

Between Optimism and Precarity: Unravel the Intersectional Challenges of Chinese
Female Immigrant Teachers in the United States

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the work and life experiences of an under-discussed and female-dominant Chinese diasporic community, Chinese immigrant teachers in American K12 education. I argue that, firstly, while being privileged as high-skilled professionals and enjoying more mobility compared to their domestic sisters, Chinese female immigrant teachers are also subject to the precarity and intersectionality deriving from the underfunded American education and their triple marginality of being women, Asian and first-generation immigrants. Secondly, the structural inequality of gendered labor performed in both the professional and domestic roles of female teachers tends to be reinforced in the diaspora. By adopting mixed approaches of interview-based ethnography and digital ethnography, this thesis offers a critical alternative to the masculine and material version of Chinese immigration and contributes to a more extensive intellectual effort to understand the systematic racial and gender inequality associated with globalization.

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
List of Figures	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Research Background	1
1.2 Research Method	10
2. Underestimated Pressure for Chinese Immigrant Teachers	13
2.1 Precarity and Limited Upward Mobility	13
2.2 Intersectionality and Racial Hypervisibility in the Teacher Burnout	26
3. Systematic Inequalities in Gendered Migration	36
3.1 Cruel Optimism of an Educational ‘American Dream’	40
3.2 Flexible Womanhood of Female Teachers in the Diaspora	45
4. Conclusion	54
Bibliography	56

List of Figures

Figure 1. Screenshot of an online post from Zhihu.....	27
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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The 21st century has witnessed an astonishing economic surge and rising global influence of China since the reform and opening-up policy in 1978. While China embarks on the path towards modernity, a spatial hierarchy arose, in which “success” as a modern Chinese subject was linked to mobility. At the pinnacle of that hierarchy was international migration to the United States, the country that symbolized global modernity.¹ The practice of contemporary Chinese immigration to the US strikingly shifts from the early working-class migrants selling their unskilled labor in low-end industries, to the nowadays relatively privileged class with multiple kinds of capital in the technological and informational economy. The capital of outward and upward mobility is therefore symbolized as the desirable prospect of a successful, steady, middle-class life in developed countries.

In the late 20th century, Ong crystallizes transnational Chinese modernity grounded on the practice of Chinese affluent elites who shuttle across the Pacific Rim of capital and bridge the nations economically and culturally. The *homo economicus* construction of Chinese immigrants refers to those who “set great store in being engineers, doctors, managers, and bankers and who see themselves as self-made men who are now building the infrastructures of modern affluence.”² As Ryan notes, migration paradigms on global labor and human movement flow, whether Chinese or

¹ Nyíri, P. (2010). *Mobility and Cultural Authority in Contemporary China*. Seattle : University of Washington Press. 4

² Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Duke University Press. 133

Western models are conceptually represented as economically and male-driven.³ The narrative of transnational Chinese modernity is inscribed with at least two layers of underpinnings: the capitalist logic with predetermined gender roles: men as productive labor in the public, capitalist realm, whereas women as reproductive labor in the domestic realm or contingent labor in some subsectors. In Ong and Nonini's account of this "Ungrounded Empire" constructed by overseas Chinese businessmen, women are positioned mostly in the family or confined to working in various forms of "homework" such as sewing garments for piecework contractors.⁴ While this framing of Chinese migratory pattern in the early 2000s can be buttressed by the lack of educational opportunities, economic resources that Chinese women access, it also needs to be complemented to avoid essentialism by taking into account specific groups of Chinese female migrants within the new socio-economic and cultural situations, which to some extent render different logic of migration.

The new Chinese international migration trend is dominated by well-educated, high-skilled professionals with a more equal gender ratio, who mainly specialize in the quantitative fields with desirable economic rewards, such as business, technology, medicine, engineering, and computer science. From the newest statistic on US immigrant occupation type, there is an under-discussed sector that constitutes a small proportion of immigrants: education. Education ranks fourth among the major

³ Ryan, J. (2002). Chinese Women as Transnational Migrants: Gender and Class in Global Migration Narratives. *International Migration*, 40(2), 93–116.

⁴ Ong, A., & Nonini, D. (2003). *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*. Routledge. 215

occupations accounting for 4.4 percent, and has the lowest pay rate.⁵ Based on the need to enrich the Chinese migratory pattern, this thesis turns the foci to a distinct group of Chinese female immigrant teachers in American K12 education. Immigrant teachers are rarely discussed when speaking of immigration. Different from the capital-driven and technology-oriented industries that attract numerous immigrants and thus erect mature pathways for recruiting foreign talents, education is a more localized public sector in the US, which anticipates a comparatively small proportion of foreign workers. Therefore, many school districts or private schools have less experience in helping foreign workers get their work authorization and go through other procedures related to immigration. Meanwhile, another important reason that this group of immigrants is underrepresented relates to the income of the teaching profession. K12 teachers in the US are undesirably paid in a national average pay rate starting at \$42,800.⁶ Teachers earn 60 percent of the average salaries of similarly educated full-time professionals—which is the lowest relative earnings among all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.⁷ While teachers are considered professionals required to attain higher education degrees and credentials, the cruel fact of the unsatisfying financial return makes it harsh for many teachers to sustain a middle-class life and fall into the vulnerable status, especially if they serve as the breadwinner of the family. This can be

⁵ Citizenship, U. S. (2021). Characteristics of H-1B Specialty Occupation Workers. 2021 Annual Report. See Figures 9 and 11.

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics, “Average base salary for full-time teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by highest degree earned and years of teaching experience: Selected years, 1990-91 through 2017-18”.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_211.20.asp

⁷ Benner, M., Roth, E., & Johnson, S. (2018). How to Give Teachers a \$10,000 Raise. *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/give-teachers-10000-raise/>

substantiated by the growing number of local teachers who rely on a second job to earn additional income in the US.⁸

The situation for immigrant teachers can be worse in multiple aspects. For example, it is more difficult for teachers from immigrant backgrounds to find jobs in schools with an elite reputation or, at least, to be fully and easily accepted by the staff and parents at these schools.⁹ Institutions in the country of settlement create hierarchical access to labor markets that results in exclusion and subordination of migrants' cultural capital, such as discounting work experience gained in countries of origin.¹⁰ In the US, foreign-trained teachers need to gain a state-recognized teaching credential apart from an education-related degree in order to work in American public schools, even if they possess teaching credentials from China or have multiple years of teaching experience. While this caters to the need of the host country reinforced by immigration legislation and professional regulation, it indeed largely improves the threshold of entering local public schools and conditions the job options of immigrant teachers especially before they obtain citizenship or permanent residency. They could not take a second job like local teachers to alleviate the financial burden either.

Despite these discouraging facts, recent years have witnessed a growing number of Chinese immigrant teachers in the US, most of whom are women, as a result

⁸ Castro, A. J. (2022). Teachers of Color and Precarious Work: The Inequality of Job Security. *Labor Studies Journal*, 47(4), 359–382.

⁹ Crul, M., Schneider, J., Keskiner, E., & Lelie, F. (2017). The multiplier effect: How the accumulation of cultural and social capital explains steep upward social mobility of children of low-educated immigrants. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(2), 321–338.

¹⁰ Erel, U., & Ryan, L. (2019). Migrant Capitals: Proposing a Multi-Level Spatio-Temporal Analytical Framework. *Sociology*, 53(2), 246–263.

of the exponential need for Chinese language education and the nationwide teacher shortage. Alongside the economically and politically rising image of China since the early 2000s, there is a corresponding cultural upsurge in learning Chinese worldwide. The need for qualified Chinese language teachers is increasing rapidly, which results in the phenomenal transnational teaching practice of Chinese language teachers globally. Within this group of teachers, many of them are exchange teachers sent out by the Office of Chinese Language Council International and Confucius Institution for temporary service in the host country;¹¹ meanwhile, it also creates a new pathway for immigration to industrialized countries. A large proportion of teachers eventually makes it to long-term position through self-initiated educational migration, labor migration or family migration.

In a more immediate context, the discussion of teacher immigration is also greatly fueled during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in the Chinese online discourse about the widely-discussed topic of *runxue* 润学. *Runxue* is a buzzword emerging from the backlash of China's authoritarian zero-COVID policy. Literally translated as 'the study of run', *runxue* reflects an intensified aspiration and anxiety of the middle-class, well-educated Chinese to emigrate for 'survival' from China with a gloomy prospect.¹² In this context, non-traditional routes of high-skilled immigration with a relatively low threshold are explored with the popularization of Chinese social media. Getting a U.S.-based teaching degree and credential is considered to have a better chance of *run*,

¹¹ Ruan, J., Zhang, J., & Leung, C. B. (2015). *Chinese Language Education in the United States*. Springer.

¹² The extensive discussion of *runxue* can be viewed as a trigger of Chinese people's long-existing discontent with multifaceted social problems and conflicts of China.

especially for liberal arts people who are less competitive in America's job market.

Under this trend, many immigrant teachers share their experiences of teaching in America in the forms of images, videos and texts on the female-dominated social media Red (小红书 Xiao hong shu), which flourished over the past five years, in addition to the question-and-answer forum Zhihu (知乎). These posts have received great attention from female users. Popular social media platforms like Red and Zhihu have evolved into search engines where users can get first-hand information and experiences from other users rather than commercial websites, and therefore enhance credibility and enlarge their imaginary vision for overseas life.

Past research has delineated the overall portrait of foreign-born immigrant teachers (excluding post-secondary teachers) in the US with three major features: Immigrant teachers are more likely to be female. They are significantly more likely than native-born teachers to have a master's, professional, or doctoral degree. Immigrants are underrepresented in non-postsecondary occupations, in part due to barriers including work authorization, educational requirements, and licensing and certification.¹³ This portrait underlies three crucial analytical lenses that illuminate the significance of understanding the multiple identities and entangled experiences of immigrant teachers: high-skilled labor precariat, gendered migration, and cultural politics of diaspora. On the one hand, Chinese immigrant teachers belong to the community of overseas Chinese (海外华人 *haiwai huaren*), especially the high-skilled professionals in the post-2000s, who

¹³ Furuya, Y., Nooraddini, M. I., Wang, W., & Waslin, M. (2019). A portrait of foreign-born teachers in the United States. Institute for Immigration Research. Fairfax, VA: George Mason University.

successfully ascend on the spatial hierarchy and realize the fantasy of transnational mobility. On the other hand, the inherent nature of Asian female immigrant teachers with triple marginality in the US that has long existed in the peripheral history of both Asian immigration and the profession of teacher, inevitably gives rise to the precariousness and vulnerability that might be obscured by the optimism of outward mobility.

Most of the extant research on immigrant teachers in the US is in teaching and education studies, which exclusively focuses on their professional role, pedagogical function and economic value as the imparter of knowledge, intermediary of bicultural exchange and contributors to the diversified curriculum. Also, understandings of teachers that solely centered on their life in schools contribute to the invisibility of the care relationships which, in most cases, advance men's careers and hinder women's.¹⁴ Therefore, whereas immigrant teachers' professionalism is crucial to the shaping of their subjectivity, there is also a need to inquire into their dynamic personal situations and life experiences given their identity as self-initiated ethnic-minority immigrants from a sociological and anthropological perspective. Neglecting the transformation process of *becoming* a foreign teacher and the motivation of choosing a certain way of living in the new land, might obscure the interlocking political and cultural logic embedded in this process. Scholars who notice this status quo propose more attention to the complexities of mobility by shifting the focus to the power, stratification and differentiation existing

¹⁴ Moreau, M.-P. (2018). *Teachers, Gender and the Feminisation Debate*. Taylor & Francis Group. 106

within and beyond the global educational landscape.¹⁵ As Kunz notes, the categorization of migration has been recognized as a deeply political exercise, involved in the ordering of movement, in broader power negotiations and social (re)arrangements.¹⁶ It is also important to align the transnational teaching practice and immigrant experience with the ever-changing political and cultural relations between China and the US.

The phenomenon of ‘teacher immigration’ is also slightly different from ‘teacher migration’ or ‘expatriate teachers’ that have received attention in global migration studies. The latter usually refers to short-term ESL teachers from Anglophone countries teaching in areas that do not set English as their official language such as East Asia, either for better pay or a work-holiday style of leisure.¹⁷ Bringing critical attention to the group of Chinese immigrant teachers constitutes a counter-discourse to the flattening and essentialist rendering of high-skilled immigrants from Asia, many of whom are thought to be driven by better economic opportunities and material rewards in the neoliberal global context. As Michael Apple points out, capitalism is not only an economic system but a form of life, ‘a structured totality.’ It is not reducible to the bare bones of economic relations. We need to see our kind of social formation as built up out of a constantly changing and contradictory set of interconnections among the economic, political and cultural ‘spheres’ which serve to be the arena for working out three kinds

¹⁵ Koh, S. Y., & Sin, I. L. (2020). Academic and teacher expatriates: Mobilities, positionalities, and subjectivities. *Geography Compass*, 14(5), e12487.

¹⁶ Kunz, S. (2020). Expatriate, migrant? The social life of migration categories and the polyvalent mobility of race. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(11), 2145–2162.

¹⁷ Studies on expatriate teachers can be seen in Rey, J., Bolay, M., & Gez, Y. N. (2020). Precarious privilege: Personal debt, lifestyle aspirations and mobility among international school teachers. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 18(4), 361–373.

of dynamics - class, gender and race.¹⁸ Although immigrant teachers only account for a small proportion of the whole Chinese diaspora, their life and work experiences on an atypical route as teachers also provide refreshing insights to better understand the general pattern of contemporary Chinese immigration and Asian diasporic movements from a micro and female perspective. I inquire into the personal reasons and social factors that they made these career and migration choices and examine how the intersectional factors of race, gender, class, and immigrant identity affect their profession, family and life trajectory as a whole. I ask about why they decided to stay in the US to be a teacher, what sort of strategies they have employed to deal with the (un)foreseeable hurdles of the triple marginality, and try to formulate the new flexible citizenship they develop through the process of localization and floating with in-betweenness.

The highly feminized K12 education as well as the Chinese language education in the US epitomize the structural impasse faced by female immigrant teachers. The case of Chinese female immigrant teachers is a perfect site to examine the transgenerational relation in the family. By following the discourse of Marxist feminism, I reflect on how the dual identities of teaching and motherhood intertwine, facilitate, and sometimes hinder each other in the juggling responsibilities of female teachers. In this analysis, I address the formation and transformation of teacher identity which is central to their professional experience. By exploring how the professional identity of Chinese immigrant teachers transforms, reconstructs, and even eventually diminishes in the

¹⁸ Apple, M. W. (1986). *Teachers and texts: A political economy of class and gender relations in education*. New York : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. 16.

precarious process of pursuing a middle-class dream, we can get more sense of the multifaceted and often underappreciated roles of female teachers as educators, mothers, caregivers, and daycare laborers that contribute to the production of capitalism.

1.2 Research Method

Built on these discourses and questions, this thesis adopts a mixed method of interview-based ethnography and digital ethnography to collect and examine the intricate transnational experiences of Chinese female immigrant teachers who work in American K12 schools. I recruited most of the interviewees through e-mails and social media WeChat and Red, and then follow the snowball sampling method to reach out rest of the interviewees. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 9 teachers in total who work or used to work in North Carolina, California, Michigan, Virginia and Maryland state. Although my initial focus is North Carolina, the recruitment result enables a broader and comparative perspective across different states. The age of the participants ranges from the early 20s to the late 30s, and 5 of them have children. The interviews are conducted in-person and online in Mandarin, each for 1-2 hours. The digital ethnography part covers teachers' online discourses on group chat, blog posts and short videos on WeChat, Red, and Zhihu. These textual and visual snippets present a cultural landscape of teaching overseas and render different socio-cultural meanings through close reading.

The majority of Chinese teachers in my study teach subjects related to Chinese (Mandarin). Some of them teach Chinese as a foreign language, and others work in Chinese-English bilingual immersion schools where they use Chinese to teach all core

subjects. While little extant data precisely reveals the exact number and background of Chinese teachers in American K12 education, three types of life trajectories can be drawn from my study to provide a rough portrait of this community: Most teachers immigrate to the US through educational migration. They pursued a higher education degree (usually a master's degree) in the US and got employed in local schools after graduation. Some foreign-trained teachers get teaching jobs in the US through international teacher recruitment agencies which aim at addressing the teacher shortage in the US. This can be encapsulated as labor migration. The last type of teacher immigrates to the US with their marital family, usually because of the job relocation of their partners, as is called "trailing spouse". For the last group of teachers, some of them worked as a teacher before moving to the US, while others have no teaching-related experience at all but decide to make a career transition into the K12 education industry for various reasons.

It has to be acknowledged that the American K12 education system varies from state to state, even schools in the same districts can be very different. While they serve as the background for understanding all these personal narratives, I would not delve deep into the details of each school that appear in our conversation or specific teaching activities related to lesson content. Rather, I attempt to address these questions from a sociocultural perspective that foregrounds the diasporan specificities of overseas Chinese and shows how marginalized individuals like K12 teachers can be the writer of the ongoing history and enrich our understanding of Chinese immigration in the 21st century. By adopting feminist ethnographic approaches, this thesis offers a critical alternative to the masculine and material version of Chinese immigration and

contributes to a more extensive intellectual effort to understand the racial and gender injustices associated with globalization.

2. Underestimated Pressure for Chinese Immigrant Teachers

2.1 Precarity and Limited Upward Mobility

Teaching in American public schools may be deemed a stable job with guaranteed job security due to the tenure they get after working for three to five years. This caters to many Chinese people's career preference for an 'iron rice bowl' job. However, the situation can be very different for foreign teachers due to their immigration status. While the process of immigration is undoubtedly difficult for all immigrants, I argue that due to the specificity of the education industry as a cultural sector, the precarity of immigrant teachers is perpetuated compared to others, in which they are exposed to higher risk and uncertainty economically, socially and emotionally.

Given the growing literature on the concept of precarity and the precariat class in labor studies, there is also a need to pay attention to the high-skilled yet precarious labor such as immigrant teachers from the extending meaning of precarity, who may be considered privileged compared to their low-skilled immigrant counterpart. From a macro perspective, the precarity of immigrant teachers derives from the process of globalization driven by neoliberalism in the postmodern era. Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of *précarité* as a situation that arises from the uncertainty in both employment and earnings, which can be traced back to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s that have impacted the global economy.¹⁹ Built on Bourdieu's conceptualization, Guy Standing coins the term 'precariat class' referring to a heterogeneous group who

¹⁹ Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Acts of resistance*. New York: New Press. 81-90

experience precarity in their employment, ranging from migrants to youth and women working part-time jobs.²⁰ While the precariat is initially a combination of ‘precarious’ and ‘proletariat’, scholars like Estrada also call for attention to the ‘educated precariat’ of ‘status inconsistency’, namely people who have a relatively high formal education but are forced to accept jobs or income status well below those considered in accordance with their qualifications, such as non-tenured, adjunct professors, freelance writers and artists.²¹ The lack of job stability and limited access to work benefits widely exist for immigrant teachers, especially considering stability in relation to financial security that is often found to be insufficient in the underpaid situation of American teachers. And many of them have to work in private schools with less social welfare such as pension, if they do not have the requisite teaching credentials, which exposes them to greater job insecurity.

Six years ago, Tianning was one of the first international students admitted to the teacher education program at an Ivy League University. There was no one knew how to apply for a work visa for international teachers. Although the school district hired a lawyer, she did most of the paperwork herself.

“Back then, I didn’t have anyone to rely on, I had to learn all those things myself and did the work for school so that they would like to hire me. You have to take as much initiative as you can, put in two hundred percent of the effort to get a little opportunity.”

²⁰ Standing, G. (2011). *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Bloomsbury Academic.

²¹ Bruno Estrada. Who will represent the educated precariat? *Revolting Europe*. September 27, 2013 <https://revoltingeurope.wordpress.com/2013/09/27/who-will-represent-the-educated-precariat/>

In contrast to other high-earning industries such as business, law, medicine and engineering, the education sector in the United States is not typically a favored industry among immigrant workers. Despite that many school districts in poor urban areas rely on temporary international migrant teachers with a J1 visa to alleviate the shortage of local teachers, they are less likely to support long-term immigrant teachers due to their high cost. In addition, the H1B lottery result timing in April is problematic for school recruitment, which typically takes place in February and March, making it difficult for districts to secure long-term teachers for the next school year. Furthermore, the H1B visa start date in October is too late for schools with a typical start date in late August. Consequently, some school districts may have limited experience dealing with immigration issues related to their teachers, such as providing legal assistance, sponsorship for visas, or access to resources that can help them better understand their rights and options. They may be open to hiring J1 teachers, but are hesitant to employ long-term teachers unless there is a pressing need. This uncertainty can create additional challenges and stress for foreign teachers who hold an aspiration of staying to navigate the complex immigration system on their own, making them more vulnerable to economic, social, and legal precarity. To cope with this precarity, teachers are usually advised to apply for schools in traditional immigration states such as California and New York, where they might have a better chance of getting through the visa hurdle with less friction. But the job markets in these states of large populations are also much more competitive than those in mid-west states. This paradox reduces teachers' options for seeking a stable job to stay. Or they may settle for, in compromise, the worse

working conditions in schools with high teacher turnover rates and endure for years until obtaining a green card. Teachers who are encumbered by either the lack of teaching credentials or legal working authorization (i.e. need to be sponsored for H1B) find themselves choiceless and passive in seeking jobs.

North Carolina is one of the top six states that hire the most international migrant teachers to relieve the local teacher shortage. Exchange teachers usually have two to five years of service and expect to be placed at the “toughest” schools of high poverty and high teacher turnover rate, where local teachers are resistant to work at. This type of labor migrant teacher belongs to the category of ‘guest worker’. According to the segmented labor theory, guest worker program in industrialized countries typically includes work that is considered low-status, poorly paid, dangerous, and unpleasant, which is premised on the notion that not enough Americans can or will fill the labor demand—at least at the wages and working conditions offered. Bartlett makes a parallel between nursing and teaching, noting that for some people, the nursing and teaching degree is a professional passport to migration more than an occupational interest in its own right. Transnational migration becomes a reason for occupational selection.²² A J1 teacher with ten-year teaching experience in Beijing, Lee got a position in a Chinese-English bilingual immersion school in North Carolina after paying a placement fee to an international teacher recruitment agency, and had been teaching there for five years. She is what Bartlett calls an “aspirer” that aspires to stay beyond the service term by investing the greatest amount of time and energy into their work.

²² Bartlett, L. (2014). *Migrant Teachers*. Harvard University Press. 106-108

Despite knowing that it is extremely difficult to transfer a J1 visa to a long-term H1B work visa, Lee said that she has to navigate through it since her son has been studying in the local school and she does not want him to continue schooling back in China. “It will be unimaginable for him to fit into the *neijuan* 内卷 environment. It’s too stressful.”²³ Having worked very hard during the five years to get the repatriation clause waived and sent out more than a hundred resumes at the end of the service term, Lee finally got a job in a public school in Maryland in 2021, the only school that was willing to transfer her visa. “I was lucky, most teachers have no choice but to leave.” When asked about her initial intention of teaching in America, she said it was just a simple idea of bringing her son to see the world when he is young. This cosmopolitan desire is later complicated into a hard choice of leaving or staying. Even though she successfully secured a job with a long-term work visa, her partner with an H2 visa has no right to work but doing some fragmented part-time job online, so the financial burden of raising the whole family mainly falls on her alone. “Teaching is just a working-class job with average salaries like the cashier at Walmart. People don’t respect teachers here as much as in China.” It is clear that Lee and her partner do not consider transnational teaching as a job with affluent rewards or even a respectable, decent one as in China; instead, they tend to

²³ *Neijuan* is a buzzword in Chinese context, referring to the life of being overworked, stressed, anxious and feeling trapped, where many face the negative effects of living a highly competitive life for nothing. (Cited from Liu, Y.-L. 2021, May 14. China’s “Involved” Generation. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/chinas-involved-generation>) In K16 education, *neijuan* is reflected in the overload of homework, score inflation and homogenized choices that are perceived as ‘good majors’ or ‘good jobs’, such as public school teachers and civil servants.

value its pragmatic purpose of immigration which benefits the next generation in a long term.

The blurring boundary between working-class and middle-class professions reflects the proletarianization of teachers in industrialized countries as well. As Allisa Quatz points out in her interview with American teachers who join the 'UberEducators' program to earn additional income by driving Uber after work, "although ostensibly middle-class historically, teachers have few of the advantages and may not be able to afford the life that we used to associate with that standing."²⁴ From my observation of Chinese teachers' online discussions on social media, many of them are experiencing similar economic pressure, as depicted in the following quote from a teacher in the WeChat group chat:

"My monthly salary is \$3000, the rent, internet and house insurance in total are \$1600, and I need to pay for my car and save money for those several months without salary. [smiling face emoji]. Not afraid to lose face, during so many years in America, I do not dare to dine in Chinese restaurants. Every day I look up the price of the Blue Bell ice cream in Albertson to see if it is on sale because if not, I can't afford it. [two smiling face emojis.]"

American public school teachers are not paid in summer and winter holidays, as contrasted to their Chinese counterparts. Therefore, the case of Lee is not merely another cliché story of the American dream mainly motivated by extrinsic rewards, being a teacher in the US can even make life more difficult in some senses. In Bartlett's

²⁴ Quart, A. (2018). *Squeezed: Why our families can't afford America*. HarperCollins. 156

account, the Philippine migrant teachers working in California alone take great advantage of the highly increased income by remitting money back to the Philippines. Nevertheless, some teachers later have their family reunion in California also feel the pinch without the comparative advantage of income. Chinese post-1980 and post-1990 generation teachers like Lee who works in first or second-tier cities in China have stronger motivation and resources to go abroad. Whereas teaching is not a high-paid job in China either, there is less comparative economic advantage than in the Philippines. Pursuing a better, at least less competitive environment of education for the next generation at the risk of financial plight renders a different narrative of conventional motivation of transnational migration from developing countries to developed countries.

Apart from the motivation, Lee also told me about the “differentiated treatment” of work benefits because of the visa type she holds when she was still a J1 teacher. “I have to buy the specified health insurance myself, but the insurance does not make much sense for my actual daily life at work. What I need to spend is not covered, and the insurance premiums are particularly expensive. But we do the same job as other teachers.” She said this makes her feel uncomfortable and even discriminated against. Usually, public schools are supposed to purchase health insurance for their employees. The well-being of foreign workers is greatly conditioned by the institutional stipulation, which would not be thoroughly informed to teachers by the recruitment agency of the J1 teacher program. After relocating to Maryland, she now enjoys normal work benefits as others.

Another teacher, Jingwei, has been teaching Chinese in a private high school in North Carolina for eight years. In 2016, she had to update her H1B visa back in China, but due to the negligence of the school staff, she got notified of her departure only two days before the visa expired. By the time she got on the plane, it was only 12 hours before she would be deemed an illegal stay. Apart from the physical uncertainty caused by the immigration institution, she also described a sense of floatiness and mental void under the enduring unpredictability before she finally got the green card after eight years of hard work.

“I faced the problem that I was floating in the air. I don’t know if I can still teach at this school next year. I have put a lot of energy into these students, I have planted the seeds, but you don’t know if you are still the gardener who continues to nurture these seeds. Next year there may be no gardener in this garden, it may be a different gardener, it may be a different method of nurturing. So in a long-term perspective, your heart will always be in a state of emptiness. Many of our Chinese teachers in North Carolina have experienced this situation. How do you prepare your mind and body in this situation to work with full dedication and conscience? The students might say to you, I want to learn Chinese next year, and then some teachers listen to this word they tear down. Next year I can not be here, next year I have to leave, next year your school district will cancel this Chinese program, next year my visa status will expire, and I will have to go back to China, or something like that. I think such a short-term teaching role is actually very sad.”

Jingwei's experiences render the issue of temporality in immigration. Cwerner notes that immigration would gradually become a part of immigrants' lives and identities, rather than just a contingent circumstance.²⁵ The uncertain prospect of staying and leaving largely determines immigrants' investment into establishing connections with the host society. As David Harvey describes, the concept of "time-space compression" in postmodernism has created a rapidly changing and adaptable world that makes it challenging to engage in long-term planning or relationships.²⁶ Immigrant teachers are the mobile subjects under globalization whose precariousness not only derives from the uncertainty of securing work visas or tenured jobs, but also from their unsatisfied expectations of building a long-term relationship with students, which is often one of the important reasons for many teachers to enter this profession. Teaching is usually endowed with much emotional labor and social responsibility. Since Jingwei started the Chinese program at that school, she put a great effort into it. Calling herself a "gardener", she expresses her deep hope and love for her students as well as the budding Chinese language program in the Southeast, a new gateway state for Asian American and Asian immigrants. The risk of unexpected involuntary departure can be detrimental to the passion for teaching and causes teachers additional emotional burdens.

Bourdieu's classification of forms of capital foregrounds the portability and convertibility of cultural capital, as seen in the case of educational qualification. The very

²⁵ Cwerner, S. B. (2001). The Times of Migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(1), 7–36.

²⁶ Harvey, D. (1990). *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Basil Blackwell. 286.

act of migration disrupts ideas of linear reproduction of cultural capital.²⁷ Ethnic-specific social capital can be a resource in upwardly mobile trajectories.²⁸ The activity of transnational migration usually underlies the prospect of upward mobility centered on increased income, especially when there is a considerable investment in studying abroad or moving abroad with family. In the case of transnational Chinese language teaching, the cultural capital of Chinese language and culture can also be horizontally converted into a teacher's professional qualification that distinguishes them from local teachers and equips them with competitiveness in the market. Teaching overseas, especially in targeted countries as ideal destinations for immigration, is therefore considered a reliable stepping stone to attain the social capital of mobility converted from linguistic and cultural capital. Many recruitment agencies advertise their service of transferring teachers overseas with such optimistic promises, therefore, many domestic teachers or to-be teachers may have underestimated the difficulties of embarking on this path.

However, past research has shown that the experience of transnational employment does not necessarily guarantee growth in professional capital or upward mobility.²⁹ Migrants from the global South may also routinely encounter the

²⁷ Erel, U. (2010). Migrating Cultural Capital: Bourdieu in Migration Studies. *Sociology*, 44(4), 642–660.

²⁸ Crul, M., Schneider, J., Keskiner, E., & Lelie, F. (2017). The multiplier effect: How the accumulation of cultural and social capital explains steep upward social mobility of children of low-educated immigrants. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(2), 321–338.

²⁹ Soong, H., & Stahl, G. (2021). Negotiating 'global middle-class' teacher professionalism: Using transnational habitus to explore the experiences of teacher expatriates in Shanghai. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 0(0), 1–14.

devaluation of their cultural capital.³⁰ For immigrant teachers, there is limited room for career growth and salary increase in the school system. Many schools set up Chinese programs for a diversified school culture to attract students, increase enrollment and get more funding from the government. Yet, they sometimes do not invest much in developing the program. One teacher told me that she had seen a Chinese bilingual immersion school where the principal does not attach enough importance to Chinese programs because he is not Chinese. Teachers need to cover all grades' teaching, preparing the work on their own without enough training, guidance and assistance from the school as other teachers of core subjects do. There is no unified teaching plan and they often find it chaotic in class management. Students' learning performance is also undesirable since they only take Chinese class once a week. In addition, unlike China's exam-oriented education system where teachers' income has more mechanisms of incentives in correlation with hierarchical titles or students' academic performance in exams, American teachers usually anticipate a set rate of salary increase which is lower than 3% per year.³¹ The lack of incentives in the structural impasse of underfunded education refrains teachers from flourishing in the job they are initially passionate about.

Moreover, the reliance on the social and political atmosphere, and the inherent marginalized status of the Chinese language subject also anticipate downward mobility

³⁰ Nohl, A.-M., Schittenhelm, K., Schmidtke, O., & Weiß, A. (2006). Cultural Capital during Migration—A Multi-level Approach for the Empirical Analysis of the Labor Market Integration of Highly Skilled Migrants. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(3), Article 3.

³¹ For example, the annual salary of North Carolina public school teachers increases by \$1000 per year. Data from NC State Salary Schedules of 2022-2023: <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/financial-and-business-services/compensation-public-school-employees#StateSalarySchedules-1388>. The teacher salary of private schools varies from school to school.

of teachers. The precarity of Chinese immigrant teachers can be further exacerbated by the volatile job market of Chinese language teaching in America, resulting from the changing interest in learning Chinese. When there is a surge in interest in learning Chinese, schools may be more likely to establish Chinese language or immersion programs, leading to an increased demand for Chinese-speaking teachers. However, when the interest in learning Chinese decreases, these programs are at stake of being cut or reduced financial budget, leaving Chinese immigrant teachers with fewer job opportunities and material supports at work. During the pandemic, with the growth of online resources and competition from commercial online language education, Chinese schools and Chinese program around the world are experiencing a decline in student enrollment. Additionally, there has been a rise in anti-Asian sentiment and intensified hate crimes toward China in the US in 2020-2021, which may have discouraged some students from studying Chinese or other Asian languages.

For example, Muzi has been teaching Chinese in a public middle school in Virginia for 6 years since 2017. She sensed a fluctuation in the interest in learning Chinese these years and describes how it negatively affects the experiences of Chinese teachers.

“I think that Chinese language education in the US is not as prosperous as it was five years ago. After the deterioration of the relationship between the US and China during the pandemic, there are increasing external doubts about Chinese education. As an elective course, Chinese is in a competitive relationship with other language courses like Spanish, French, and Latin. Students and parents are like our customers, and I feel

that as a teacher I become less confident and afraid to be strict with students, worrying that they might drop the class. I have to lower the standard and work very hard to make the course as interesting as possible to attract the students. There can be a lot of pressure on teachers to keep the enrollment. In my school district, there was once a time that parents banded together to negotiate with the school to not invest their money in the Chinese program. Now it is more and more difficult to get a job teaching Mandarin, especially if you don't have credentials in teaching other subjects."

Similar to ESL teachers whose field "occupies the lowest intellectual value in the hierarchy of academic disciplines in American schools",³² some Chinese teachers also express concerns to me that they are teaching a marginalized subject, and their work is undervalued by those who think teaching Chinese is easy for every Chinese-speaking person. One teacher Cathy in a Chinese immersion school in California even had a terrible experience when a Mexican student in her class did very badly, his father was irritated and shouted at her: "It is because the Mandarin is too hard! Why would my child need to learn a language he won't even use?" This case, despite its rareness, epitomizes the nuanced feeling of underconfidence and the dynamics of power relations among teachers, school, students and parents that situate Chinese teachers in a passive and vulnerable position. Although Chinese remains the second dominant foreign language (behind Spanish) taught in American K12 schools, the cultural capital of language and Chinese culture alone is hard to sustain sufficient work competitiveness, and teachers need to take more classes, get more credentials in other subjects such as

³² Subedi, B. (2008). Contesting racialization: Asian immigrant teachers' critiques and claims of teacher authenticity. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 11(1), 57-70.

science and math to get over the precarious employment brought by the volatile Chinese education market and the devaluation of their work. As Lasky notes, vulnerability is a complex emotional experience that can occur in various situations and has different dimensions. It's a flexible state that is shaped by individuals' perception of their current circumstances and how they align with their beliefs, values, identity, and sense of competence.³³ Muzi and Cathy's everyday vulnerability is not uncommon among my interviewees, which is intensified by the intersectionality of Asian female immigrant teachers.

2.2 Intersectionality and Racial Hypervisibility in the Teacher Burnout

The precarity of third-world women emigrating to Western countries has been well disclosed in the framework of intersectionality. Intersectionality serves as a productive theoretical framework in analyzing the various ways that race and gender interact with class in the labor market, and interrogating how states construct regulatory regimes of identity, reproduction, and family formation.³⁴ From my interview result, I argue that the teacher burnout of Chinese immigrant teachers is beyond the overwhelming physical and affective labor of teaching itself, but is also perpetuated by their intersectional identities that bring unpredictable difficulties. The following screenshot is an excerpt from an online post about the traumatic experience of teaching

³³ Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 899–916.

³⁴ Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(4), 785–810.

in a poor urban school in Michigan:

我们最大的感受就是，不太把我们当平等独立值得尊重的人吧.....就大概是被拐到非洲^Q搬砖的人的心情吧。每个人都日夜祈祷^Q着快点结束 所以，你必须内心十分强大，才可以，不建议年轻人或者单纯可爱没心机的人去。如果你是非常determined^Q，或者有其他小心思的人，可以试试.....最好一定完成它，不然一毛钱也没有。

我在这里大概是受到了职场pua 性别歧视^Q 种族歧视^Q，每日睡眠不足6小时，上班期间fully responsibility 中间有不到30分钟午餐时间，我记得我一星期瘦了10斤，几乎每日以泪洗面，心头压着大石头^Q，脖子梗着鱼骨头的感觉，深刻体会到了 如芒刺背^Q，如鲠在喉，如坐针毡的感觉。后面回国后，我闷在自己的卧室半年没有怎么出门，每天都很压抑，很难过.....不想出门，不想吃饭，不想见人，不想说话.....后来过了很久很久，我才明白，我当时是患了抑郁症。这个阴影一直纠缠着我，到我重新申请其他大学的研究生，并且顺利毕业后，还是如噩梦般纠缠着我，让我没有信心鼓起勇气好好面对生活。2年多了，我第一次在网上说出我当年遭受的一切.....本来我不想再谈起，可是看着那么多人的私信，我就把一切写在这里吧.....你不说，我不说，大家都不说，还有谁会说出来呢？

Figure 1. Screenshot of an online post from Zhihu³⁵

To give a little background information of this post, it happens in one of the few U.S.-based master's programs in teaching Chinese that have cooperation with China. To get the state teaching credential, teachers who get admitted must work full-time with a

³⁵ Zhihu is an online forum for question-and-answer. <https://www.zhihu.com/question/56265025>

[Our greatest feeling is that we were not equally treated as independent people who deserve respect. It feels like being kidnapped to work in Africa...Everyone prayed all day for an end as soon as possible. Thus, if you want to try, you must be very determined, have a big heart or other intentions. Otherwise, I don't recommend naive, young people to go. You'd better get it done by all means, or there would be nothing in return.

I have probably experienced workplace manipulation, sexism and racism. I slept less than six hours daily, being fully responsible during work with less than a 30-minute break. I remember that I lost 5kg within a week, and almost spent my whole day in tears. I deeply understand what it feels like to have a big stone weighing on my mind, a fishbone in the throat, awn in the back, and sit on pins and needles. Later I went back to China, I didn't go out of my room for half a year, feeling depressed and unhappy every day, unwilling to eat, meet people or talk. Long after that did I realize that I suffered from depression at the time. This shadow has been haunting me like a nightmare till I reapplied for graduate school at another university and graduated, leaving me with no courage to confront life confidently. It's been two years, and this is the first time that I talk out everything I experienced...I didn't want to talk about it again, but seeing so many direct messages asking about it, let me put everything here. If all of us don't say it out loud, who would speak for us?]

monthly salary of \$1600 for two to three years while completing the online coursework. Because of the work-study setting and the low tuition, it is considered a good deal to immigrate to the US by many. Yet despite omitting many details and specific incidents, this teacher's experience expresses a disillusioned reality that shares with some of my interviewees and other postings from teachers who harbored this optimism before coming to the US.

The intersectional identity of Asian immigrant teachers perpetuates teacher burnout. From the perspective of race, it renders a countering power relation: on the one hand, immigrants of racial and ethnic minorities are structurally posited as the vulnerable Other at the margins of the white-dominated American society. On the other hand, the traditional education system anticipates teachers to play multiple roles that require a certain degree of power in front of students, such as the gatekeeper of knowledge, authority of the class, role model in behavioral expectations, the person that students can look up to and learn from, etc. Chinese immigrant teachers, who have experienced the Chinese educational pattern with a Confucian ideology, are much imbued with the belief in a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student. Teachers are reverentially regarded as someone who “传道受业解惑” (pass down wisdom, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts).³⁶ Moreover, in developing countries with enormous populations and poverty-wealth disparity like China, education serves as a crucial even the only pathway to upward mobility for many, as described in the saying “千军万马过独木桥” (an army of thousands trying to cross a

³⁶ Quoted from Han Yu's famous essay "On Teachers" in Tang Dynasty.

single-log bridge), referring to the brutal mechanism of selection of Gaokao. Given the traditional ideology and realistic need, teachers are generally granted higher social status for they play an important role in the game. Whereas the student-centered mode of teaching in American education largely breaks the myth of the teacher as the only authority and shapes the way teachers posit themselves in the classroom, some of my interviewees express the anticipation of a Confucian-type student-teacher relationship, and teacher should usually be the one who takes the lead and gives instructions in most activities. The difficulty of drawing a similar teaching authority from Asian communities to work with the diverse student population results in a sense of underconfidence, unsafety and vulnerability of the teacher, which is also one of the reasons that Asian Americans are reluctant to go into teaching profession.³⁷

Apart from the direct racism from white, senior colleagues, Cathy also experienced how cultural differences in education can lead to misunderstanding, manipulation and even power abuse from other racial minorities. For example, they both have encountered hostile speculation or accusations of being racist to African American students by their parents or students themselves. "The mother accused me of 'yelling and cursing' her child. I just asked the student if he could hear me clearly with a loud voice since he sits at the back of the classroom." Cathy said to me with rage and sadness. Cathy has moved to North Carolina after teaching in California for ten years, partly because of the unaffordable price in California, and partly because of being traumatized by the toxic relationship with some parents at that school district. I will turn

³⁷ Gordon, J. A. (2000). Asian American Resistance to Selecting Teaching as a Career: The Power of Community and Tradition. *Teachers College Record*, 102(1), 173–196.

to her story in detail in the second chapter. Another teacher, Wu, also says that “Teaching is not the most difficult part, being politically correct is. You have to be very careful of everything you say and do.” The nuance power dynamic of the racial triangulation is unfamiliar to newly arrived Chinese immigrant teachers, who did not have much awareness of the highly-sensitive racial issue in America and .

Ladson-Billings found that in North American schools the norm is a white, middle-class homogenous representation amongst teaching staff.³⁸ Similarly, in a study of the racialization of two Southeast Asian female immigrant teachers in the US, Subedi shows how the specter of post-colonialism haunts the classroom by constructing a normative practice of privileging white identities as a symbol of teacher authenticity and legitimacy.³⁹ This observation resonates with the experience of a Chinese female teacher in an urban public school in Michigan, who complained in a WeChat group that she was not treated as a formal teacher and was verbally bullied by the students. Chinese teachers are also often laughed at by the students if they have a heavy accent in speaking English. The hegemony of English still widely exists even in a world language learning/teaching setting, embedded with the deep-rooted ideology of colonialism and imperialism. Some first-generation Asian immigrant parents also prioritize learning English over the ethnic language for their children, in order that they can excel in academic performance and assimilate into American society as soon as possible. Yet,

³⁸ Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). The evolving role of critical race theory in educational scholarship. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 115-119.

³⁹ Subedi (2008).

according to my interviewees, parents who choose to send children to their classes are better aware of the importance of learning Chinese.

Brown emphasizes the central role of race in the social analysis of education: Whiteness as hegemony is evident in the knowledge, values, experiences and ways of being valorized in American society and in educational settings. Teachers of color must be recognized as both individuals and members of historic groups that likely possess knowledge and experiences that are different from but complementary to those found in the dominant society.⁴⁰ Cho argues that the experiences and perspectives of what it means to be a teacher are stories predominantly told by the prototypical teacher.⁴¹ As immigrant teachers of ethnic minorities bring in diverse linguistic and cultural capital that largely contribute to addressing the multilingual and multicultural needs of American public education, they also reconfigure the ontological question of teacher identity by providing refreshing perspectives on what it means to be a teacher, especially a teacher of color.

Jingwei is the advisor of her school's AAPI Affinity Student Group (Asian American and Pacific Islander) because the only other two Asian American teachers refuse to do it. One says that he is too busy, and the other says to the student "I don't see the reason why you start an affinity group."

⁴⁰ Brown, K. D. (2014). Teaching in color: A critical race theory in education analysis of the literature on preservice teachers of color and teacher education in the US. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17(3), 326–345.

⁴¹ Cho, C. (2010). "Qualifying" as Teacher: Immigrant Teacher Candidates' Counter-stories. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 100, Article 100.

“So they come to me for help. At first, I wanted to reject it because I don’t think I am qualified. I said to them: ‘I am not an Asian American. I am just a foreign worker, I know little about your history.’ But they have no one else to turn to, so I must take responsibility. I became their teacher, therapist and analyst. And it took me a lot of time without extra pay (laughs). Because you are a teacher and you want to help them, right? He called him a Chink and when he told that to you, you became a secondary victim. Everything is also very personal to me, isn’t it? Another student came to me crying when someone asked him, ‘Are you coming from where the virus is coming from?’ And I was like, I think I’m coming from the same place...You are trying to help them, but at the same time, you also have a lot of internal mental friction. There are many Chinese teachers who want to quit. I think there was a time in 2021, I woke up every day and wanted to quit. Can I take a month off? The mental burden is problematic for me. I think it’s because I’m too sensitive. When I hear a few political voices or read a little bit of news, I will be very painful, but then I have to suppress my feelings. I have to put a smile on my face and go to class, acting as if nothing happens. I think this is difficult.”⁴²

As critical theorists of education point out that rather than defining teacher work through the narrow language of professionalism, a critical pedagogy needs to ascertain more carefully what the role of teachers might be as cultural workers engaged

⁴² Jingwei’s last word is referring to the Shanghai lockdown incident in April 2021 as a traumatic collective memory of Chinese people. She explains to me that she finds it hard every time to respond to students’ or other teachers’ inquiries related to the controversial political events in China.

in the production of ideologies and social practices.⁴³ While education can serve as a means of combatting racism, it also has the capacity to function as a mechanism that benefits the nation-state, institutions, and power structures. As an Asian immigrant teacher, instead of reproducing the social capital of “Americanness” which is perceived as an important function of public education, Jingwei plays a proactive and positive role in helping the minor students reclaim “Asianness” by teaching Chinese and volunteering in the student activities related to racial equality. She is not only a helper but also an embodied life that her Chinese American students can look up to and imagine as the kind of people they might become when they grow up. “They are curious about me...They see what they can do in the future from me.” Yet, this extra physical and emotional labor is not acknowledged by the school in the lack of financial and staffing support. The school is catering to the taken-for-granted demand of immigrant assimilation and acculturation into mainstream American society. And it also renders devaluation of the teacher’s role in the cultural sector towards a mechanized and routinized vocation.⁴⁴

Castro points out that teachers of color in a predominantly white profession are often assigned additional job demands to support, mentor or discipline students of color, which endows them with negative hypervisibility and particular vulnerabilities.⁴⁵

Jingwei’s mental friction resulting from the emotional labor of mediating the hate speech

⁴³ Giroux, H. A. (2005). *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*. Routledge. 71.

⁴⁴ Means, A. (2019). *Precarity and the Precarization of Teaching*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-1179-6_117-1

⁴⁵ Castro, A. J. (2022). Teachers of Color and Precarious Work: The Inequality of Job Security. *Labor Studies Journal*, 47(4), 359–382.

among students is often overlooked, despite its unsettling nature. She is burdened with extra responsibilities that are rejected by other local teachers of color who possess better social circumstances and language proficiency, unencumbered by the uncertainties imposed by immigrant status. In contrast, Jingwei needs to prioritize improving her working performance, cultivating a good relationship with students and appeasing the principal and parents to secure a renewal of her contract and work visa. The work ethic of a teacher committed to facilitating students is intertwined with the realistic necessities of an immigrant striving to survive and prosper. In this sense, the racial hypervisibility of being both an immigrant teacher and teacher of color is a result of intersectionality, which further exacerbates Jingwei's working situation by exposing her to longer unpaid work hours and additional emotional labor.

Despite the fact of an increasing number of Asian American students, the small proportion of Asian American teachers in Jingwei's school reflects how the lack of diversity in the teaching workforce might reproduce the unbalance teacher-student-of-color ratio. Whereas education is widely regarded as a primary avenue to success, social acceptance, and upward mobility in Asian countries, there is noticeably low participation of Asian Americans who choose to enter the teaching profession in the United States. Gordon identifies that there are deeper and more nuanced cultural factors beyond the conventional social perception and parental expectation towards teaching such as Asian immigrants' preference for jobs with high income and prestige. Being minorities, they are concerned that teaching as a vocation that requires higher language skills and social-emotional capabilities might lead to an unqualified working

performance and leave them vulnerable to microaggression in dealing with students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, they would rather opt for careers that require math or technical skills.⁴⁶ As a result, the dearth of Asian American teachers may perpetuate this situation, as students do not see people of their race/ethnicity as viable role models making such choices when they receive education in school. When Jingwei talked with me about the “bamboo ceiling” phenomenon in teachers’ career progression, she highlighted that the lack of teachers of color in school leadership positions may limit students’ vision of their future possibilities.

⁴⁶ Gordon (2000)

3. Systematic Inequalities in Gendered Migration

Chapter 2 delineates the underestimated precarity of Chinese immigrant teachers mainly from the perspective of their intersectionality of being Asian and immigrant. This chapter will approach their life stories by examining the often intermingled experiences of work and other gender roles in the context of diaspora, particularly in their identity of motherhood. The Asian feminized diaspora and gendered migration in the US have been widely discussed in the case of working-class women in low-skilled or semiskilled, usually labor-intense industries such as garment and microelectronics workers, daycare and healthcare laborers, including family businesses of ethnic economies.⁴⁷ These studies foreground the labor exploitation of immigrant women who find themselves straddling the blurring lines between public and domestic work. Little attention has been paid to the experiences of Asian immigrant teachers who comprise another female-dominant transnational flow with higher-education backgrounds, especially language teachers and teachers of low-level grades.

The reproduction theory of Marxist feminism explains that the feminization of the teaching profession can be understood as the result of an extension of the domestic labor division. Women went into teaching in massive numbers because they had the requisite energy, skills and feminine qualities to perform the work that is deemed as modest, respectable work for women, appropriate to their sex.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the social perception of teaching as a 'female-friendly' and 'family-friendly' profession aligns with

⁴⁷ Espiritu, Y. L. (1999). Gender and labor in Asian immigrant families. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42(4), 628-647.

⁴⁸ Lawn, M. & Grace, G. (2012). *Teachers: The Culture and Politics of Work*. Routledge. 16

the traditional gender roles that women invoke more responsibility in the domestic realm. This can be exemplified by the fact that, in China's marriage market, women who work as a teacher are considered ideal partners due to the stability and decency associated with the profession. Moreover, teachers often receive benefits that are favorable to reproduction such as lengthy holidays, tuition discounts for their own children and other preferential policies. Similar benefits are also enjoyed by teachers in the United States.

Correspondingly, during my 6-month observation and interaction in a WeChat group of California teacher credentials question-and-answer, I found that this professional/work-based online community of overseas Chinese often renders the blurring identities of female teachers, and serves as a multifunctional site that provides diverse information and network related to womanhood. For example, the marriage issue is a widely discussed topic in the group chat, in which female single teachers would be advised by married teachers to seek jobs in California, where they have a better chance of encountering eligible Chinese male 'Coding Peasant' (码农 *ma nong*).⁴⁹ And they often refer to their husbands as 'teammate' (队友 *dui you*). From my perspective, such discourses of selecting an ideal spouse are imbued more with the expectation of material support and guarantee of legal identity than a mere affective need, which is considered a crucial component of the big project of immigration.

Teachers in the group also seek information related to family and children such as the

⁴⁹ 'Ma nong' is a humorous, often self-deprecating call to the low rank programmer or coder who writes repetitive and noninnovative code for a living but earn a lot. It represents one of the typical Chinese male immigrants working in the high-tech industries in west coast America.

price of *Yuesao* 月嫂 (confinement nanny) in the Bay Area, the policy of maternal leave, when is the proper time to send the child to preschool, etc. The group is therefore often dubbed a tongue-in-cheek title 'baby-mother group' 宝妈群 by the group members. Here is an excerpt quoted from the group discussion:

A: Teacher is a good job to take care of the family and children. The ideal family combination is *ma nong* with teacher. [smiling emoji].

B: Is it?

A: I think teachers can do it, especially during the holidays.

B: I feel like I almost have no time to attend my kid's school activities. [Face with tears of joy emoji]

C: Many teachers' spouses work in high-paid technological industries in the Bay Area, otherwise life is totally unaffordable.

D: [referencing A's words with three thumbs-up emojis]

A: Working couples without summer and winter holidays don't know where to send the kid.

C: I feel like teachers are quite busy as well, there is not as much time as I thought to take care of the family.

.....

A: Don't be a teacher if you are a guy.

E: Never do, it's not enough to raise the family.

A: If considering taking care of the child in the future, girls can think about it.

E: Those who haven't entered the teaching profession, learn something else.

F: I feel like I am too poor to have a chance to get married [Face with tears of joy emoji]

G: Male teachers can take the administrative path in the future, first as a principal, and then work in the school district management, it's also pretty good.

H: Even the superintendent earns around \$300,000 annually, still nothing compared to *ma nong*. Also, it's very difficult for first-generation immigrants to

climb up to the position of superintendent or senior management of the school district.

Female teachers' discussion surrounding career choice, gender dynamics and family obligation reveals how gendered labor disparities may be exacerbated in the diasporic contexts. They may, albeit unwittingly, position themselves and their female peers in subordinate and supportive roles that prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations. In this context, gender features an inevitable perspective to examine teachers' experiences. Given the limited job opportunities and resources available, it is pertinent to investigate whether labor divisions based on stereotypical gender characteristics and the need for reproduction impact the career choices of well-educated Chinese immigrant women. This inquiry requires an exploration of how female teachers perceive their societal and familial roles, navigate multiple responsibilities, marshal resources, and manage work-family conflicts. Moreover, it is crucial to consider how the distinct educational cultures of China and the United States influence their attitudes and decisions regarding career trajectories, child-rearing practices, and residential locations. While the limited nature of my sample size may constrain my ability to provide comprehensive answers, I aim to offer novel insights by illuminating individual experiences that diverge from prevailing perceptions of Chinese immigrants and female teachers.

3.1 Cruel Optimism of an Educational ‘American Dream’

Let me first return to Cathy’s story. Cathy always wants to be a teacher because she is deeply disappointed with the Chinese education and family education she received in the past and wants to make a change. She recalls herself in middle school when the school ordered everyone to cut their hair short, and she cried so hard because she really wanted to have long hair. Chinese kids grow up soaked in school, homework and exams that they don’t have enough time to exercise. And she was so stressed out in middle school that she grew acne on her face and gained much weight. She felt really ugly back then. “Why can’t schools allow us to have the right to pursue beauty? It’s human nature. My mom told me to go out and exercise more, but at that time, how could I have time to exercise? It was all about homework.” During the internship in a public elementary school in California, Cathy was astonished by the Western education idea and that students are given so much freedom and encouraged to have personalities. Back then she was only a graduate student, but she made up her mind to stay in America for her future child’s education.

At first, she was very passionate and dedicated a lot to the job in the first three years. She arrived at school at around 7:30 am and sometimes got home later than 9 pm. Some teachers who take up the new Chinese program have to work 60-80 hours a week to handle everything themselves. “There is much invisible labor besides teaching. People just see that you got off work at 3 pm, have summer holidays, and they think that being teachers is easy. The reason why there are summer and winter holidays is that if not, we

would die from overwork!" The stereotypical understanding of teachers' work resonates much with the undervalued domestic labor of women in the family.

The teaching dream soon turned out to be a dystopia. Having experienced several intense conflicts with students' parents, getting threatened and being sued by parents to the superintendent, Cathy was completely traumatized and lost her confidence and passion for the job. Teaching Chinese to K-3 graders, she not only felt that she was doing daycare's repetitive and trivial things, but also that she was not appreciated by parents for her efforts and even got bullied. "Parents just see the public school as free daycare so that they can go to work. They don't care much about educating their children themselves but blame teachers if the kids do badly." Worse still, after she had a child, she found it more and more difficult to balance work and family. She did not have time and energy to spend with her daughter, but spent on other people's children without appreciation. She said with great anger, "Teachers do the most laborious work, get the least amount of money, and are not respected." There was a time when she had a mental breakdown at home in the morning before going to work. Holding her daughter tightly, she called the principal in tears crying that she couldn't make it to work today.

Now, she has moved to North Carolina, a more conservative state than California where she feels that teachers get more respect and students have fewer behavioral issues. NC is also more affordable since she wants to send her daughter to a private school. During their first year in NC, she worked as a part-time substitute teacher three days a week and spent the rest of the time studying for the real estate agent

license. She also writes articles about American education on her personal blog and does paid consultations for domestic Chinese who want to teach in the US. She quits teaching after passing the test. Transitioning to be a real estate agent gives her more time and flexibility to accompany and educate her daughter. She is now tutoring her daughter Chinese, English and French. “But it was indeed really difficult to navigate family and studying. I often reviewed the test on the sofa with my daughter pulling my hair.” All these conversations happened with Cathy’s daughter around since she only had one free morning on Saturday after picking up her daughter from the dance class every week.

The different educational cultures between China and America greatly shape her life trajectory. Chinese women like Cathy who studied abroad in their 20s in the early 2000s are part of the “study abroad fever” (留学热 *liu xue re*) that is “fed by the middle classes’ anxieties about the reproduction of their social status in light of an ever more marketized, inequitable, pyramid-shaped, and competitive secondary education system at home.”⁵⁰ Experiencing the identity shift from a Chinese student to an immigrant teacher in America, to a hardworking mother with slash careers, she epitomizes the initiative and aspirational dream of the first-immigrant generation of Chinese educated women. Cathy’s initial motivation for entering the teaching profession derived from the anti-personality and misogynic education system of China, undoubtedly, she wants to be a good teacher and treat students in the way she used to desire. The western educational mode that is desirably constructed by Chinese media as

⁵⁰ Martin, F. (2021). *Dreams of Flight: The Lives of Chinese Women Students in the West*. Duke University Press. 10

quality education (素质教育 *suzhi jiaoyu*) and happy education (快乐教育 *kuai le jiaoyu*) render an idealized picture that not only provides a great platform for her professional pursuit, but caters to her wishes for changing the future of the next generation. Thus, studying, teaching and living in America became an attachment to more than a material version of the American dream, but is endowed with a humanitarian sense of the 'good life' with the moral expectation of being a good teacher and a good mother. However, later her passion for teaching and her aspiration for professional success is dampened by the culture and structural impasse of American education itself, which is not as teacher-friendly as a Chinese might expect, especially for immigrant teachers with multiple vulnerabilities and precariousness.

Another teacher Yingying also expresses the same frustration and the difficulty of continuing teaching. "I've never had such a sense that I could be a really good teacher, or that I could be a person who influences the lives of others, and I'm still thinking about that. So that's why when I was in my second year of full-time work, there was a time when I thought I couldn't hold on anymore...I think that being a teacher, especially in the United States, you need to be a very caring person...You must first be a person who gets a lot of love, and then you are also willing to share your love with others. I really felt that I couldn't love anymore, these students were too annoying and unbearable. In terms of my own growing environment in my natal family, I am not someone who could give a lot of love to others...Some of my colleagues are from China, and they feel that there is a big gap between what they imagine they will be doing and what they are actually doing...because the students are not as obedient as in China, they work very

hard, and they are really tired...but the income and rewards are not as rich as they think...Sometimes I joke with them, 'Why don't you consider getting married to an American?'"

Lauren Berlant coins the term 'cruel optimism' referring to a relation of "attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic." The cultural trope of the 'American Dream' is itself a rhetorical fantasy of a series of attachments to "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy",⁵¹ which constitutes part of domestic Chinese's imagination of going abroad to developed countries. It also connects with a structure of feeling that evokes a self-motivated, ambitious individual and represents the enterprising spirit of the current reforms era (in China).⁵² In the specific context of the everyday lives of immigrant teachers like Cathy and Yingying, the activity of teaching is an important pathway towards the final goal of the 'American Dream', including material and social advancement. Teaching is usually considered a vocation that requires much love, willingness to help others, and a big heart to sustain the overwhelming affective labor with minimum pay. It is also the intrinsic rewards, the promised sense of accomplishment and happiness of nurturing the next generation that gives teachers optimism to continue their careers. However, Cathy's case discloses the cruelty of such optimism in today's education system that teachers are not only being underpaid, underappreciated, and lacking upward mobility, but also

⁵¹ Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press. 3-24.

⁵² Martin, 28

experiencing the affective impasse of “crises of ordinariness” that the subject is wearing out in the everyday condition of attrition.⁵³ For Cathy, the professionalism of teachers is undermined by the attrition of repetitive and tedious language teaching and correcting young graders’ behavioral issues, which made her feel like she was just doing daycare for others’ kids. It becomes an unattainable goal to flourish in this system by doing something she used to be enthusiastic about. Her last word betrays the disillusionment of being a teacher and the relief of freedom after changing careers: “Getting the real estate license is the first time that I feel like I am making a decision for myself. Before that, I just did what I was told to.” Selling real estate to earn commission is more fluctuating than teaching, but it gives her more chances of improving the family’s financial condition and free time to operate other side hustles.

3.2 Flexible Womanhood of Female Teachers in the Diaspora

Apart from teachers like Cathy who aimed for education industry in the first place, there is also another group of immigrant teacher, such as Yeyun, who has no educational degree or teaching experiences at all before moving to America, due to her *ma nong* husband’s decision of job relocation. “My husband saw that many of his classmates and colleagues went to America, so he wanted to go as well.” Yeyun obtained a bachelor’s and master’s degree in ancient Chinese art and used to work in the advertising industry when they were in Shanghai. The hasty decision of immigration, coupled with childbirth left her with the majority of domestic labor during the initial years of resettlement. Due to her limited English proficiency and background in liberal

⁵³ Berlant, 28

arts, she struggled to reenter the workplace without local work experience and network. Finally made up her mind, she chose to pursue another master's degree in Early Childhood Education at the state University in California, which is a more accessible and affordable option for new immigrants like herself. In studying the work experience of Chinese women in Australia, Christina Ho points out that men's careers are often a key part of households' decision to migrate. While migration can bring new opportunities and freedoms to women, it is usually women who "bear the brunt of the burdens of adapting to life in a new country." Chinese women face significant limitations on the types of jobs they can pursue and the career opportunities they can accept due to the 'double burden' of work and family responsibilities. Consequently, they tend to integrate into the gendered labor market that are experienced by the majority of Australian women.⁵⁴ While Ho's observation implies her interviewees' reluctant attitudes to take up those jobs, my interviewees are actually willing to and find it challenging to be a teacher. There is also bias in my samples since teachers who are unsatisfied with their jobs are less likely to accept my interview, as one kindergarten teacher did when I reached out to her, who was recommended by one of my interviewees. She used to work in other industries in China as well and migrated with the marital family to America with limited job options.

A mother's curiosity about American education was another reason that drove Jane to teaching, in that she was a bit confused and worried when she felt like her third-grade son went home every day without learning anything. Some of my interviewees

⁵⁴ Ho, C. (2006). Migration as Feminisation? Chinese Women's Experiences of Work and Family in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32(3), 497-514.

also say that the choice to be a teacher is embedded with the anticipation of learning more about the American education system so that they can do better in educating their own children. Nevertheless, many of them did not expect the workload that would diminish their time spent with their children. In addition to that, I also seldom hear them talking about what the father would do in family education during our conversations. It seems to be the case that teachers who have better bilingual abilities in cultural communication and educational knowledge are granted more responsibility for the family education of their Chinese American child, compared to the husbands who mostly work in STEM-related industries that require less social abilities but earn more. The structural inequality of the domestic labor division is further reinforced in teachers' families.

Although female teachers are inclined to take on more care work for the family as most women do, Chinese immigrant women strive to maintain their abilities of full-time working. Collins points out that in the US, compared to white women who are expected more in performing "intensive mothering" and full-time housewives, racial/ethnic minority women are expected to work for pay as well as care for the families in their culture.⁵⁵ As Zhou argues, 'paid employment is an indispensable part of womanhood for contemporary mainland Chinese...The current generation of Chinese women grew up believing that working outside the home is the only way of life.'⁵⁶

However, with that belief, Chinese immigrant women need to confront the lack of policy

⁵⁵ Collins, C. (2019). *Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage Careers and Caregiving*. Princeton University Press. 13.

⁵⁶ Zhou, Y. (2000). The fall of "the other half of the sky"? Chinese immigrant women in the new york area. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23(4), 445–459.

support and the free-market approach for working mothers in the US, an exception to Western industrialized countries without federally mandated paid maternity leave.⁵⁷ Given the expensive child-care service and without the support from the older generation, many of them choose to send the children to Chinese afterschool operated by the ethnic community, which is more affordable, sometimes provides pick-up service and is good for improving children's Chinese. Some teachers also teach part-time in such schools to make extra money.

While it is commonly assumed that teaching and motherhood could be blended together and facilitate each other easily and successfully, these two identities could also be contested and burdensome for female teachers and affects their professionalism in a negative way. For some female teachers, the choice not to have children seems to 'threaten' their careers. Jingwei told me that she did not plan to have children in recent years and this caused her concern:

"The thing that I was worried about this decision was the parents' attitude toward me. Now they might say, oh you're still young, it's normal not to have children. But several years later, my connection with the parents might not be so natural. They may feel that I don't have the authority to instruct or suggest how they should educate their children because I don't have children myself. I've heard too many times of teachers giving parent-teacher conferences and telling parents, 'I have kids too, I understand you, and you should do this and this', and the parents will be convinced. But I don't have such a sense of conviction, so why should parents believe me? So

⁵⁷ Collins, 199

having children can be a factor that affects a teacher's professional image, social status and credibility. Especially in the education industry, your skin color, your age, your family structure, all of these will affect your image. Before sending their children to my class, parents will research me."

Teaching in high school means that Jingwei also needs to be students' academic advisor and assist them in applying for colleges, which gives her greater responsibilities and pressure in communicating with parents. People tend to trust those who have similar experiences and backgrounds to themselves. The professional abilities of female teachers is easily connected with her womanhood as well as other signifiers of identities, as a result, it might undermine teachers' professionalism. "Chinese seems to be more concerned about women worker's fertility which has become a criterion in recruitment. In fact, Americans also care about your personal life in the workplace, they don't ask you directly in words, but they will use the topic as a door to get to know you. My American colleagues also ask me about my plan of having children. These causes me pressure."

When asked about the why she made the choice, she answered:

"What is a successful middle-class American family? Two adults, three or four children, a few dogs and cats. You have to have money to raise all of these. I don't have children, it's my personal choice. And from my perspective I feel that I'm better off pursuing my own life, I'm not ready to give birth to the next generation. First of all, I don't have the conditions. My husband and I are both fragile new immigrants, and we have to put down roots in America. The roots are not deep enough, the soil is a little

loose, so I think the fruit that comes out of this may be undernourished. Many Chinese came to the U.S. for the next generation to receive a better education and growing environment, but we are here for ourselves. I think it's unfair for me to let the next generation enjoy this, and it's unfair for the child either. She will be born Asian American, the minority. She has to accept all kinds of prejudice and racism. I don't think America is the best choice for my family to raise the next generation. So where is it? I haven't found it yet, and until I do, I won't think about having children. Both countries, China and the US, have experienced so many tragedies because the government dictates women's reproductive rights and because the government is a male-dominated place. China is forcing you not to have children, America is forcing you not to abort, essentially the same thing. Women live in such a society, neither have the initiative over their own bodies."

Fran Martin frames how the post-1990 generation of Chinese women is caught between the coexistence of striving for enterprising selfhood and the neotraditionalist gender discourse of familial femininity. While women as daughters are encouraged to pursue overseas study, as wives and mothers they are expected to focus on family care work instead.⁵⁸ In a more immediate context of post-pandemic China, the online discourse on *runxue* is also fermented by several strikingly terrible gender-based violence incidents in the past three years, such as the 2020 Tangshan restaurant attack, 2022 Xuzhou chained woman incident, in addition to the three-child policy and deep-rooted workplace sexism. Therefore, the idea of *run* is associated with a feminist trope

⁵⁸ Martin, 18

that resonates with the classic question asked by Lu Xun a century ago: What happens after Nora leaves home? The gesture of leaving her husband can be expanded to leave the women-unfriendly “motherland” imbued with patriarchal repression.

Among my interviewees, Jingwei is the only one who does not include having children in her life plan. She studied linguistics in America and was initially not planning to be a teacher and stay. It was a fortuitous opportunity of teaching Chinese in her college that enabled her to get a job in a nearby high school. Working both as Asian language teachers in North Carolina, Jingwei and her Korean husband feel not only the economic pressure of raising children, but also its unpromising prospect deriving from their undesirable firsthand experiences of working in American education. Despite the asserted multiculturalism, she thinks it is imbued with inequality, prejudice and hostility towards minority groups, and both students and teachers are subject to it. Unlike many first-generation immigrants from East Asia, they prioritize their individual well-being and realization of self-value over sacrificing for the next generation, countering the Confucian idea that is still powerful in mainstream East Asian culture. Feeling outsiders to both America and East Asia, the well-educated yet economically precarious and politically pessimistic female immigrant teachers like Jingwei hope for a utopian place that is friendly to women and racial minorities. Although working in education industry and labeled as ‘pro-children’, she demonstrates the self-consciously feminist efforts of post-1990 generation Chinese women to get rid of the patriarchal expectation and manipulation from state and society. The sense of insecurity and uncertainty towards the future did not disappear as Jingwei got the green card; rather, it

is reinforced by the increasing feeling of floating and lack of a real 'home' in the perpetual state of in-betweenness.

Two other new grad teachers also say that they may leave America in the future. They believe that with the teacher credentials, teaching experiences and bilingual proficiency gained in America, they are equipped with world-recognized professional qualities in education which enable them to set foot in any other developed country by teaching Chinese or other subjects in international schools. The globalization of education benefits cosmopolitan teachers, who firstly build up a solid knowledge of each subject as they went through the demanding K12 education in China, and later accumulate valuable experiences in teaching students with multiethnic and multicultural backgrounds in a typical immigration country like America. They do not have a strong preference for a certain country yet, instead, the desire for a flexible world citizenship that allows unfettered travel between China and the world is clear. When I conducted the interview, China had not yet lifted the international travel ban of the zero-COVID policy. Therefore, squeezed mobility becomes one of the top factors that affect overseas Chinese's decisions on relocation and resettlement. On the other hand, one teacher also expressed the inclination to return to China because the pandemic made her realize that it was more important to stay with her parents than float overseas alone. It echoes some teachers' motive of entering the teaching profession for the lengthy holidays that enable them to spend a longer time with their parents at home. For those who do not plan to move back, they are waiting for the naturalization that allows them to take their parents to America. Maintaining a good relationship with the natal family

and enacting the daughter-filial duty becomes one of the motivations and emotional supports for overseas women to thrive in the foreign land.

Portraits of these teachers' professional and personal life with a focus on womanhood and family provide heterogeneous trajectories of gendered migration and enrich our understanding and imagination of the group of female teachers which has been essentialized by the stereotypical gender roles. As teaching is and will still be a female-dominant profession and imbued with structural inequality in the foreseeable future, Chinese immigrant women exert many initiatives in both the workplace and family. They try hard to play the roles of good educators, daughters, wives and mothers while overcoming the triple marginality in the diaspora. For younger, post-1990 generation women like Jingwei are striving to contest the neotraditional gender expectations and pursue an enterprising individuality.

4. Conclusion

By situating this professional-specific and female-dominant Chinese diasporic community in the neoliberal context of immigration and globalization, the forgoing chapters delineate the work and life experiences of immigrant teachers with three types of transnational migration trajectory: educational migration, labor migration and family migration. In terms of teachers' career choice and working location, the first two groups of teachers feature proactive subjectivity and mobility with relatively clearer career goals, at least in the beginning. The main motivation of their immigration lies in their aspiration for a better education and growing environment for the next generation, they wish that their children can have more choices and possibilities in the US. While being privileged and enjoying more mobility compared to their domestic sisters, immigrant teachers are also subject to the intersectionality deriving from their triple marginality of being women, Asian and first-generation immigrants, which is more severe than in other industries as contrasted to the cultural sector, education. They may find themselves precarious and vulnerable to the hostile working environment, overwork, emotional labor, downward mobility, encumbered by immigrant status and burdened with underpaid and underappreciated treatment in American education. Moreover, the structural inequality of gendered labor performed in both the professional and domestic roles of female teachers tends to be reinforced in the diaspora, especially when their partners make much more money and become the key reason for migration, as typically exemplified in the trajectory of family migration. They seem to take on more domestic responsibilities at least in educating children.

Lastly, this study is limited by its small sample size and lack of long-term tracking interviews and observations with the participants. Some teachers are also cautious and less willing to share their private family life with me, particularly when it comes to their partners, which makes it harder to get the full picture of their domestic labor division. Besides, with the information and resources on teacher immigration more and more accessible on the internet, the number of Chinese immigrant teachers in the US keeps increasing and the subjects they teach are also more diversified than before. They play an important role in teaching STEM subjects that are most needed in American schools. Further research can be conducted to investigate their experiences.

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