the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education. The report suggested it is vital for colleges that are developing a better understanding of AAPIs to respond to the rapidly changing demographic trends in higher education (Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009).

In summary, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Asian and Pacific Islander populations continue to be the fastest growing race groups in the United States and will reach 41 million by 2050 (2009). As a result, the number of the Asian students will increase in higher education. It is important to recognize the need for Asian leadership in community colleges in the near future, and colleges should prepare for it.

**Gender Issues in Community Colleges**

In the United States, ethnic diversity and the number of females in community college student bodies continue to grow (Aud et al., 2010). However, women, especially female administrators of color, still face barriers in higher education (Somer, 2007). According to a
survey by the American Council on Education (2007), the percentage of female presidents of two-year colleges jumped from 10% in 1980 to 23% 20 years later. Regardless of the fact that the number doubled, the report shows that women’s progress has slowed in recent years. Jones (2005) proclaimed, “Women have been omitted from leadership positions and have obtained devalued positions, prestige, and ultimately value within higher education” (para. 3).

To find out the new definition of leadership in community college administrators, Eddy and Van DerLinden (2006) undertook a national survey of community college administrators. The 1,700 administrators were randomly selected from different colleges. A reasonable response rate of 54% was received. The results showed “gender needs to be considered as an analytic category versus merely a demographic variable in order to formulate policy that adequately addresses the needs of women” (p.11). The authors claimed that, in the 10 years leading up to the study, the status of female leadership in higher education remained almost the same. Although this study provided good data on the status of women in community college administration, it failed to examine the personal experiences of these female administrators.

Furthermore, women of color, because of historical, cultural, and social factors, face additional challenges in becoming administrators or obtaining administrative positions in community colleges (Dean, Bracken, & Allen, 2009). They suffer from lack of mentoring, underrepresentation, and the issue of cultural self-identity (Somer, 2007). To overcome these barriers, women of color need to develop strategies to survive and thrive.

Researchers have recognized the phenomenon of the challenges women of color face in administrator roles in community colleges. For example, Opp and Gosetti (2002) conducted a study with 71 participants who were identified as women of color working in community
colleges to predict trends and changes in the proportional representation of women by race/ethnicity among two-year community college administrators. Even though the data the researchers used was from 1991 to 1997, the results were significant. The authors reported it is critical to increase the representation of female administrators of color to connect to campus climates and cultures and serve culturally and linguistically diverse students. This study pointed toward the need for female administrators of color; unfortunately, it did not provide information about their experiences. Further, it failed to distinguish between the experiences of different ethnic and cultural groups of female administrators.

In brief, women today, especially women of color, continue to face disadvantages in leadership roles in higher education (Jones, 2005; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Nevertheless, there continues to be a need for women of color in administrative roles to serve as mentors to both faculty and students. U.S. institutions need to open opportunities and encourage well-prepared and intelligent minority women to pursue leadership careers in community colleges. In addition, there is a need for qualitative studies of the experiences of female administrators of color. Such studies will reveal qualities of group experiences of first-generation, Asian female, middle-level administrators in a way other forms of research cannot.

**Working as an Adult Chinese Female Immigrant Middle Level Administrator in Community Colleges**

After working with 102 deans in four southeastern states, Watba and Farmer (2006) summarized 48 major issues and 18 categories that had implications for community college leadership. Their findings identified the main challenges that middle-level community college administrators currently were confronting: changes in diverse populations, technology, and
industry training. In addition, these deans had to work closely with faculty and students to solve classroom problems. There was limited time for them to focus on their professional development or family life. The study demonstrated a great deal of issues and challenges associated with the community of college deans and other senior administrators. However, the research participants were deans of occupational or continuing education in community colleges in southeastern states, and their experiences may or may not have been applicable to those in other administrative positions. In addition, this study’s participants all worked in instruction departments. Middle-level administrators of student services departments were not mentioned. Finally, no specific experiences of Asians or Asian female administrators or Chinese American administrators were addressed in this study.

Two years later, Garza Mitchell and Eddy (2008) also conducted research in a medium-sized, rural community college. Even though the study was conducted in one institution, the results were similar to Watba’s and Farmer’s (2006). They found middle-level administrators were still involved heavily in the classroom. Among these administrators, there was no desire for them to work toward advanced positions because of the heavy workloads and lack of mentoring. Again, this study focused on instructional deans only.

While these two studies concentrated on the deans and directors of community colleges, the literature on community college leadership remains limited in its presentation of data regarding the achievement of Asian middle-level administrators, especially Chinese American leaders. Although Somer (2007) conducted a study on five Asian women, they were either presidents or vice presidents in community colleges. Also, they all were born in the United States, and they all were in executive-level positions. Like other community college leaders, Asian female deans
and directors also face the challenges of heavy workloads, the misalignment of their professional requirements and personal responsibilities, and stress (Bailey, 2008). As a result, these middle-level administrators may not aspire to higher-level leadership positions.

For Asian women, besides their current pressure and stress, their cultural, social, and historical roots can influence their careers (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008). As Hyun (2005) observed, Asian Americans, especially those who are first-generation adult immigrants, are not vocal in public settings. This is because most first-generation Asian American women who were born and raised in Asian countries are educated to avoid taking stands in public. Obedience to one’s parents, elders, and superiors is deemed natural. Often, because English is the second language for adult Asian female immigrants, they do not speak up at the workplace, especially when their opinions differ from others’ opinions (Fong, 2002; Yeh, 2007). Lack of self-confidence has been an issue for most Asian American women working at community colleges. In addition, “cultural biases, perceived language limitations, accent discrimination, and lack of recruitment and mentorship” obstruct the path to higher education management (Fong & Shinagawa, 2000).

In short, despite the last five or ten years of growth in published articles on women in leadership, first-generation Asian women, especially Chinese adult immigrants at community and technical colleges still remain invisible in the research studies. They need support to help overcome the known and unknown barriers at the workplace and become successful.

Summary

As for the content of the literature, the first finding was that scholars have identified the challenges and issues Asian women and middle-level administrators face in community and
The experiences of middle level adult Chinese technical colleges. Most of the Asian women studied who had close relationships and supportive family were more successful in college. However, although Asian women, including adult female Chinese immigrants, often demonstrate high academic achievement, without role models and mentors from the same race and background, it is very difficult for them to break barriers.

Secondly, research on middle-level college administrators has shown that because of their heavy workload, these leaders cannot balance their professional lives and personal lives. As a result, most of them have no desire to move up for career advancement.

Lastly, although the need for ethnically diverse female administrators has increased, women of color in community and technical colleges still remain quiet and face disadvantages in leadership roles. The institutions need to focus on promoting more women, especially women of color, to serve diverse populations in their service area.

This study explored the status of adult Chinese immigrant female middle-level administrators in both instruction and student services in community and technical colleges on the West Coast. None of the literature reviewed specifically focused on this topic. I feel it is an area researchers have left undiscovered, and this study has filled the gap. In addition, most studies were conducted by questionnaires, self-report, or survey. The findings offered basic information about participants, but more research is needed to provide a more complete picture of first-generation Asian female middle-level administrators in community and technical colleges. For example, a case study is one of the qualitative research methods that could be used to explore the experiences of the target group. This specific method can produce an intensive description and analysis of the adult female Chinese immigrants who were working as community and technical college middle-level administrators. Such a study of middle-level Chinese American
community and technical college leaders could be designed to provide multicultural perspectives on leadership, and it would add to the scholarly research in higher education as well as empower Asian women to overcome barriers in career advancement in daily practice.
Section Three: Methodology

This section discusses the philosophical research approach, method, site and participant selection, data collection, trustworthiness, and data analysis method used in this study. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the greater understanding of adult Chinese immigrant female middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges. To develop an in-depth understanding of this special group of women, collective case study was selected as the qualitative approach to answer the following questions:

1. What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

2. What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these adult female Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges?

3. What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

Philosophical Approach

Interpretive Social Science (ISS) was the philosophical approach I adopted in this study. ISS views society as it is and tries to seek connections and contemplate messages to explain a phenomenon. As Weber (1962) indicated, “the perspective of this approach focuses on the interpretative understanding of social behavior in order to gain an explanation of its causes, its
course, and its effects” (p. 29). The nature of ISS could use rich and contextual narratives to explain phenomena and provide the intrinsic importance of findings (Gerring, 2001).

ISS has a long history that can be traced back to sociology and hermeneutics. Berger and Luckmann (1967) were key developers in the field of sociology. They believed that reality is socially constructed by knowledge and the access to reality is only through social constructions such as context, consciousness, and language. From their point of view, humans are a product of society and society is a product of humans.

On the other hand, hermeneutics is viewed as a system of interpretation: recovery of meaning. As Palmer (1969) described, “Hermeneutics is the process of deciphering which goes from manifest content and meaning to latent or hidden meaning” (p. 43). Gadamer (1975) defined hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation and understanding plus the correct interpretation of what has been understood. In his book, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer took the essence of the works of Dilthey, Husserl, and Heidegger on hermeneutics and conducted a historically important job on interpretation. He argued that a person needs to expand his/her range of vision in order to see far beyond what is near him/her and that people overvalue the significance of everything near to them (Gadamer, 1975).

The purpose of the ISS approach to research is to explain and describe objectifications of human meaning and to provide the deeper levels of reality (Delanty, 1997). Delanty (1997) pointed out, “While different cultures and historical periods may have different values, there is an underlying human nature that remains constant: the belief that the world cannot be meaningless” (p. 40). To develop a body of general knowledge for the understanding of human
social behavior, the ISS approach seeks to find the meanings of social process, uses direct involvement, and creates data on social interactions.

ISS was a natural match for my study as I explored the experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges. The approach enabled me to learn and understand the challenges and struggles that these women face in higher education. The goal of this study was to enhance the understanding of the social processes and problems encountered by this specific group in higher education. It is hoped this study will offer new perspectives to the people who work with adult Chinese immigrant female middle-level administrators in community and technical colleges and eventually transform their perspectives to a different level.

Personal Disclosure

I am an adult female Chinese immigrant. I was born in China with caring parents who provided everything they could to support my education, career, and marriage. As the oldest child, I was expected to be the role model for my younger sister and brother. After graduating from college with an accounting degree, I took my younger brother with me to Beijing. I worked as a saleswoman in a computer company while supporting my brother so he could go to college.

Education, hard work, diligence, and ethics are very important values to me, and I inherited them from my parents. During my time in Beijing, besides working in computer companies, I took different classes from different universities to acquire new knowledge and improve my technical skills. At the end of 1998, a year after I married the most wonderful man in the world, my husband and I immigrated to the United States and restarted our life in a new environment.
My first experience with a U.S. community college began more than 14 years ago as an English as a second language (ESL) student at Lake Washington Institute of Technology (LWIT). In the beginning, I was ashamed of being a 30-year-old student who could not speak English. I did not want to talk to anyone in my class because I was afraid they would laugh at me. My instructors encouraged me to participate in class discussions and activities. Soon, I felt comfortable being part of the class and started to speak out more.

I started the computer services and network technology program in 1999 at the same college. After I graduated from the program, I took a computer support position on campus. That job gave me the opportunity to work with different people with various technical backgrounds. By helping others, I started to build my self-confidence and realized that education would help me reach the career level I desired.

Being accepted by the graduate program at City University of Seattle encouraged me to continue developing my educational potential. After earning my MBA degree in project management, I was promoted to the position of manager of the Redmond campus of LWIT. At the same time, I was hired as the principal of the largest Chinese school in the northwest to oversee the entire operation, including managing 85 staff and teachers, planning and implementing budgets, and developing new programs. Both management positions allowed me to improve my leadership, intuitive, communication, and decision-making skills. When I became the associate dean of extended learning at LWIT, I had the opportunity to work and interact closely with faculty, students, and business and industry partners.

I have always enjoyed working with college students and faculty. However, I realized I would need more education to become more familiar with the U.S. higher education system. I
wanted to be an expert in my field. When I learned about the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) at Oregon State University six years ago, I decided it was an excellent path toward achieving my goal.

The CCLP program expanded my view of the educational system and heightened my way of thinking. After completing three CCLP research classes, I now have a preliminary understanding of the nature of epistemology and the importance of articulating a world view when engaging in research. The professors helped me discover that the philosophy I believe in and value was interpretive social science. I no longer believed that truth is simple or obvious on the surface, and I understood that multiple interpretations of fact always exist as a result of bias and subjectivity. However, an answer or truth could be learned through research or study.

My professional journey has taken many turns over the past 14 years in a technical college. Because of the support and mentoring I received from several presidents, vice presidents, and senior leaders at LWIT and other colleges, I have successfully grown from an ESL student to a dean of instruction. However, I have also experienced some difficult moments in my career as a middle-level administrator. Thus, I wanted to study other adult female Chinese immigrants working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges to explore their challenges and perspectives. My goal is to offer the findings of the study to help community and technical college senior administration, faculty, and staff to further understand the professional journeys of adult female Chinese immigrant middle-level administrators in higher education.
Research Method

The method I selected for conducting my interpretive research was the case study, an approach in which the researchers focus on an “in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection” (Creswell, 2008, p. 476). By “bounded,” Creswell (2008) meant the case is viewed as an object that can be separated from time, place, or physical boundaries. Yin’s (2009) definition of a case study was “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18).

The concept of the case study is to develop an in-depth understanding of a case or multiple cases by collecting multiple forms of data. In this study, I wanted to work closely with my studied target: adult female Chinese immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges, and develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from the empirical materials I collected, synthesized, and interpreted in the research process. Case study was particularly appropriate for the research I wanted to conduct. Below I explicate how case study worked for my study.

Case Study Type


**Intrinsic case study.** According to Stake (1995), an intrinsic case study is one in which researchers have an intrinsic interest in the case. He pointed out that the goal of an intrinsic case study is to gain greater insight into a particular case instead of studying one case to solve general
problems or to learn other cases (Stake, 1995). “It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 445).

**Instrumental case study.** Using a case study as a tool to provide insight into an issue other than understanding the particular case is the method of inquiry called instrumental case study (Stake, 2009). The instrumental case study provides support to the researchers and helps researchers “pursue the external interest” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 437).

**Collective case study.** In some situations, when there is a need to use more than one case to learn about “a phenomena, population, or general condition,” a collective case study can be used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 437). The advantage of using multiple cases is that they provide detailed information for researchers to compare and describe a complex issue.

**Explanatory case study.** This type of case study attempts to explain complex causal links in real-life interventions by determining causes and effects (Yin, 2009).

**Exploratory case study.** Yin (2009) identified this type of case study as a case study to understand and explore a phenomenon by studying surrounding context.

**Descriptive case study.** This type of study is used to describe a natural phenomenon or intervention and the real-life context in which it has occurred (Yin, 2009).

**Key Concepts of a Case Study**

Case study as a research method is common in social science. It helps researchers understand an in-depth real-life phenomenon or an investigation of a single person, group, or event. The case study method uses multiple sources of data to offer rich and holistic views for readers. The two key concepts of a case study are described below:
**Single- and multiple-case studies.** Single- and multiple-case studies reflect different design situations. During the case study research design phase, the researchers need to identify whether multiple cases or a single case is going to be used to examine a specific phenomenon. As Yin (2009) pointed out, a single-case study can be selected to address or examine: (a) a well-formulated theory, (b) a unique situation, (c) a typical case, (d) a revelatory case, and (e) longitudinal purpose.

In contrast, a multiple-case study focuses on replication rather than sampling logic, which means each case is expected to deliver similar results or “predict contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons” (Yin, 2009, p. 55). Therefore, compared to the single-case study, the multiple-case study can achieve more robust results. A multiple-case study could consist of two to ten cases, depending on the needs of the situation.

**Data sources.** Case studies can use both quantitative and qualitative evidence (Yin, 2009). There are multiple sources for researchers to conduct case studies. Bickman and Rog (1998) noted five documentations that are important to the researchers. First are archival records, such as organization records, lists, survey results, other data files that are computerized, and quantitative data files. Second are interviews. As verbal reports, interview data need to be corroborated by other types of data for validation purposes. Next is direct observation, which requires “multiple investigators to increase the reliability of the observational evidence” (p. 247). The fourth is participant observation. This data source is widely used for anthropological studies of different cultural groups. Finally, the last one is physical artifacts. For most contemporary case studies, technological devices, tools, or instruments are commonly used evidence.
**Major Steps in Conducting a Case Study**

In this section, I describe the procedures I followed in conducting my study based on Yin’s (2009) suggestion.

**Define the research questions.** Normally, researchers start by selecting a specific area, phenomenon, or issue of interest to explore to gain a deeper understanding. For this study, I chose to explore the challenges and issues that Chinese female adult immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges experienced. Literature review is an important step in the process of doing a study because it helps narrow the interests to key topics and identify research questions. The researchers then develop questions that begin with “how” or “why” to study a complex phenomenon. The research questions for this study were: 1) What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges? 2) What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these adult female Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges? 3) What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

**Select cases.** In this phase, researchers select a single-case or multiple-case study. To do so, the researchers constantly refer back to the purpose of the study to decide the appropriate approaches. Both single-case and multiple-case studies can be holistic or embedded, depending on the type of phenomenon being studied and the research questions. Therefore, researchers can select four types of basic case study designs (see Table 3.1).
Table 3.1 Basic Types of Designs for Case Studies (adopted from Bickman & Rog, 1998)

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<th>Single-Case Designs</th>
<th>Multiple-Case Designs</th>
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<td>(Holistic – single unit of analysis)</td>
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The case design selected for the present study was descriptive holistic multiple-case study with single units of analysis (Type 3).

**Participant selection and site selection.** In the data collection process, the first step is to identify the population, participants, site selection, and data collecting tools. According to Creswell (2008), “A sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population” (p. 153). The target population of this study was female Chinese adult immigrants who immigrated to the United States and were working as middle-level administrators in community and technical colleges on the West Coast. Requirements for participation in the study were that the individual: be a Chinese American woman who was born in mainland China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong; immigrated to the United States as an adult; and held a middle-level administrative position such as dean, associate dean, director, associate director, or manager at a community or technical college on the West Coast. The participants all were at a similar stage in their careers but might oversee different programs or departments. This was a nonrandom, purposeful sampling group. Purposeful sampling means the researchers use their expertise and knowledge to select a particular subject from the sample to represent the population (Berg, 2007; McMillan and Schumacher, 2001). Selecting purposeful
sampling in this study was to assist the researcher in identifying subjects from whom the researcher could learn the most.

There are 34 community and technical colleges in Washington State, serving 485,587 students (Washington State Board for Community and Technical College, 2010). In 2009, the percentage of Asian Americans in Washington State, 7%, was almost double the national average of 4.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Racial and ethnic diversity continues to grow in Washington State, especially in community and technical colleges (Washington State Board for Community and Technical College, 2009). With help from multiple resources, I identified five participants in Washington, Oregon, and California to represent the study population—adult female Chinese immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators—and find out the current challenges they face.

There were several ways for me to identify and recruit the participants. First, I asked the executive director of human resources at LWIT to send an invitation email to the head of human resources at the 34 community and technical colleges in Washington State to help me recruit participants. The email went to the colleges twice, and I received recommendations from the colleagues who saw the email. However, nobody was recruited by the email directly. Second, I asked my colleagues, other college contacts, and personal friends for recommendations. One college president recommended two Chinese women from colleges in one of the three proposed states. I was able to recruit them as the first two participants for this study. Due to the nature of the profile, I had a very difficult time finding qualified participants in one state. I then contacted the community and technical college leaders I had met at AACC conferences and sought their suggestions. Finally, the secretary of the National Asian/Pacific Islander Council under AACC
helped me forward my email to the council members at West Coast community and technical colleges. I was able to secure three more participants.

**Data collection.** It is important to collect evidence from multiple sources to keep the data comprehensive and systematic. Yin (2009) suggested six evidence sources for case studies: interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. For this study, I collected data through interviews, documentation, and field notes.

**Interviews.** Interviews are a common tool for qualitative research, especially case studies (Glesne, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Yin, 2009). Researchers often use interviews to understand other people’s stories and experiences (Seidman, 2006). As Yin (2009) indicated, “interviewees can provide important insights” to inform the researchers about research topics (p. 108). As a natural match for the present study, it was beneficial to use the interviews to collect qualitative data from the middle-level adult female Chinese immigrants and analyze the data to find the answers to the research questions.

**Documentation.** Documentation plays an important role in the data collection in a case study. It may take many forms: letters, diaries, photos, meeting agendas, meeting minutes, reports, and news articles (Creswell 2008; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Yin, 2009). There are many advantages for researchers to use documentation to conduct a qualitative study. First, it is relatively cheap and quick to access documents (Payne & Payne, 2004). Next, documentation can be very stable, as it can be repeated and reviewed over time. Third, documentation covers details of events including exact
date, name, and references. Finally, documentation is unobtrusive, as it does not impact the result of the research (Yin, 2009).

In this study, I gathered and analyzed different types of documents, including personal statements, résumés, and websites. These documents helped me provide a comprehensive picture of the life experiences of middle-level adult female Chinese immigrants working at West Coast community and technical colleges.

**Field notes.** Field notes are useful, as they provide firsthand insight into the participants’ attitudes, behaviors, and motives (Yin, 2009). In addition, researchers can use field notes to check for nonverbal expression of participants’ feelings during or after interviews and observations. Using field notes for the present study was appropriate; they represent reality, as they “cover events in real time” and “cover context of “case” (Yin, 2009, p. 102). The digital records I collected during the interviews were great examples of field notes, as they reflect the original discussion the participants and I had.

**Steps in data collection.** When I started the data collection process, I used interviews as my primary data collection method. I met with two participants in person and had multiple phone interviews with all the participants to capture their experiences in their own words. Seidman (2005) indicated that interviews can help us understand “the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). The interviews helped give me an in-depth understanding of the women I worked with for this study. In addition to the communications between the participants and me during the interviews, the process helped me collect documentation and field notes to capture the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2008).
Before I started the IRB process, I conducted a pilot study with four female Chinese adults at LWIT. The purpose of the pilot test was to familiarize myself with the interview questions and process and to improve my interview skills. The pilot test provided me the opportunity to modify or change the questions (Appendix A) based on the pilot group’s comments and feedback (Creswell, 2008). The procedure I followed for the pilot test was to interview the individual from the pilot group, ask interview questions, analyze answers from the interview, and compare and categorize the answers to different themes.

Once I completed the pilot study, I refined the interview questions and sent the questions to the Oregon State University IRB for approval. At the same time, I emailed and called the participants to schedule interview appointments. After receiving approval from IRB, I emailed the interview questions and the consent form to the participants a week before the meeting. On the interview date, for the in-person appointment, I met with the participants on a campus that they preferred and had a face-to-face interview. For the participants I interviewed over the phone, I called the number they provided. I scheduled a two-hour meeting with each participant. Before we started the conversations, I asked participants to sign the consent form or confirm orally. They all agreed to let me digitally record the interviews. During the interviews, I asked the questions that the participants had already received prior to our meeting. Besides recording the interviews, I also took notes to emphasize the thoughts and ideas and questions as well as check for nonverbal expression of feelings of participants. After the interviews, I organized the notes and the recordings and then transcribed them.

While I was working on the transcription, I realized that a second or even third meeting with the participants was needed, as I was not clear about some of their answers. Therefore, I emailed
all the participants and requested a follow-up 30-minute phone call to clarify some answers. All participants agreed, and I was able to secure the meeting. The process was repeated until the participants and I felt we both were clear on the responses and feedback I received.

**Data analysis.** In this stage, the core concepts begin to emerge from the collected raw data. Yin (2009) suggested five analytic techniques for case study research: pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Pattern matching is used to compare an empirically based pattern with a predicted one. Explanation building is used to link all collected data logically. Time-series analysis is used to analyze changes in indicators over time. A logic model is a combination of pattern matching and time-series (Bickman & Rog, 1998). Cross-case synthesis technique searches for patterns and helps researchers avoid premature conclusions. The data analysis technique selected for the present study was explanation building.

To ensure high-quality analyses, Yin (2009) also suggested following four general analytic strategies: “relying on theoretical propositions, case descriptions, a dual use of both quantitative and qualitative data, and rival explanations” (p. 135). The present study was designed to explore the challenges and work-related issues that first-generation Chinese American female middle-level administrators face at West Coast community and technical colleges. The propositions helped me organize the study and provided alternative explanations of the phenomenon (Yin, 2009), and developing a case description helped me cover the most significant aspect of the study. From my interviews, I was able to paint a full picture of each participant as a case. From there, I used all relevant evidence to cover the key research questions and leave no loose ends. Finally, according to Yin (2009), the analysis should address all major rival interpretations.
Therefore, the findings of the study needed to support the first three analytical strategies, which meant other researchers should be able to confirm and examine the findings. The findings of this study did support the analytic strategies and can be used by other researchers.

**Report.** The last step of a case study is to report the findings and demonstrate how they fit and explain the complex phenomena of the research. As Yin (2009) indicated, there are four types of written case study reports. A report on a single-case study describes and analyzes a single case. The second report contains multiple single cases. The narratives cover every single case along with a section that includes the cross-case analysis and results. The next format is a report that permits questions and answers after the analysis of a single or multiple cases. The last type of written report applies to multiple-case studies. The format of the report is to cover explanatory topics as a whole. For this study, a single-case study report with a cross-case analysis will be presented.

**Strengths and Limitation of Case Study**

The case study method offers an in-depth understanding and clear view of complex social situations or events; it offers rich and holistic data to capture the phenomenon. A particular study can be used as a means of insight into other research and illuminate meanings that expand its readers’ experiences. As a result, the case study is a particularly appealing method in psychology, social work, health, political science, business, education, and community planning (Yin, 2009).

There are several limitations of the case study. First, in the situation of a small sample size (cases), the findings may not be general enough to apply to many situations, rendering the reliability of the findings questionable. Second, bias is difficult to avoid due to the intensive
exposure to study of the case. Finally, case study research deals with personal views and circumstances. Ethics-related issues are unpreventable. Therefore, researchers are required to “exercise great caution to minimize the risks” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 448).

**Trustworthiness of the Data**

Trustworthiness indicates the reliability and validity of the data. According to Creswell (2008), reliability is the consistency and stability of the data, and validity is whether the data is convincing and sound. To establish and ensure the trustworthiness of the data, I used the following strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings and interpretations: members checking, peer review, and triangulation. For documentation, I used Microsoft Word as the tool to store the interview transcript, memos, and coding sheet.

For members checking, before the interview started, I set up individual meetings first to explain and share my vision of the study with the participants and ask for their perspectives. After the interviews, I sent the interview transcripts back to the participants and had them check the transcripts’ accuracy. This process was repeated twice until the participants confirmed that the findings were accurate and the interpretations were correct. After I completed the report, I also sent it to all participants for their review. The feedback was very positive.

As for the peer review, I asked Dr. Marcia Somer, a CCLP graduate who conducted a similar qualitative study, to help me review different aspects of the study. She provided her perspectives and lots of questions about my participants, research questions, and the findings. Although I did not address all the questions she asked, it was very helpful for me to have the opportunity to hear the points of views of someone who was a researcher as well as a community college administrator.
Triangulation was another method I used to check the reliability and validity of the data. Because I interviewed five participants, I was able to substantiate data from different individuals and different data types, such as interview and field notes. In summary, triangulation ensured the study was accurate because the information came from multiple perceptions.

**Ethical Consideration**

In a qualitative study, ethical consideration is an important part of the process. For this study, there were several ethical concerns. First, because this study involved human participants, to protect their welfare, rights, and privacy, I needed to seek approval from the Oregon State University IRB before I started the data collection process. I completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative training and certification before I worked on this study. As part of the process, I ensured that the participants were clear about the study and understood its purpose. I sent the consent form and interview questions to the participants before the interview and gave them time to think about the study to build trust between them and me. Second, the confidentiality of the participants had to be ensured. I stored all my notes, memos, and any other documents related to the participants in a lockable cabinet at home or in a password-protected folder on my computer. Only the principal investigator and I had access to it. Third, because I was also part of the study group, my own experiences as a first-generation female Chinese leader may have impacted the participants’ opinions. Therefore, it was necessary to clearly set up a boundary between the participants and me. I made sure they understood my role was the researcher and my job was to seek an in-depth description of them. Finally, there was a potential ethical issue associated with the interview process, as the participants may have shared information that impacted them emotionally. When that happened, I planned to schedule
debriefing sessions to discuss what we experienced and what we needed to do to move to the next step. Although I was prepared to handle the situation, the five participants were very strong women, so it did not happen. The conversations I had with the participants were very positive and engaging.

Summary

This qualitative case study was designed to explore the experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges. In this study, I chose a descriptive holistic multiple-case study with single units of analysis as a research method because its constant comparative analytic process can offer a more comprehensive hermeneutic framework and provide an in-depth understanding of the status of adult female Chinese immigrants in middle-level administrator positions.

This section started with an introduction of the research questions, which were: 1) What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges? 2) What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these adult female Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges? 3) What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

Next, ISS was presented as the chosen philosophical approach for this study. Under “Research Method,” the case study method was discussed in the following steps: three types, key concepts, strengths and limitations, and the procedures for implementation and analysis. Because this study involved human subjects, ethical consideration was addressed.
In the next section, I summarized a review of findings from the data collection and analysis. A final report of this study was presented. Additionally, reflection on the interviews and responses of the first-generation, adult female Chinese American, middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges was included.
Section Four: Findings of the Research

This section discusses the data collected, the analysis conducted, and the results of the analysis. The qualitative approach selected for this research was a descriptive, holistic, multiple-case study with single units of analysis. To develop an in-depth understanding of adult female Chinese immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges, in-person and phone interviews were conducted to capture their experiences.

This research involved five participants who were working at community and technical colleges on the West Coast. They were selected to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

2. What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these adult female Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges?

3. What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

In the following section of this chapter, each of the five cases is presented in alphabetical order by participant code. Each case begins with a personal background description, followed by an individual case analysis and findings. A cross-case analysis and findings are then provided. Lastly, this section concludes with a summary of findings.
Participants

This section presents five research participants selected from community or technical colleges on the West Coast. These participants were born in mainland China or Hong Kong and moved to the United States as adults. They held various middle-level administrator positions within their colleges, such as associate dean, associate director, or manager. The participants in this study were assured a level of confidentiality for their contribution. Therefore, in keeping with the integrity of that obligation and protecting their privacy, the study participants and the names and locations of the colleges in which they worked remain anonymous throughout this study. Each participant was assigned a single letter in alphabetical order, from Participant A to Participant E. Next, the quotations were coded with the letter of the participant. In addition, findings that were generated and supported by documents collected in this study were not cited in order to ensure confidentiality for the participants. These documents will remain secure throughout the duration of this study and will be destroyed three years after the study’s completion. Table 4.1 summarizes the study participants.

Table 4.1 Summary of the Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Birth Place</th>
<th>Current Title</th>
<th>Reason for Coming to U.S.</th>
<th>Entry in U.S. by Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Associate Director</td>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Associate Dean</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Soundness of Data, Analysis, and Interpretation

To test and increase the soundness of data, analysis, and interpretation, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four evaluative criteria were used in this study: credibility (truth value), generalizability/transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and conformability. Additionally, member checking, peer review, triangulation, and participant langue verbatim accounts were employed to enhance credibility, assess dependability, and evaluate generalizability and transferability. Microsoft Word was used as the tool to document the interview transcripts, recording, emails, memos, and coding sheet.

The four criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed can be explained in one word: trustworthiness. That is, the researcher has confidence in the truth of the findings and can show that the findings are applicable and consistent. Also, it is important to show that the findings contain a degree of neutrality, which means the researcher needs to avoid or minimize bias. As the researcher of this study, I am completely confident in the findings I am presenting. The following paragraphs explain the steps I adapted to ensure trustworthiness of the data I collected.

Member checking was a method I used in this study to determine the accuracy of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. To start, I set up individual meetings over the phone with the participants before the interviews. At the meetings, I thanked them for their participation and explained my vision of the study. I also asked participants for their perspectives on the topic and gave them the option to address questions and concerns they had about me and the study. All the participants agreed to have our interviews recorded. Two participants preferred to email their
responses to the research questions to me. During the interviews, even though the conversations were recorded, I consistently restated, summarized, and sometimes paraphrased the participants’ responses to ensure that what I heard and had written down were correct. After the interviews, I sent the interview transcripts back to the participants and had them check the transcripts for accuracy. For the email responses, I scheduled several phone calls with the participants to confirm my understanding of their responses and ask for clarification if needed. Once data analysis was complete, I sent the preliminary findings back to the participants and asked for critical comments until the findings were confirmed accurate and the interpretations were exact.

In summary, this member-checking process ensured accuracy and richness of this study.

Following member checking, participant langue verbatim account was a tool I used to validate the data and findings of this study. As I audiotaped the interviews and obtained emails from the participants, I was able to quote directly from the responses to the research questions. This method ensured the participants’ statements were firsthand and accurate.

Additionally, I used peer review to exam the validity and reliability of the study. I talked to Dr. Marcia Somer, an Oregon State University Community College Leadership Program graduate who conducted a similar qualitative study on the experiences of female Asian Americans who held vice president and president positions in community colleges. Her study and perspectives provided similar views of the barriers and facilitators that I found from the participants I interviewed. I learned different aspects of the study and gained a deeper understanding of Asian women as a whole who work in community and technical colleges on the West Coast as middle-level administrators.
Lastly, as a common approach for qualitative research, I used triangulation to check the reliability and the validity of the data. Multiple data sources such as interviews, recordings, email, and archival were used. When conducting the interviews, I used different methods to capture the information from the participants, for example: observation, note taking, and audiotaping. During the process of data analysis, I substantiated data from different individuals and different data formats to confirm and validate my research findings. In summary, the triangulation method ensured this study was accurate because the information was gathered from multiple perspectives. I gained a more complete understanding of the phenomena from the process.

**Findings in Response to Research Questions**

The following section presents the findings in response to the three research questions. For each research question, I reviewed the interview transcripts, emails, memos, and my observations to determine themes that emerged. This section is divided into the three research questions; under each research question, I first present thematic analysis of the data from each case. Then, I provide a cross-case analysis and overall summary for each research question.

**Research Question 1.** What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

**Participant A.** Participant A was a 35-year-old woman who was born in mainland China. She received her bachelor’s degree in journalism from a well-known university in China. In 2003, she came to the United States as an international student to pursue her graduate degree in journalism at a Midwestern state university.
It is common for international students to select popular majors they believe will lead to high-paying jobs with relatively bright futures. Additionally, there is a perspective for Asian students, especially Chinese students, that it would be easier to select a major that does not require too much language use. Thus, information technology, engineering, science, and economics have been common majors for Chinese international students for years. However, Participant A chose journalism as her major, although it was not an easy program to study. She wanted to continue her dream to become a journalist someday:

It (the program) was about language and culture. As the only international student of the class, I felt that the professors and other 23 classmates did not understand my feelings of loneliness nor had an idea how to support me by providing additional help to me. Although it was a good experience for me to take the challenge, I would prefer to have the opportunity to work with someone who could understand me.

Participant A was very open minded and was clear about the future of both her professional and personal lives. She soaked up all the knowledge she received to improve her English skills and study American culture. In her first several years in the United States, her network was mostly Caucasian. She worked to intentionally surround herself with Americans as much as possible to learn the way they think and try to assimilate to be a part of them.

One way to learn language and culture for Participant A was through religion. Participant A grew up in mainland China and was not exposed to religion. As an international student, she became very engaged with a workshop hosted by the university campus missionaries. Unlike some other Chinese students, Participant A was never against religions. Throughout events and activities, many missionaries patiently helped her improve language skills, answered her questions, and, of course, introduced her to god. In the beginning, she thought the reason missionaries helped her was to convert her to Christianity. However, the more she went to
church, the more she loved Christian values. Thus, she later became a Christian: “I appreciated the journey of becoming the child of God. He taught me how to work with people, how to respect, how to give back, and how to give grace.”

During the time of studying at the university and exploring religion, Participant A made more friends, improved her English, and met her future husband. In 2005, Participant A got married. Her husband also was born in mainland China. He went to North America for his master’s degree and then worked there for 10 years before he moved to the United States because of job relocation. The two started their family in the Midwest.

Participant A did not want to become a housewife. After she received her graduate degree, she worked as an intern at the Governor’s Office of International Trade in a Midwestern state. Then she landed her first job at a four-year university as an administrative assistant in the office of international education. Then Participant A saw a position open at a local community college. She applied and got the job as the international program coordinator. She didn’t intentionally plan to work for a community college; it just happened that way.

The college system in China is quite different. I did not know what I expected until I started to work at the community college in the United States. I fell in love with the system because I loved the value of college. It is down to earth and provides the programs for nontraditional students.

In 2010, Participant A was approved to attend the Leadership Development Program for Higher Education (LDPHE), which was hosted by Leadership Education for Asian Pacific (LEAP), an organization that focuses on growing leaders within Asian and Pacific Islander communities across the world. The four-day intensive training helped Participant A enhance her
professional development as a Chinese American, prepared her to move into leadership positions, expanded her professional networking, and, most importantly, meet her future employer.

One of the LDPHE instructors was the president of a community college on the West Coast. He was an inspirational and visionary leader. He introduced Participant A to his college and asked her to join him to build the international program. Participant A was not sure about the position because of the uncertainty she and her husband would have to face. In addition, she found out she was pregnant. Plus, the monetary compensation was not much more than what she was making at the time. Also, the college was not going to provide much help with relocation.

To help Participant A make the decision, the president told her that he was not offering her a job but a career. She was advised that success does not always just happen; it involves sacrifices, change, and uncertainties. Thus, it meant she needed to come out of her comfort zone. She might experience different things that were not easy, but the future could bring more potential if she was willing to give it a try.

The president’s words inspired Participant A. She made the decision to move to the West Coast late in her pregnancy. After relocating, Participant A became homesick because she felt the place she had lived had become her home. It took her about six months to get used to the new environment and new team at the college. Looking back, she was glad about her decision.

I think change, move are good thing. Sometimes we are afraid of change. It is human nature. Especially for first generation of immigrants, because we feel latitude compare to the people who were born here. We need to have more courage. We need to have more support from family. We need to come out of comfort zone and to be more determined. In the future, I learned that I need to accept the change, even though the new environment may not work. The most important thing is to have courage.
Starting as an international student in the United States, Participant A worked at colleges as an administrative assistant, program specialist, and now the associate director of outreach. It took her seven years to become a middle-level administrator. She loved the value of community college: open access. The community college where she worked in the Midwest didn’t have a strong international program, and the student population that the college served was mostly from local communities. She saw how the colleges provided support to the families that struggled financially and did not have the privilege to go to big-name institutions. These students had the opportunity to study and get trained and then transferred to four-year universities. Now at a college on the West Coast, she saw the opportunity also available for international students.

Community college provides alternative options for international students, especially Asian students, including Chinese students. Even though some of them have high GPA scores, but they may not be ready for the change in terms of language and culture shift. Community college is a stepping stone and place to help them be better prepared for the next step: big campus and large university.

**Summary.** The case analysis of Participant A concerning the first research question identified five themes: (a) first-generation adult Chinese immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator as associate director at a community college, (d) married with children, (e) family and culture value. These themes are listed in Table 4.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2 Themes Describing Participant A’s Life Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• First-generation adult Chinese immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graduate degree from an American university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Middle-level administrator as associate director at a community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Married with children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Family and Chinese culture value

Participant B. Participant B was born in mainland China as well. While in China, she got married and started a family. Her husband came to the United States as an international student in 1995, and Participant B and their daughter joined him in the spring of 1996. At the time, she held an F2 visa (spouse of a student in the United States).

Participant B received a bachelor’s degree from a university in China. Her major was English. In the United States, this major did not have much value, especially in terms of landing a job. Participant B knew that if she did not want to be a stay-at-home wife she had to start everything over again to pursue a new career in her new country. At the time, the information technology boom was an ongoing global phenomenon: “I did not know anything about IT, nor understood the jobs that related to computer. It was a new field that I had no experiences. But my goal was to be trained and be prepared for future employment. I was willing to learn new knowledge and skills.”

Participant B decided to attend a community college to take some academic classes and basic computer classes. Her plan was to transfer the credits to a state university later to get a degree in computer science.

When her friend heard what she was doing, the friend offered some suggestions. She thought that because Participant B did not have a strong background or experience in computer science, it would be very difficult for Participant B to learn the subject and eventually obtain a job in the field. However, there was a program at one of the state universities in instructional technology. It related to computer science but also focused on instruction. She believed this
In January 1998, Participant B started the instructional technology program at the state university. After a week at the new school, Participant B managed to receive a tuition waiver. Immediately, the financial stress was off. The second term, she received more scholarships and worked part-time helping the international department redesign the department website. In 2000, Participant B received her graduate degree in instructional technology.

After she graduated in June 2000, Participant B landed an instructional designer and web master position at a community college on the West Coast. The job was a perfect match with everything she had done. The position was funded by a two-million-dollar grant the community college had received to develop long-distance learning for all colleges in the state. Participant B worked as the system administrator of Blackboard, an online instructional delivery system, responsible for system setting, troubleshooting, and course management.

The college administrators, faculty, and staff were impressed by Participant B’s outstanding performance, and her dedication and hard work were rewarded. In 2001, the college offered a teaching position for her husband after he graduated from his master’s program. In 2002, Participant B received more training on managing servers, as she didn’t have related experience. Attending training sessions and workshops helped Participant B expand her professional network.

I met other administrators from the community college district, and we became friends. I learned a lot from them. Because of the network and my good reputation, later I was offered a position at the district level. I am a very loyal employee, and I enjoyed working at the college. However, my position was funded by the grant, and the grant would run out in five years. The hiring manager at the district convinced me that the job at the district was more stable.
The problem was, the office for the district job was 100 miles away from where Participant B lived. It was not an easy decision for her and her husband to make: “I loved my job and the people at the college. However, as a new immigrant, surviving is the priority. My family needed stability to become permanent resident in the United States. The future of the grant was unpredictable. The full-time position was more attractive.”

In September 2002, she took the position at the district and moved to the city by herself. A year later, her daughter moved in with her. Her husband didn’t relocate to the same place until 2009, when he took a position at the state university.

Participant B changed her career in information technology again in 2009. Instead of website design and maintenance, as the system administrator, she was now responsible for managing the entire district’s network, storage, servers, and emails. It was all computer science, not much instructional technology anymore. She returned to square one, where she had planned to be years before.

Summary. The case analysis of Participant B concerning the first research question identified five themes: (a) first-generation adult Chinese immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator as manager at a community college, (d) married with child, (e) family and culture value. These themes are listed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Themes Describing Participant B’s Life Experiences

- First-generation adult Chinese immigrant as international student’s spouse
- Graduate degree from an American university
- Middle-level administrator as manager at a community college
Participant C. Participant C was born in mainland China. She went to a very good university and majored in economics. In her senior year, she applied for a student exchange program to come to the United States. Ten students were chosen, and she was one of them. She went to a university in the Midwest to continue her economics degree.

It was quite an experience in the United States. Her first assignment was to analyze financial reports for well-known companies. Participant C was fascinated by the project.

When I was at the university in China, I learned everything from the textbooks. The professors gave lectures, and we did our homework based on what he told us or what was in the textbooks. The experience was quite different in the United States. I could not believe that the reports we reviewed were real data from the companies. We acted as we worked for the companies, and we had to provide strategic advices in front of the executives. I was totally lost. Even though I was already in the third year of the program when I started in the United States, I had no idea how to complete the project. I felt that I only learned theories in the past two years in China. The knowledge I had gained was lack of real-life practice.

It was a turning point for Participant C, as she started to realize that she enjoyed the education she received in the United States because it was practical and applicable. Thus, she decided to stay in the United States to continue to pursue her educational goals. She loved economics, but she had always had a passion for education. As a result, she applied to many universities to major in both economics and education. She was accepted by the University of Washington (UW) Gradate School in multicultural education.

After discussing it with her family members, school advisors, and mentors, Participant C decided to take the UW offer. It was a completely different major from economics.
I felt multicultural education matched my background better, as I am a minority in the U.S. Plus, the two professors I had at my graduate program were the founder of multicultural education. They developed many theories based on their studies. I enjoyed the program, admired the professors, and learned so much from them.

After she graduated from the master’s program, the professors asked Participant C to start her PhD study and work at the Multicultural Center on campus. But Participant C felt she should take a break and apply what she had learned so far to real life. Participant C turned down the offer and started working on multiple internship positions in different capacities: Chinese language teacher, kindergarten daycare volunteer, and teaching assistant.

In 2011, Participant C visited a college on the West Coast to share her perspectives and concepts on international education.

During my graduate studies, I worked on a research project on how to support international students at U.S. institutions. One of my mentors learned about it and encouraged me to share my findings with the local community colleges, as she felt it is relevant and important to the rapidly growing international populations at the colleges. She gave me her friend’s number, and I made the appointment. The visit changed my life.

There she met the president of the college. After the presentation, the president asked Participant C to join the international programs at the college. At the time, there was no position open, but the president created one for her because his priority was to promote the school’s international programs. He was eager to hire the right people to manage the programs. Although the college had to spend extra funding to sponsor Participant C’s working visa, the president believed it was a good investment. It turned out to be a very good learning experience for both Participant C and the college. After going through Participant C’s case, the leadership at the college felt much more confident dealing with the foreign hiring process. Later they successfully sponsored another faculty position for the good of the college.
It took the college eight months to get Participant C’s legal working permit. She started as a part-time intern as the assistant student advisor and then became the manager of international programs.

**Summary.** The case analysis of Participant C concerning the first research question identified five themes: (a) first-generation adult Chinese immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator as manager at a community college, (d) unmarried, no children, (e) family and culture value. These themes are listed in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Themes Describing Participant C’s Life Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult first generation Chinese immigrant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate degree from an American university</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle level administrator as manager at a community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried, no children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family and Chinese culture value</td>
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**Participant D.** Participant D immigrated to the United States in 1985 with her family. She was born in mainland China and came to this country in her early adulthood. After she settled in the new environment, she completed her bachelor’s degree in accounting and finance from a university on the West Coast and then moved on to get an MBA from an online institute.

Traditionally, the field of accounting is preferred by Asians, especially the Chinese population. A career in accounting can take many directions, from tax advising and consulting to auditing and banking. Participant D was interested in accounting and thought it was a good
match for her. Later, she felt she needed another degree for career advancement. She started the MBA program online while working full-time.

I enjoyed the accounting program, as it was one of the popular programs for international students. I have a very traditional family. My parents and I believed that accounting could lead to different opportunities and it offers good career for women. However, after I received my accounting degree, I felt I prefer to work with people, instead of dealing with numbers every day. Plus, working in higher education, higher positions require higher degrees. Therefore, I went to get my MBA later.

Like other participants, Participant D started at a college as a student. Soon she received a work-study position in the college’s enrollment services department. Luckily, she met her mentor and future supervisor at that job. The mentor gave her the support and help she needed. Later, when the college had a full-time position open, Participant D was ready to take it.

The first full-time position Participant D obtained at the college was the supervisor of enrollment services. Then she moved to the associate registrar position, and later she became the associate dean for enrollment services. She had been in the position for over four years at the time of our interview. When asked what Participant D’s career goal was, she answered, “I am ambitious about obtaining a higher-level administrator’s position in the college, and I feel I am ready for it.”

Summary. The case analysis of Participant D concerning the first research question identified five themes: (a) adult first-generation Chinese immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator as associate dean at a community college, (d) married with children, (e) family and culture value. These themes are listed in Table 4.5.
Table 4.5 Themes Describing Participant D’s Life Experiences

- **Adult first-generation Chinese immigrant**
- **Graduate degree from an American university**
- **Middle-level administrator as associate dean at a community college**
- **Married with children**
- **Family and Chinese culture value**

**Participant E.** Participant E is another Chinese woman who immigrated to the United States with her family. Originally from Hong Kong, Participant E came to the United States in 1988. At the time of the interview, she was married with two children.

Participant E considered herself a product of the community college system. In her first year living in the States, just like for other new immigrants, her priority was to go to a school and take classes to improve her English and learn skills for future employment. Because Participant E had to pay out-of-state tuition and fees for regular-credit classes before she became a resident of the state, she took her friends’ advice and tried some noncredit vocational training courses.

Participant E took several classes, such as typing and Microsoft Office, to gain clerical skills. In 1989, Participant E got her first job in the United States, working in the college’s affirmative action office as a student worker. She used the skills she learned from the classes to help other office staff with various tasks. Later, when a part-time employment training specialist position opened at the office, Participant E applied and got the job.

From 1996 to 2007, while she was working at the college in different positions (evening faculty support staff, senior management assistant), Participant E took the opportunity to
continue her education. As a first-generation immigrant, Participant E’s priority was to seek employment so she could become independent. In the 1990s, business administration was an ideal and popular major for women. Like other new immigrants, Participant E felt she did not have much information or anyone to consult with on what her future career would be. The easiest way for her was to go with business and hope it would lead to a job.

Being new to this country, my main goal was to obtain an educational degree and pursue a career. During my time, business administration was one of the popular majors besides engineering and architecture. Not knowing much about various career pathway opportunities, I just selected business as my major, thinking that I should be able to get a job.

Participant E completed her bachelor’s degree in business administration, international marketing, and went on to get her MBA. As she had hoped, her colleagues and supervisors recognized her hard work and dedication. The education she received and skills she obtained from the programs helped her secure a full-time position at the college in the Department of Continuing Education and Contract Training. Three years later, in 2010, Participant E was appointed interim associate dean of contract and continuing education and became the associate dean of contract and continuing education in 2011.

Summary. The case analysis of Participant E concerning the first research question identified five themes: (a) first-generation adult Chinese immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator as associate dean at a community college, (d) married with children, (e) family and culture value. These themes are listed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Themes Describing Participant E’s Life Experiences

- First-generation adult Chinese immigrant
• Graduate degree from an American university
• Middle-level administrator as associate dean at a community college
• Married with children
• Family and Chinese culture value

_Cross-case analysis: Research Question 1._ Five themes describing the life experiences of adult Chinese females who immigrated to the United States and were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges emerged from the individual case studies. These themes were: (a) first-generation adult immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator at a West Coast community college, (d) family and Chinese culture value, and (e) married with children (four out of five participants). Therefore, four of the same themes were evident for all of the participants: (a) first-generation adult immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator at a West Coast community college, and (d) family and Chinese culture value. The cross-case analysis was used to capture the commonalities participants shared. An analysis of the themes that emerged across the case studies is provided. To assist with the cross-case analysis, Table 4.7 summarizes the findings for the first research question, related to the life experiences of adult Chinese female immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges.
Table 4.7 Themes describing the life experiences of Participants A–E:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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| Participant A | • First-generation Chinese adult immigrant  
• Graduate degree from an American university  
• Middle-level administrator as associate director at a community college  
• Married with children  
• Family and Chinese culture values |
| Participant B | • First-generation Chinese adult immigrant  
• Graduate degree from an American university  
• Middle-level administrator as manager at a community college  
• Married with child  
• Family and Chinese culture values |
| Participant C | • First-generation Chinese adult immigrant  
• Graduate degree from an American university  
• Middle-level administrator as manager at a community college  
• Unmarried, no children  
• Family and Chinese culture values |
| Participant D | • First-generation Chinese adult immigrant  
• Graduate degree from an American university  
• Middle-level administrator as associate dean at a community college  
• Married with children  
• Family and Chinese culture values |
| Participant E | • First-generation Chinese adult immigrant  
• Graduate degree from an American university  
• Middle-level administrator as associate dean at a community college  
• Married with children  
• Family and Chinese culture values |
First-generation Chinese adult immigrant. The first theme all five participants shared is that they immigrated to the United States in their adulthood. Although they left mainland China and Hong Kong under different circumstances and arrived under a range of conditions with various challenges, they all appreciated the experiences they had. As well-educated adults from a different country, all participants had to start new lives in the United States, where they did not know anyone besides their immediate families. Loneliness and language barriers were the first challenge they had to bear, not to mention the culture shift they experienced. They took classes to improve their English language skills and participated in different activities to meet new friends, and some of them found peace in god. All the efforts they made became assets in their future careers. As I worked with the participants, none of them regretted the choice they made to come to the United States. The longer they lived here, the more they cherished the opportunities they encountered.

Graduate degree from an American university. As first-generation immigrants, especially adult immigrants, surviving in a new environment was their number-one priority. Despite having families with them, some participants still had to learn how to integrate themselves into the community and become independent. Education played the most important role in the participants’ lives. After they settled down and passed the survival phase, they all continued their educations at community colleges or universities by seeking bachelor’s or master’s degrees to enhance their professional knowledge and employability. The degrees helped them either get employed or advance in their existing careers. All the participants delivered the same message when I interviewed them: Education was essential for everyone, especially for these adult immigrants who came to the United States seeking life-changing opportunities.
Middle-level administrator at a West Coast community college. Like other middle-level administrators at community and technical colleges, all five participants faced the challenge of unbalanced professional and personal lives, especially the ones who were married and had children. Their work hours often involved evenings and weekends or frequent long-day travels, yet they still had to take care of their families and be present for their partners. Two participants indicated they were trying to stop working overtime but occasionally still did. Despite the long work hours and heavy workload, all the participants stated that they enjoyed what they did for the students, colleges, and communities.

Family and Chinese culture value. Coming to the United States as adult immigrants, the participants said they preserved their Chinese culture. Although they all had been here for years, they still preferred to speak their own native language at home, eat Chinese food, and socialize with Chinese friends.

Research Question 1 summary. This section provided findings in response to the first research question. Five themes emerged from the data describing the life experiences of adult Chinese females who immigrated to the United States and were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges: (a) first-generation adult immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator at a West Coast community college, (d) family and Chinese culture values, and (e) married with children (four out of five participants).

Research Question 2. What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these Chinese female adult immigrants working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges?
Participant A. For Participant A, the following factors impacted and influenced her professional life: family support, life-long learning, mentoring, networking, and being humble.

Taking the associate director of outreach position at a community college on the West Coast was not an easy decision. Without Participant A’s husband’s support, it would not have happened. Even though Participant A preferred to have a professional network of Americans, coming from a traditional Chinese family, she wanted to build a family with someone with a similar cultural background and experiences. It was important for her to spend time with someone who also was born in China and knew the culture: “Because it is very different, I know I am different. Even right now my English has been improved a lot, I can speak better English, I know more about the culture here, but I still know I am a Chinese.”

Participant A really appreciated the Chinese family value. She believed that:

Family is a safe place. I wanted to keep my culture, value and identity, and the comfort zone for my personal life. I did not want to lose these pieces. Especially after whole day of working and networking with Americans, sometimes I was exhausted. I needed to shift to the most comfortable way I could get, which is thinking, speaking, and reading in Chinese.

Participant A could not thank her husband enough when talking about her family support: “My husband offered everything I needs for life. He did not hesitate to move away from his colleagues and friends to the West Coast to support my job. Fortunately, he could work from home but he still lost the personal contact at work that he used to have in the Midwest.”

Participant A’s job required her to travel a lot. One time she was out of the country for more than 45 days. Participant A’s husband had to work and also took care of two young children when she was away. Participant A believed the reason her husband was so supportive was that they shared the same cultural background and life values.
Being a life-long learner was another factor that helped Participant A become a middle-level administrator at the community college. From the first day she was in the United States, Participant A utilized every opportunity to learn and practice English. She stayed with an American family so she could learn authentic English and closely observe the American way of life. She went to church and attended various workshops to learn about religions. She knew she wanted to be a manager and read leadership books and reviewed literature to enhance her knowledge and skills. She was well prepared when the opportunity showed up.

I went to church, I went to parties. Many times I was really lonely. Many topics I had no idea. I forced myself to be there, involved as a listener. It was out of my comfort zone, but I knew I need to adapt the new environment if I want more opportunities. I can’t wait to let the environment adapt me. I have to be more proactive.

As the third factor, mentoring played an important role in Participant A’s professional life as a successful middle-level administrator at the community college. Good mentors provide guidelines, directions, and experiences to those who need help to advance their careers. Participant A was fortunate to have many mentors who were there when she needed them. One of her supervisors at the college in the Midwest was always patient and was willing to share valuable information with Participant A and help her overcome the obstacles she encountered. Another supervisor encouraged Participant A when she lost self-confidence and told her that one day she could be a vice president at a college. The supervisor also supported her when she attended professional development programs, such as the LEAP program that she participated in a couple years before the interview. The former president of the college Participant A was working for at the time of the interview was also a mentor to her. He showed her what a visionary looked like and taught her that change was unpredictable and might not be desirable
but that, without change, opportunities might not occur. All these mentors were valuable to Participant A: “I always believe that their advice, wisdom, and support impacted my work ethics and made me a better administrator. I felt that without the mentors in my life, I could not make many achievements as I have achieved so far.”

The fourth factor that influenced Participant A’s professional life as a middle-level administrator was networking. Networking is vital for successful managers. When Participant A was an international student, she knew that she needed to make new friends to learn English and avoid loneliness. She went to parties and talked to people she did not know. After she started working at the colleges, she attended workshops and conferences to broaden her networks: “I understood that networking is about establishment of relationship, and the first step to establish a relationship is to take time to meet with someone.”

As a result, she got her job via networking. Had she not attended the LEAP program, she would not have had the opportunity to meet the college president and would not have had the chance to demonstrate the skills and knowledge the president was looking for.

The last factor that Participant A felt influenced her as a community college middle-level administrator was her personal values: relationships, respect for others, and being humble.

It is about human nature. Chinese culture helps me foster the style because we value family and respect others. Because my background in China, my culture humble myself when I am here and be more open minded for new things and diversity, working with people from different background. Understand the culture differences is important.

At work, Participant A was not a micromanager. She tended to be supportive of her staff, and she considered her leadership style as more servant leadership. She was neither ambitious
nor aggressive. Respecting others and being humble were part of her management traits. She believed that is why she was well-liked by others at the campus.

As a first-generation immigrant, Participant A came a long way as a middle-level administrator at a community college. Family support, life-long learning, mentoring, networking, and personal values helped her grow from an international student to an experienced leader.

**Summary.** The case analysis of Participant A concerning the second research question identified five themes: (a) unconditional family support, (b) being a life-long learner, (c) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (d) power of networking, and (e) being humble. These themes are listed in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Themes Describing the Main Factors That Impacted Participant A’s Professional Life

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unconditional family support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being a life-long learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring from colleagues and friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power of networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being humble</td>
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**Participant B.** Participant B had a different career path from that of Participant A but shared similar factors that impacted her as an adult Chinese female immigrant working in a middle-level position at a college. Mentoring, networking, family support, being humble, and working hard were vital for Participant B to succeed in her career as a middle-level administrator.
Participant B enjoyed her work. She said mentoring was the number-one factor that made her work successful. As with many other newcomers, Participant B was educated before she came to the United States. Yet despite her academic and professional background, she still faced challenges in finding work that was commensurate with her past experiences and education. Therefore, having someone who could provide advice and suggestions to Participant B effectively helped her overcome some of the most significant barriers she had as a middle-level college administrator.

Participant B had very supportive supervisors over the years. She considered her first supervisor a workaholic.

It was my job when I had him as my supervisor. I didn’t know how to work in the United States. When I saw he worked overtime almost every day, I started to believe that was the style I should follow. He was very strict on the works but also very personable. I learned a lot from him.

The supervisor Participant B worked for at the time of the interview was one who moved up the ladder internally at the school district. He had years of experiences in the organization and understood the college structure and system. He always offered his advice and recommendations when Participant B asked him. He was willing to share information with Participant B to help her improve her technical and communication skills. He viewed Participant B as a dedicated and honest person; he trusted her.

When I was hired as the system administrator, it did not matter to my supervisor that I did not have the related experiences. My supervisor and colleagues believed in my potentials and knew I had the ability to pick up new skills and adapt the new environment. It meant a lot to me and really helped me build my confidence.

The supervisor offered Participant B the opportunity to attend different workshops and training activities in information technology, leadership, communication, and budgeting to
broaden her knowledge and skills. Participant B appreciated the mentoring she received from different supervisors and colleagues, and she said she was ready to mentor others who might need help.

Networking was also a factor that helped Participant B get her job in the community college district as a middle-level administrator. As a first-generation immigrant, Participant B did not have many friends when she moved to the United States. Unlike Participant A, she did not make it a priority to expand her professional network in the beginning of her career. However, because of her dedication, diligence, and passion for technology, her coworkers recognized her abilities. Ultimately, she benefited from networks she developed unintentionally through the training workshops she attended.

Participant B agreed that being humble was a great tool for her to work with her colleagues and supervisors. She always reminded herself that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Respecting others would help them feel confident, create a positive atmosphere at the workplace, and, eventually, increase team effectiveness. Lastly, Participant B strongly believed her strong work ethic contributed to her success as a middle-level administrator.

She was the only female in the department. In that male-dominated environment, Participant B was well respected by others. Her coworkers commented that she had the proper mindset for the job she was doing: problem-solving, bug-fixing, and logical thinking. Not only did Participant B have strong technical skills, but she was also a hard worker. At the time of the interview, Participant B held a high position at the school district. She was well known as “That Chinese Lady” by the entire district. She often visited colleges and helped set up storage, configured servers, and fixed bugs. When she went to work, she was always on time or early
and went directly to work. As a task-driven person, she always delivered outcomes and results for projects. People respected her for that. She enjoyed her work very much.

I think everyone needs to find the niche that works for himself/herself. For me, my major was in English. But when I entered in the computer science field, I felt that I was more interested in technology than literacy. Back in China, parents made career decisions for their children. Here in the US, everyone has the opportunity to explore and try different works. However, for first-generation immigrants, the first thing was to survive. There were not many options for them to choose or pick the things they like. They had to do whatever to make a living for the family. Fortunately, I selected a career that works well for me and also on demand on the job market.

In Participant B’s mind, she could not be in the position she was in without her family’s support. The education she received in China taught her work first, family second. Also, as a first-generation immigrant, she did not have much choice in terms of getting her desired job, because the most important thing for the family was having any job. Therefore, for seven years Participant B lived away from her husband because of her work. She didn’t spend much time with her daughter either. It was unfortunate, and she did not prefer living that way. However, when surviving was the priority, she had to grab any opportunities before they were gone. Unlike in other Chinese families, she didn’t take her daughter to any afterschool classes to learn piano, dance, or drawing, because her focus was work. Her daughter turned out to be very independent and learned to take care of herself. During the year of our interview, her daughter earned a master’s degree from Yale University. Although Participant B was not with her husband and her daughter during the time she worked alone in the different city, she did not feel lonely, as her husband and daughter understood the separation at the time was necessary and temporary. Their love and support made her a strong woman.
Summary. The case analysis of Participant B concerning the second research question identified five themes: (a) family support, (b) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (c) power of networking, and (d) hard work. These themes are listed in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Themes Describing the Main Factors That Impacted Participant B’s Professional Life

- Family support
- Mentoring from colleagues and friends
- Power of networking
- Hard work

Participant C. Participant C started in the United States as an international student. She got the job as the manager of international education because of her network. However, it was the way she demonstrated humbleness and respect for others that made her job easier. Mentoring also helped her learn and grow in the leadership role.

Even though Participant C did not have work experience in China and only briefly worked in the United States before she took the manager’s position at the college, she knew that social networks are very important in both countries. Like Participant A, Participant C intentionally worked on her connections. She developed great relationships with her professors and other professionals at the university and through friends. One of her mentors suggested that she share her ideas on international education with the college president. She took the initiative and made the appointment; that appointment turned out to be an interview. She was hired because of the
Meeting. Now a middle-level administrator, Participant C continues to expand her professional networks to support her daily work as well as for future reference.

Mentors are important, and Participant C was fortunate to have very positive experiences with her supervisors and coworkers. She viewed many of them as her mentors: “My first supervisor always covered for me and he was as a father to me. Then when I met the president of the current college, he taught me how to develop vision and goals for myself and for the international program.”

Because of her hard work and personality, she gained trust from her colleagues and received tremendous help from them.

Being humble and respectful are great tools Participant C used daily at work. She understood that she was hired because she was Chinese and that a priority of the college was to grow the international program. The population of the Chinese students went from 30 to 150 in two years. The college desperately needed to hire someone who had experience in China to provide support for these Chinese students. Participant C enjoyed her work with students and parents. She always respected the students and her colleagues.

It was my nature. Even though the way I got the job was different than the most staff at the college who entered their position, I proofed my ability at work. My personal qualities helped me gain respect from others. I am well liked by my coworkers, students, and parents because I am humble and respectful for others.

Summary. The case analysis of Participant C concerning the second research question identified three themes: (a) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (b) power of networking, and (c) being humble. These themes are listed in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 Themes Describing the Main Factors That Impacted Participant C’s Professional Life
• Mentoring from colleagues and friends
• Power of networking
• Being humble

Participant D. For Participant D, relationships and networking, mentoring, and being humble were the factors that impacted her position as a middle-level administrator.

Participant D valued relationships and networking the most. She believed in teamwork and collaboration: “I think that relationship can bring everyone together towards a common goal. As the leader, it is my responsibility to develop and nurture the relationship and networking among the staff, me, and other colleagues.”

In practice, Participant D always encouraged her team members to participate in group activities and creating new ideas. All the decisions she made were people oriented.

Mentoring played an important role in Participant D’s professional life. She started to work at a community college as a work-study student. In addition to the language challenge, new immigrants also need to adjust to fit into a new culture and environment. The support and mentoring that Participant D received from her supervisors and colleagues made her more confident and motivated. Eventually, through years of working at the college, Participant D was well prepared as a competent college administrator. Mentoring was one of the reasons Participant D stayed in the college. At the time of our interview, as a manager herself, Participant D had started to play the mentor role for her staff and her friends who were new to the country or culture.
Being humble was natural for Participant D, as she was raised in a traditional Chinese family. She learned that being humble meant listening to others and respecting different points of view. She says that, for immigrants, the first challenge is language and the next is culture shock.

I understand that I need to be patient and be humble before I make a decision, whether at home or at work. Being humble does not mean hold my personal perspective. I am clear that as a professional, I always treat everyone the same and respect everyone as an individual.

Summary. The case analysis of Participant D concerning the second research question identified four themes: (a) relationship and networking; (b) mentoring from colleagues and friends, and (c) being humble. These themes are listed in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Themes Describing the Main Factors That Impacted Participant D’s Professional Life

| • Relationship and networking |
| • Mentoring from colleagues and friends |
| • Being humble |

Participant E. Participant E identified the following factors that impacted and influenced her job as an adult Chinese immigrant who obtained a middle-level administrator position at a college: mentoring, networking, being humble, and family support.

Over the 18 years before our interview, Participant E was fortunate to have a supervisor she could go to for advice, guidelines, and support. She felt it was important for her to be able to connect with someone who understood her work and background and could help her expand professional networks and counteract isolation and loneliness: “I strongly believed that
Participant E said she could not have gotten this far without the mentors in her professional and personal lives.

Networking was the second factor that impacted and influenced Participant E’s professional life. As mentioned above, for 18 years, Participant E had one supervisor, who hired her as a student worker and helped her grow to become a middle-level administrator. It was obvious that the supervisor liked Participant E’s work. Without professional networking, it is difficult for newcomers to demonstrate their abilities to others. In addition to her daily work, Participant E intentionally attended social gatherings with colleagues regularly to establish a stronger professional network.

Just like other participants of this study, Participant E believed that “humble” is the word to describe her as a middle-level administrator at a community college.

It is Chinese culture that people, especially women, are taught not to brag their success as they think it’s rude to do it. That culture norms places adult first immigrant female middle-level administrators at a significant disadvantage. They often miss the opportunity to share their own achievements and credentials. Therefore, being humble but stays firm and confident when work with others at the workplace is difficult to balance.

Participant E emphasized the importance of family support during the interview. She was the mother of two children, a wife, and a daughter, and Participant E’s family was always there for her. As a result, she was able to work full-time, go to school to get her degrees, and develop her potential to become a middle-level college administrator. It was clear that Participant E could not have succeeded without support and love from her family.
Summary. The case analysis of Participant E concerning the second research question identified four themes: (a) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (b) power of networking, (c) being humble, and (d) family support. These themes are listed in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Themes Describing the Main Factors That Impacted Participant E’s Professional Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring from colleagues and friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power of networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being humble</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
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Cross-case analysis: Research Question 2. Seven themes were identified to answer the second research question, regarding main factors that impacted and influenced adult Chinese female immigrants working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges. These themes were: (a) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (b) power of networking, (c) being humble, (d) relationships, (e) being life-long learners, (d) hard work and dedication, and (g) unconditional family support. Overall, three of the same themes were evident for all of the participants: (a) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (b) power of networking, and (c) being humble.

Table 4.13 Themes Describing the Main Factors That Impacted the Professional Lives of Participants A–E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unconditional family support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being a life-long learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentoring from colleagues and friends</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The first common theme across cases referring to the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of Chinese female adult immigrants working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges was mentoring from colleagues and friends.

Mentoring from colleagues and friends. The first common theme across cases referring to the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of Chinese female adult immigrants working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges was mentoring from colleagues and friends.

There is an abundance of literature describing the importance of mentoring as a powerful social network and professional empowerment tool (Gerdes, 2003; Naber-Fisher, 2009; Gong, Chen, & Lee, 2011). Especially for Chinese immigrants, mentoring from friends and colleagues is essential for their personal lives and career advancement (Liu, Liu, Kwan, & Mao, Y. 2009; Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007). In this study, all five participants expressed the significant impact their mentors had on them. The mentors they identified were their supervisors, colleagues, and friends, both Americans and Chinese. Although some studies state that women
of color prefer their mentors to be minority and female (Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004), the participants in this study did not echo that concept. In fact, at least four out of the five participants had white male mentors whom they considered the most helpful, supportive, and accessible figures in their professional lives. Also, most of the mentors stayed connected with the participants over the years. For instance, Participant D had a long-term mentor whom she respected and would always go to for career advice.

Power of networking. The next theme that came out across cases was the power of networking. Chinese culture values personal relationships and connections (Kim, Yang, Atkinson, Wolfe, & Hong, 2001; Geithner, Johnson, & Chen, 2004; Tsunoda, 2010). All five participants started their first jobs or switched to their current positions at their colleges because of the professional networks they had developed over the years. In addition to their hard work, networking brought professional opportunities and provided various connections for the participants. For example, Participant B attended a technical workshop that was hosted by the school district she had served several years prior. That training was the turning point for her to get her next job, and the positive feedback she received from the people she met at the workshop helped her increase her confidence. It was the same for Participant C; she was able to obtain her current position because a shared connection referred her to the college president. The connections opened the community college door to Participant C, but it was the knowledge, skills, and abilities she demonstrated at the interview that helped her get the job. Without the connections, Participant C might not have had a chance to show her talent.

Being humble. One important element in the Chinese culture is the concept of preserving group harmony (Farah, 2006; Ray, 2011). All five participants indicated that being humble
helped them realize that they can make mistakes, seek guidance from their mentors and
colleagues, gain trust from others, break down barriers, and maintain positive and engaging
working environments. Unfortunately, as middle-level administrators, especially new
immigrants, sometimes these Chinese women were undermined by people who did not know
how competent they were. Several participants stated that they started to learn how to stay
humble but keep confident in front of the group.

**Research Question 2 summary.** This section provided findings in response to the second
research question. Three common themes emerged from the data about the main factors that
impacted and influenced Chinese female adults who immigrated to the United States and work as
middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges: (a) mentoring from
colleagues and friends, (b) the power of networking, and (c) being humble.

**Research Question 3.** What are the work-related issues that challenge these middle-level
Chinese adult immigrants at West Coast community and technical colleges?

**Participant A.** The four work-related issues that Participant A expressed were: (a) language
barrier, (b) cultural reticence, (c) work–personal conflict, and (d) lack of professional
opportunities.

Even though Participant A loved her job, she still shed lots of tears. Many times she felt she
was stuck in a box and could not make any progress in the projects she worked on. When talking
about work-related issues, Participant A’s number-one concern was definitely the language
barrier. Related to the language issue, being Chinese often altered her decision making at work.
Unbalanced work–personal lifestyles and limited institutional support continued to be the
challenges that impacted her work as a middle-level administrator.
Although Participant A achieved great test scores when she came to the United States as an international student and her language skills significantly improved over the years, she still viewed her English proficiency as her number-one weakness. As much as Participant A wanted to network with Americans and practice her English, for her personal life, she wanted to build a family with someone who had a similar background and experiences as hers. She needed a Chinese environment at home.

For my personal life, for my family, I prefer Chinese friends because the culture piece plays deep in my life. It is important for me to spend time with someone who also were born in China and know the culture. Because it is very different. I know I am different. Even right now my English has been improved a lot, I can speak better English, I know more about the culture here, but I still know I am a Chinese.

Participant A did not use English at home. At work, sometimes she did not have confidence because of her language skills. Even at the time of our interview, after almost 15 years in the states, she still had a lot of doubts about herself:

Another reason that I read so much is because of my language. I am very concerned, especially at group conversation or staff meeting. I am always not the first person to speak up even though I have lots of ideas. I always have to think, because it is not my native language.

If my language is stronger, I might get more positions. My English is not perfect like yours but I am working on it. I try everything to improve it. I would be a better networker if I was born here or English is my first language. I would have more to share with my coworkers and friends. My public speaking skills are not very strong. I want to get there.

Participant A realized that, no matter how long she lived in the United States, was is no way she would obtain the language level of native speakers. That was reality. She continued to work on building her confidence and believed it is a life-long journey.

The second issue was culture reticence. As a first-generation immigrant and a Chinese woman, Participant A was neither ambitious nor aggressive. Because she was concerned about
her English, she forced herself to be a good listener. At staff meetings, Participant A would not be the first one to speak up. She would sit quietly and listen to others. She believed that being a listener would help her think differently when she needed to make decisions. In reality, she wanted to be conservative and preferred not to challenge others. She needed to feel secure and comfortable before she voiced her opinions.

I think Chinese culture helps me about consequences. I am not good at that. I see lots of first-generation Chinese are not very open. They think if they share information they become less competitive. Security is very important to make people feel successful. I need to feel confident too to share information.

Participant A realized being too conservative was a weakness for her, especially as a middle-level administrator; she needed to be more direct and firm. She practiced and looked for opportunities to receive related training. For example, she attended the Toastmaster’s program specifically to improve her communication and public speaking skills.

As a Chinese woman, Participant A treasured her family and knew her role within it. However, as was the case with the rest of the college administrators, she faced the challenges of balancing her work and family responsibilities. Despite endless support and tolerance that Participant A’s husband had been providing, because of the nature of Participant A’s work, she felt she was reaching her limits and might no longer be able to continue working the same way. For example, after one and half months of business traveling, her children did not recognize her and she barely knew what had happened in the office. She needed time to be with her family and be in her office to work with her staff. Additionally, she needed time for self-reflection. Otherwise, she felt she would lose her purpose and passion.
The last work-related issue Participant A encountered was the limited support that the college provided. Participant A was always eager to learn more, read more, and be exposed to more on diversity, leadership, and international education, which was the field she was in. She felt she was still lacking experience and needed to stay competitive. One way to sharpen her skills and enhance her ability to become an expert in her profession was to attend professional development activities. However, due to budgetary constraints at most West Coast community and technical colleges, her employer could not send faculty and staff for professional development workshops and training, especially opportunities that were outside the state.

Participant A did not give up. She continued to seek opportunities and submit requests to her supervisor, hoping one would get granted. She believed that she should “just give a try and also get prepared if people say no to us, because rejection is part of our life. Sometimes it is hard, could be intimating.”

Summary. The case analysis of Participant A concerning the third research question identified four themes: (a) language barrier, (b) cultural reticence, (c) work–personal conflict, and (d) lack of professional development opportunities. These themes are listed in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 Themes Describing Participant A’s Work-Related Challenges

- Language barrier
- Cultural reticence
- Work–personal life conflict
- Lack of professional development opportunities
**Participant B.** Like Participant A, Participant B felt her biggest weakness was her English language skills, followed by work–personal conflict, cultural reticence, and limited professional development opportunities.

Participant B worked in China for more than 10 years before moving to the United States. Although Participant B’s bachelor’s degree was in English, she did not have many opportunities to practice her listening and speaking skills while in China. It was textbook English. Unlike her coworkers, who were native speakers with broader vocabularies and American cultural backgrounds, she found it challenging to use English to communicate at work clearly and accurately.

Most of the time, I feel that people who have better English would easily exaggerate the efforts they made for the work they had done, where I would just tell the fact straightforwardly. I do not know how to use big words or brag her work, even though I do feel sometimes it is necessary to let others know how much efforts I put in.

At staff meetings, Participant B would always give the briefest reports. To help give her credit, her coworkers often would follow up her reports by saying, “Although it sounds simple when Participant B describes it, it was very complicated.” From Participant B’s perspective, the reason not many first-generation immigrants were taking on leadership roles was the language barriers. This was the main issue that new immigrants had to face at the workplace.

As a first-generation adult immigrant, Participant B found it very difficult to manage her workload and her family. She valued Chinese culture and believed in working hard as well as honoring family obligations. Because she insisted on working hard at her job, it seemed her work never ended, no matter how much time she put in. She felt she had too many tasks on her desk every day, and she did not have time to take a break. The nature of Participant B’s work
was to make sure the systems that supported the entire district never stopped or broke down. At the time of our interview, she was trying to balance her professional life and personal life by taking vacations and spending more time with her family. She also learned not to work too much and to leave work on time. In addition, she usually did not work on weekends.

Participant B valued teamwork, but as the supervisor, she did not have enough confidence when faced with workplace conflicts. She also tried not to talk at group meetings and hide her comments most of the time, mainly because of her language concerns. Sometimes it was because she did not want to make mistakes when openly sharing her opinions. This was a weakness she identified for herself.

Lastly, limited professional development opportunities was also a work-related issue for Participant B. Previously, she had often gone to workshops and training but, at the time of our interview, with every state on the West Coast facing budget crunches, many colleges were cutting resources and limiting funding for activities not directly related to instruction. Professional development programs often were the first to be eliminated. Participant B expressed her concern about limited professional development opportunities for herself and her staff to catch up with the current technology.

It has been very difficult for us as we are technical staff and we need to update our skills to match the industry standards. I wonder if there are other ways that I can pursue for resources to support the workshops and conferences that my staff and I to go. Probably I can check with the college foundation and research grants.

**Summary.** The case analysis of Participant B concerning the third research question identified four themes: (a) language barrier, (b) cultural reticence, (c) work–personal conflict, and (d) limited professional development opportunities. These themes are listed in Table 4.15.
Table 4.15 Themes Describing Participant B’s Work-Related Challenges

- Language barrier
- Culture reticence
- Work–personal life conflict
- Limited professional development opportunities

**Participant C.** Participant C identified language barrier, culture of reticence, reduced professional development support, and work–personal life conflict as work-related issues that challenged her as an adult Chinese female who immigrated to the United States and worked as a middle-level administrators at a West Coast community college.

Although she came to the country at a younger age, Participant C still considered the language barrier the number-one challenge she had to work on every day at work.

I felt my English is more “Book English.” I am good with grammar and punctuations, but when talk with others, there is no way for me to speak as a native English speaker. In addition to that, sometimes I do not feel comfortable about my accent. I believe that it really hurts my self-esteem.

Respecting others is a primary consideration for Participant C. Growing up in a traditional Chinese family, Participant C was taught to respect the people she works with and to reserve her own opinion if it differs from the opinions of others. She said that made her a little conservative when dealing with her colleagues. As the manager, she was always patient and honest and had gained the trust of students and parents. They were willing to share their concerns and issues with her. However, dealing with conflict was her biggest weakness because she felt she could not challenge her supervisor and colleagues if she did not agree with them. Often at staff
meetings, she would not speak up because she wanted to hear others’ ideas and opinion first. Many decisions were made without her input.

I feel that native speakers can use different words describing what they like or dislike without giving a direct answer, in a sophisticated way. While people like me, with English as the second language, I do not have the skills or ability to do the same. The disadvantages make me more cautious at work because I do not want to make anyone misinterpret me. It is stressful to be this way but I prefer it.

Participant C said her college was supportive of professional development opportunities. However, the budget had been reduced in recent years, and staff members had to take turns attending conferences and workshops, one person at a time. It was not ideal but was understandable.

Because of the nature of her work, Participant C often needed to be available on weekends and evenings to accommodate international students. She had been leading and hosting different activities beyond her regular work schedule. It was Participant C’s goal to reduce the extra time at work and focus on her personal life. This was not an easy choice to make, but she strongly believed that, to maintain her professional life, she needed to take care of herself first.

Summary. The case analysis of Participant C concerning the third research question identified three themes: (a) language barrier, (b) cultural reticence, (c) lack of professional development support, and (d) work–personal life conflict. These themes are listed in Table 4.16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.16 Themes Describing Participant C’s Work-Related Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language barrier</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural reticence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of professional development support</strong></td>
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Participant D. Lack of professional development opportunities and work–personal life conflict were the main work-related issues that Participant D faced.

Participant D thought that her college was supportive in terms of professional development opportunities. Similar to Participant C’s college, the budget had been reduced in recent years, and staff had to take turns attending conferences and workshops. It was not ideal but was understandable.

As the associate dean and a mother of two children, Participant D had to make sure she balanced her professional and personal lives. Participant D’s job required her to work different hours, sometimes on the weekends. She had to work with her husband and family to make sure the children were cared for, requiring additional time and energy.

Summary. The case analysis of Participant D concerning the third research question identified two themes: (a) lack of professional development opportunities and (b) work–personal conflict. These themes are listed in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17 Themes Describing Participant D’s Work-Related Challenges

- Lack of professional development opportunities
- Work–personal life conflict

Participant E. Lack of professional development opportunities, work–personal life conflict, and the glass ceiling were identified as Participant E’s main work-related issues.
Getting a job in a community college is not easy. Being competent and effective requires more than just showing up at work every day. Professional development is a primary factor that enhances middle-level administrators’ knowledge and skill to help them succeed at work. Participant E always looked for opportunities to take training and attend conferences and workshops. She actively participated in the college governance council and received training on leadership development, enrollment management, compliance, and other related issues. In recent years, out-of-state travel had been limited. Participant E did not have as many professional development opportunities as she had had before, but she still could attend in-house training that the college offered.

As the mom of two children, Participant E also said she had to balance her family life and her professional career. Often, she had to work on weekends and evenings. It was not convenient for her, but she made it work. Although most of the time Participant E could leave work on time, she occasionally needed to stay late or work on the weekends for classes or international projects. Participant E was not concerned with the extra time that she added to her workload, but said she should learn how to stop doing it, as she wanted to be available for her family after regular work hours.

Participant E was the only one out of the five participants who directly voiced her concern on the glass ceiling she faced at work. She had observed many promotions and opportunities offered to non-Asian or male administrators without going through the program. She always had to apply and work hard to get the positions, even though she felt she had the same or better qualifications compared to other candidates. Participant E strongly believed that the glass ceiling
exists. She saw it as her job, as an adult Chinese immigrant, to work to promote and provide support to Chinese women at West Coast community and technical colleges.

In the end, Participant E mentioned she believed having public speaking skills would enhance her leadership. Even though Participant E said language was no longer a barrier for her, she still believed her language skills could not compare to those of native English speakers.

Summary. The case analysis of Participant E concerning the third research question identified three themes: (a) language barrier, (b) personal style (not being able to speak up in front of team), and (c) lack of professional opportunities. These themes are listed in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18 Themes Describing Participant E’s Work-Related Challenges

| • Lack of professional development opportunities |
| • Work–personal life conflict |
| • Glass ceiling |
| • Lack of language/public speaking skills |

Cross-case analysis: Research Question 3. Five themes were identified to answer the third research question: work-related issues that challenge Chinese adult female immigrants who were middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges. These themes were: (a) language barrier/lack of public speaking skills, (b) cultural reticence, (c) work–personal/personal life conflict, (d) lack of or limited professional development opportunities, and (e) the glass ceiling (Table 4.19). Of the five themes, two common themes were evident for all of the participants: (a) work–personal/personal life conflict and (b) lack of or limited professional
development opportunities. In addition, one theme was identified as the primary work-related challenge for four participants out of five: language barrier/lack of public speaking skills.

Table 4.19 Themes Describing the Work-Related Issues That Challenge Participants A–E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
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| Participant A | • Language barrier  
               | • Cultural reticence  
               | • Work–family conflict  
               | • Lack of professional development opportunities |
| Participant B | • Language barrier  
               | • Cultural reticence  
               | • Work–family conflict  
               | • Limited professional development opportunities |
| Participant C | • Language barrier  
               | • Cultural reticence  
               | • Lack of professional development opportunities |
| Participant D | • Lack of professional development opportunities  
               | • Work–family conflict |
| Participant E | • Lack of professional development opportunities  
               | • Work–family conflict  
               | • Glass ceiling  
               | • Lack of language/public speaking skills |

Language barrier/public speaking skills. The first common theme that emerged across cases referring to the work-related issues that challenge all the participants in this study was language barrier and lack of public speaking skills.

Four of the five participants stated that the language barrier or lack of public speaking skills was their primary barrier in their career advancement. Unlike native speakers, as adult immigrants, the participants had to focus on their language skills in addition to performing their regular work. Although they all received education in the United States, they said they would
never be able to express their opinions or perspectives the way native speakers could. It was easy to tell that the confidence levels of these professional women were deeply impacted by the language barrier they identified. Unfortunately, there is no simple solution to solve the issue. It will take time for the participants to continue to learn, practice, and improve their speaking and language skills.

Lack of professional development opportunities. The second common theme across cases referring to the work-related issues that challenge the study’s participants was lack of professional development opportunities.

Over the past ten years, college allocations have been reduced and funding resources have been constrained nationwide. The direct impact to college administrators, including the five participants, has been the limited opportunity for classes, conferences, and training. They try their best to locate alternative options to get access to professional development in both work-related and culture-related areas.

Work–personal/personal life conflict. The third common theme across cases was work–personal or personal life conflict.

The five participants identified heavy workloads as work-related stressors. Four out of the five participants had families with children. They all were concentrating on their careers and spending extra hours at work. Some participants expressed the desire to switch their focus to themselves, family, and children.

Research Question 3 Summary. This section provided findings in response to the third research question. Three common themes emerged from the data referring to the work-related issues that challenge Chinese adult immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators
at West Coast community and technical colleges: (a) language barrier/lack of public speaking
skills, (b) lack of or limited professional development opportunities, and (c) work–
personal/personal life conflict.

Summary

This section described the data that were collected and analyzed from the interviews and
documents. The method of research I used to study the experiences of adult Chinese females
who immigrated to the United States and were working as middle-level administrators at West
Coast community and technical colleges was multiple-case study analysis. This study involved
face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, email exchanges, and review of documents with five
participants, which made up five cases. For each of the cases, at least three interviews were
conducted, face to face or via phone calls.

The data needed for this case study were guided by the research questions and supported by
the literature review. Data were needed to answer these three research questions:

1. What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to
   the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community
   and technical colleges?

2. What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these
   adult female Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at
   West Coast community and technical colleges?

3. What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level
   administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?
Five themes describing the life experiences of the female Chinese adult immigrants emerged from the individual case studies: (a) first-generation adult immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator at a West Coast community college, (d) family and Chinese cultural values, and (e) married with children (four out of five participants).

Four of the same themes were evident for all of the participants: (a) first-generation adult immigrant, (b) graduate degree from an American university, (c) middle-level administrator at a West Coast community college, and (d) family and Chinese cultural values.

Eight themes emerged from the interviews identifying the main factors that influenced the professional lives of female Chinese adult immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions West Coast community and technical colleges: (a) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (b) power of networking, (c) being humble, (d) family value, (e) relationship, (f) being a life-long learner, (g) hard work and dedication, and (h) unconditional family support.

A key finding of my study regarding the second research question was the discovery that three themes identifying the factors that influenced the women were shared by five participants: (a) mentoring from colleagues and friends, (b) power of network, and (c) being humble.

Five general themes emerged from the interviews, emails, and supporting documents concerning the work-related issues that challenged these female Chinese middle-level administrators at community or technical colleges on the West Coast. These themes were: (a) language barrier/lack of public speaking skills, (b) cultural reticence, (c) work–personal/personal life conflict, (d) lack of or limited professional development opportunities, and (e) the glass ceiling. A key finding of my study regarding the third research question was that three themes concerning work-related issues were shared by four out of five participants: (a) language
barrier/lack of public speaking skills, (b) lack of or limited professional development opportunities, and (c) work–personal/personal life conflict.

In this chapter, I have reported the findings from my research of adult female Chinese immigrants working as middle-level administrators at community or technical colleges on the West Coast. In the following chapter, I will describe the findings in relation to the existing literature, discuss the findings’ implications to practice, and suggest recommendations for future research on the topic of adult female Chinese immigrant middle-level administrators.
Section Five: Discussion and Conclusions

This section starts with the summary of methods and research questions. Then I offer a comprehensive review of the findings related to the existing literature about adult Chinese female immigrants who work at West Coast community and technical colleges as middle-level administrators. I also provide my recommendations about the implications of the findings to practice, limitations of the study, and implications for future research. The conclusion and final thoughts are also included in the end of the section.

Summary of Methods and Research Questions

To develop an in-depth understanding of adult Chinese female immigrants who work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges, in-person and phone interviews were conducted.

This research involved five participants who work at West Coast community colleges. They were selected to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the life experiences of adult female Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States and work as middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?

2. What are the main factors that impacted and influenced the professional lives of these adult female Chinese immigrant administrators working in middle-level positions at West Coast community and technical colleges?

3. What are the work-related issues that challenge these female Chinese middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges?
The purpose of this study was to contribute to the greater understanding of adult Chinese immigrant female middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges. ISS was the philosophical approach I adopted in this study. Multiple-case study with five participants was used as the research method. In-person interviews and phone conversations accommodated data collection and analysis.

**Findings Related to the Existing Literature**

When I started this study, I could not locate any literature that focused solely on adult female Chinese immigrant middle-level community and technical college administrators. While several pieces of research made progress toward a deeper understanding of female Asian American administrators in community and technical colleges, there continued to be gaps relating to Chinese immigrants who work at colleges as middle-level administrators. In their research, Somer (2007), Wilking (2001), Neilson (2002), and Wong (2002) focused on Asian American senior leaders in higher education. Wong and Neilson’s study participants included male Asian Americans.

The purpose of Somer’s 2007 study was to explore the experiences of Asian American females who attained president or vice president positions at community colleges. Her participants were five Asian American women.

This study did share some similar findings with Somer’s work. Although they hold different positions, the participants of this study, just like the American Asian female vice presidents and presidents, all obtained a strong work ethic and appreciated mentors’ support. Also, one theme that came up from Somer’s study was “fracturing the glass ceiling.” However, only one participant from this current study specifically mentioned the glass ceiling during the
interviews. The other four participants did state that they had to work harder than their coworkers to get the positions they wanted. They might not refer to this phenomenon as a “glass ceiling,” yet it was certainly an obstacle for their carrier advancement.

Despite the several common findings between the two studies, differences are also obvious. First, the participants in Somer’s 2007 study were Asian Americans who were born and raised in the United States, including Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, and Filipino Americans. This study focused on Chinese adult immigrants who were born and raised in mainland China or Hong Kong and immigrated to the United States as adults. As Endo (1980) indicated, although the two groups of women all belong to the “Asian American category, there are major cultural and experiential differences” among them (p. 376). Therefore, perspectives and points of view from the two studies are different. Also, because English was the native language for the participants from Somer’s study, these women did not have the language concerns the other women had. The adult female Chinese immigrants strongly believed their lack of English proficiency was the number-one barrier for advancement in their professional careers.

Secondly, Somer’s participants held executive leadership positions as presidents or vice presidents at colleges, whereas this study’s participants worked as middle-level administrators, with positions such as dean, associate dean, director, associate director, manager, and supervisor. Thus, the experience and career goals among the participants were not the same.

Thirdly, family obligation heavily impacted the participants of this study, yet Somer’s participants did not have the same issue, as “The five participants in this study either had no
children, children that were grown, or parents who were taken care by their siblings or a shared responsibility” (pp. 151–152).

Lastly, when talking about barriers that Asian American women faced in higher education, Somer brought up an interesting point, which was the physical image of female Asian Americans. She believed Asian American female leaders were challenged by their “small stature and youthful appearance.” None of the current study’s participants expressed the same concern.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to explore the life experiences and perspectives of adult Chinese immigrant women who hold middle-level leadership positions at West Coast community and technical colleges. The study’s intent was to identify which factors influenced these women to enter community and technical college leadership positions and to determine the workplace issues they may face. As one of them, I wanted to advocate for this group of leaders and voice the challenges we experience in our daily work. Therefore, one of this study’s outlined goals was to offer insightful information for community and technical college leaders. This section provides several practical recommendations for community and technical college presidents, administrators, faculty, and staff to improve culture awareness and leadership practices. The recommendations include:

- Providing resources for professional development activities for adult female Chinese immigrant administrators. Many higher education institutions and community organizations offer leadership programs.
- Using the college’s existing educational resources to provide workshops and courses for adult female Chinese American administrators to help them accelerate their
career advancement. For example, accent reduction or accent modification programs will help the women increase their self-esteem and build confidence.

- Encouraging adult female Chinese immigrant administrators to join the National Asian/Pacific Islander Council under the AACC and participating in the LEAP program to realize their full potential, foster confidence and leadership skills, and network with other leaders who have similar backgrounds.

- Establishing one-on-one mentoring programs for adult female Chinese immigrant administrators, pairing them with community and technical senior leaders. The mentors will work closely with the mentees to provide career guidance.

- Developing consistent training and diversity workshops for college leadership, faculty, and staff, based on the nine primary characteristics of global competent learners defined by the AACC (see Appendix E).

- Allocating dedicated resources and facilitating activities to enhance diversity in instruction, curriculum, and pedagogy.

- Promoting and encouraging adult female Chinese immigrant administrators represent the college at chambers, Rotary, and other community organizations.

- Creating a strategic plan to promote sustainable leaders with diverse and evolving leadership competencies for the community and technical colleges.

Although the number of adult female Chinese immigrant middle-level administrators at West Coast community and technical colleges remains small, the impact they make on students, colleagues, and their colleges cannot be ignored. Community and technical college leaders
should recognize the population and support their personal and professional growth. In return, they will become more creative, dedicated, and competent.

Limitations of the Study

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “a qualitative study’s transferability or generalizability to other settings may be problematic” (p. 192). This study was limited to the life experiences of five adult Chinese female immigrants who were working as middle-level administrators at West Coast community colleges. Although the findings are compelling, the findings cannot be generalized to other adult Chinese female immigrants who work at colleges as faculty and staff. Additionally, all interviews and phone conversations were conducted with the participants; I did not have the opportunity to interview the participants’ supervisors or staff to get different perspectives regarding adult Chinese female immigrants who work as middle-level administrators at the colleges. Also, I believe other Asian Pacific American women—not just Chinese women—who hold identical positions at community and technical colleges may share similar experiences; future research on this group would broaden the view about the adult female Asian immigrants’ professional lives as college leaders.

Implication for Future Research

Despite the last five or ten years having seen a growth in the publication of articles on women in leadership, first-generation Asian women, especially Chinese adult immigrants in community and technical colleges, remain invisible in the research studies. They need support to help overcome the known and unknown barriers at the workplace and become successful.

In particular, this study focused on West Coast community and technical colleges. With the increasing numbers of new immigrants, more research is needed for colleges in other regions of
the United States. Also, some research can be conducted comparing the experiences of first-generation adult male and female immigrants who work at community and technical colleges. Another comparison study could be conducted to explore the difference in experiences for Chinese American female administrators and Japanese American female administrators or Korean American female administrators.

Finally, future studies could also involve students who share the same ethnic and cultural background with the college administrators to determine the most effective means for serving these students, as research states that racial minority students identify with their own race role models (Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004).

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

When I started the Community College Leadership Program at Oregon State University in the fall of 2009, our professors asked us to plan our dissertation proposals. Many of my classmates kept switching topics, but I was very firm with mine: finding other women like me, who had come to the United States as adult immigrants, started new lives, continued their education in this country, and became middle-level administrators at community or technical colleges. For years, I did not know anyone who shared a similar background with me whom I could talk to. I always believed I had a unique experience as a Chinese American, but I wanted to verify and validate that.

This study gave me the opportunity to meet and know five other wonderful women who came from mainland China and Hong Kong. Although our ages were different, we all followed similar paths, shared similar interests, and encountered similar challenges. I am grateful to have had the honor to talk to them and appreciate their help in supporting me with this dissertation. I
will always remember their warm words of encouragement, their generous spirits, and their contributions to this study. As one of the stated outcomes of this study, I wanted to advocate for this special group of women who work diligently to support their faculty, staff, and students. After a year of working with them, I admire them immensely and am proud that I am one of them.
References


Appendix A Interview Questions

Each participant will be asked the following questions during the two hour interview:

- Tell me about your background:
  - What is your race/ethnicity?
  - Where were born?
  - How did you come to the United States?
  - When did you come to the United States?
  - Are you married?
  - Do you have children? If so, how many?
  - What is your educational background? Where did you obtain these degrees?
  - Why did you pursue these degrees? What interested you about the subject? Did you change majors at any point? If so, why?

- Talk about your journey to be the administrator at a community or technical college in WA State.
  - What brought you to Washington State?
  - Where do you work?
  - What is your current title? How long have you been holding this position?
  - What has been your work history?
  - What are your career goals?
  - Have you receive organizational support, feedback, coaching, career development in your workplace?
- Do you think there is a connection between your ethnicity and your work as a college administrator?
  - What does your culture value the most?
  - Have family obligations affected your career (spouse, children, parents, location)? If so, please tell me more about it.
  - Does the culture influence your work with others? Such as decision making, communication, and information sharing.
  - What is your leadership style? Has your culture background affected your leadership style?
- Could you please share your experiences as an adult Chinese immigrant female middle level administrator in the west coast?
  - Have you worked in a state other than Washington, Oregon, or California?
  - What would you have liked to change?
  - What advice would you give to other adult Chinese immigrant female middle level administrators who work or study at west coast community and technical colleges?
  - Is there anything else that you believe to be pertinent to my research that is in your career background?
Appendix B Invitation Letter to Potential Participant

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Lin Zhou. I am a Doctoral Candidate, in the School of Education at Oregon State University, in the Community College Leadership Program.

I am looking for candidates who would consider participating in a study that I am doing for my dissertation on the experiences of Chinese female adult immigrants who work at West coast community or technical colleges as middle level administrators, such as manager, associate director, director, associate dean or dean.

The purpose of this research study is to collect narratives of Chinese adult immigrant female leaders that capture the barriers and facilitation they encountered to enter a middle level leadership position as well as the workplace issues they may be facing. The barriers could include the “glass ceiling,” stereotyping, cultural values, or perhaps gender role expectations. The facilitators could be mentors, role models, and leadership programs.

Participants of this study will be of Chinese descent, specifically, Chinese immigrants who were born and raised in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan.

The participation in this study would consist of reviewing an outline of the study and signing the Informed Consent Form, both of which I am sending to the participants via email and a mail with an envelope, and a follow-up telephone conversation so that the participants have an opportunity for clarification. Once the participants have agreed to participate, please sign the Informed Consent Form and send it back to me via postal mail in the envelope that I have provided. I will be giving the participants a copy of the signed Informed Consent Form when we conduct the interview, for their records. The interview is about 60-90 minutes in length at a place near the participants’ work or residence. If the participants live outside of Washington State, the interview may be conducted via telephone call or email.

After the interview, I will be sending the participants an email with the transcribed interviews to allow the participants the opportunity to review the collected information. Finally, I will be calling the participants to schedule a follow up meeting of 30-60 minutes for clarification and validation. The length of this study will be over a period of four months beginning this August.

Please consider participating in this study. Your contributions to the current knowledge of Chinese adult immigrant females’ experiences in academia would allow other Chinese adult immigrants, such as myself, to hear the valuable words of those who have broken new ground in higher education leadership. I would be honored by your acceptance.

Respectfully,
Appendix C Consent Form

Consent Form

Project Title: The Experiences of Middle Level Chinese Female Adult Immigrant Working at West Coast Community and Technical Colleges
Principal Investigator: Dr. Alex Sanchez, OSU College of Education
Co-Investigator(s): Lin Zhou, Graduate Student, OSU College of Education
Version Date: September 12, 2013

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?
This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. Please read the form carefully.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may ask questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered and the purpose and procedures of the research study are clear, you can decide if you want to be in this study as a participant or not. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form for your records.

The results of this this study will be published as a doctoral dissertation and may be used for other publications and presentations. The results may also be used as a basis for further research on this topic.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of Chinese adult immigrant females who work at a community or technical college in the West coast as middle level managers. The intent of the study is to identify which factors influenced these women to enter community and technical college leadership positions and to determine what workplace issues if any they may be facing.

The results of this study will serve to provide useful information to administrators in community and technical college settings that seek to improve their diversity awareness of minority populations, and specifically Chinese adult immigrant female administrators.

This research study is being done as partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Philosophy degree requirements at Oregon State University.
Up to twenty participants may be invited to take part in this study.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
You are being invited to take part in this study as a participant because you are a female Chinese adult immigrant who was born and raised in mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan and who also works as a middle level manager of a community or technical college on the West coast. It is anticipated that five to eight participants will complete this study.

1. What will happen if I take part in this research study?
If you agree to participate in this study, your involvement will take place sometime between April and the end of September 2013 for approximately 3 hours. During the six month study, you will be contacted in the following manner:

a. The researcher will contact you via a telephone call or email. This will be an opportunity to request your participation, discuss the study, and send you the Consent Form.

b. The researcher will set up an initial private interview of approximately 60-90 minutes with questions. The researcher will travel and conduct the interview near your place of work or residence. If you live outside of Washington State, the researcher may conduct the interview via telephone call or email your interview will be audio recorded. If you do not want to be audio recorded, the researcher will ask you to consent to her taking extensive and detailed notes. The researcher will transcribe the tape and analyze it for themes.

   _____ I agree to be audio recorded.
   Initials

   _____ I do not agree to be audio recorded.
   Initials

c. The researcher will send you the transcribed interview via email for you to correct or to make changes.

d. The researcher will contact you to schedule a follow up meeting of 30-60 minutes for clarification and validation. The meeting will be conducted by telephone.
1. **WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?**

The risk to you as a participant in this study will be minimal. Your name will not be used in the study, nor will you be identified by specific position, department, or discipline. The researcher will identify you by a pseudonym and your role as a middle level administrator. Actual participants’ names and institutional affiliations will be known only to the researchers. Individual responses will be known only to the researchers and not to other participants or individuals. However, your responses may be unique enough that colleagues could identify you or your responses may be associated with your institutional role. All reported results will be grouped together in aggregate to help maintain confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your institution likewise will not be identified in the research report, but described in general unidentifiable descriptive terms.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. You may benefit from reflecting on your own experiences as an adult immigrant who works at a community and technical college. In addition, with your involvement, the results of this study will be expected to increase understanding of the perspectives of female Chinese administrators, that barriers to success could be potentially addressed, and that other Chinese females could benefit from learning about their experiences as well as regardless of the level they have achieved within their professional hierarchy.

2. **WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study

3. **WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public. All audio and written recordings will be securely locked in a desk at the researcher’s place of residence. All electronic documents will be password protected and accessible only be the researcher. All audio and written recordings will be destroyed within three years after the completion of this study and access will be restricted solely to the researchers.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.
During the interview process, you are free to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Dr. Alex Sanchez at (503) 588-3190 or by email at sancheza@oregonstate.edu
Or
Lin Zhou at (253) 680-7575 or by email at zhoul@onid.orst.edu

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu
Appendix D Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

The above referenced study was reviewed and approved by the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Approval Date: 06/09/2014  
Expiration Date: 06/08/2015

Annual continuing review applications are due at least 30 days prior to expiration date

Documents included in this review:

- Protocol
- Consent forms
- Assent forms
- Alternative consent
- Letters of support
- Recruiting tools
- Test instruments
- Attachment A: Radiation
- Alternative assent
- Project revision(s)
- External IRB approvals
- Translated documents
- Attachment B: Human materials
- Grant/contract
- Other: CRA

Comments: Closed to enrollment; data analysis only.

Principal Investigator responsibilities for fulfilling the requirements of approval:

- All study team members should be kept informed of the status of the research.
- Any changes to the research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to the activation of the changes. This includes, but is not limited to, increasing the number of subjects to be enrolled.
- Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others must be submitted to the IRB within three calendar days.
- Only consent forms with a valid approval stamp may be presented to participants.
- Submit a continuing review application or final report to the IRB for review at least four weeks prior to the expiration date. Failure to submit a continuing review application prior to the expiration date will result in termination of the research, discontinuation of enrolled participants, and the submission of a new application to the IRB.
Appendix E Global Learner’s Competency List

Community Colleges and Global Education
Executive Summary

Airlie I: Building the Global Community: The Next Step
The participants in the first ACIIE/Stanley Foundation conference at Airlie Center, charged with drafting the policy direction and implementation strategies for global education in community colleges, adopted the following mission statement: "To ensure the survival and well-being of our communities, it is imperative that community colleges develop a globally and multiculturally competent citizenry."

They went on to state that community colleges must provide an educational experience which advances knowledge and understanding in five areas:

Global interdependence

- Human resources, values and culture
- Global environment and natural resources
- Global peace and conflict management
- Change and alternate futures

Strategies to accomplish this mission were organized under six categories:

- Educational approaches
  - Organizational partnerships
  - The technological frontier
  - Consultation with other nations
  - Coordination of community college efforts
  - Celebration of our commonalities, our differences, and our interdependence

Airlie II: Educating for the Global Community: A Framework for Community Colleges
The second Airlie conference was convened to examine two questions:
What does it mean to be a globally competent learner?

1. What is required institutionally for community colleges to produce globally competent learners?

The participants agreed on the following definition of global competency: "Global competency exists when a learner is able to understand the interconnectedness of peoples and systems, to have a general knowledge of history and world events, to accept and cope with the existence of different cultural values and attitudes and, indeed, to celebrate the richness of this diversity."

They went on to determine that the globally competent learner possesses nine primary characteristics:

- Is empowered to make a difference in society
- Is committed to lifelong learning
- Is aware of diversity, commonalities, and interdependence
- Recognizes geopolitical and economic interdependence of our world
- Appreciates impact of other cultures on American life
- Accepts the importance of all peoples
- Is capable of working in diverse teams
- Understands the nonuniversality of culture, religion, and values
- Accepts responsibility for global citizenship

If community colleges are to produce such learners, institutions will be required to

- Obtain the commitment of the CEO and trustees
- Include global education as an integral component of the institution’s mission statement
- Develop and implement a comprehensive global education program on campus
- Allocate resources to faculty for research and development of curriculum, exchanges, and activities
- Provide support and incentives for international initiatives
- Conduct a needs assessment for local businesses and services
- Revise accreditation criteria to acknowledge the importance of global competency
- Provide student services to promote access to global education for all learners

The forces which restrain efforts to globalize community colleges were grouped under the rubrics: Attitudes, Practices, Priorities, and Marketing.
Strategies devised to counter the obstacles to systemic support for global education were categorized as follows:

- Review and revise institutional policies and practices
- Increase public awareness of diversity
- Develop collaboration and partnerships at the local, state, and federal levels
- Advocate more effectively for global education
- Prepare individuals and institutions to deal with change

Beyond the community college campus, the goals of global education can be advanced through

- Initiatives at the federal level
- Inclusion of global education in accreditation criteria
- Initiatives at the state level
- Making the case for global education with the general public
- Exploring alternative sources of funding