CROSS-CULTURAL TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN TEACHERS IN THAI HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Globalization and the expansion of Western influences have made English the *lingua franca* of international connections. For this reason, the demand for native English speaking teachers, especially those from the U.S, has been escalating worldwide, especially, in Thailand, one of the major hubs of international travel and education in Southeast Asia.

The increasing number of American teachers in Thailand poses many cross-cultural challenges. Numerous theorists suggest that culture plays a significant role in educational settings because learning and teaching are profoundly influenced and determined by culture. The noticeable mismatch of cultural norms and language patterns between Thailand and the U.S., thus, can result in significant cross-cultural misunderstandings and difficulties. A better understanding of this cultural phenomenon, therefore, is both crucial and necessary.

To learn the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thailand, a qualitative transcendental phenomenology approach was used. A purposeful nonprobability snowball sampling technique was utilized to recruit nine American teachers who taught at five universities in Thailand. The interviews were conducted in Thailand and the United States over an 11-month period (2010-2011). The interviews were analyzed to address four main research questions to ascertain several cross-cultural issues including 1) overall cross-cultural teaching experiences of the participants in Thailand 2) teaching methodology they used in Thai classrooms 3) perception toward their American identity, and 4) their views toward the Thai globalization process.

The data revealed several important indications. First, it highlighted the complexity of conducting cross-cultural research. Because the concept of culture is highly complex, subjective, and dynamic, a study involving one’s culture and experiences is highly individual-specific and idiosyncratic. To better understand an individual’s cross-cultural experiences, one must take into
consideration the diversity and complexity of social, cultural, and personal situations. Second, the findings of this research suggest that one’s cross-cultural teaching experience is dependent upon the composition and characteristics of the students they taught. Third, cross-cultural teaching experiences are greatly impacted and influenced by two factors - cultural and language differences. Differences in cultural practice, language used, and communication patterns increased the complexity and difficulties of their classroom cross-cultural interactions.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

Globalization and increasing interconnection among countries have made the English language one of the core languages of international communication. For this reason, a demand for native English language teachers is growing tremendously worldwide, including Thailand. In recent years we have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of English language institutions, international schools, and international programs within established Thai universities that use English as the medium of instruction. For example, in 1959 there was only one international school in Thailand (International School Bangkok, ISB). However, by 2006, the number escalated to at least 94 international schools, of which more than 60 were located in the capital city, Bangkok (Watkinson, 2006). These numbers are also likely to increase according to an increase in the demand for English language skills. The rapid expansion of bilingual, international programs, and institutions in Thailand, therefore, has resulted in the significant growth of job opportunities for native English speaking teachers, especially American educators from the U.S.

The opportunity to teach abroad can be rewarding personally, socially and economically, as it expands a teacher’s horizons and personal connections, and enriches one’s life experiences (Council On International Educational Exchange [CIEE]). However, teaching abroad can also be extremely challenging. Littrell (2010), for example, stated that in cross-cultural classrooms, teachers and students often come equipped with their own set of beliefs and expectations on how to teach or to learn, skill sets often based on their own life experiences and native cultural knowledge. They, as a result, may not be familiar with other cultures and may not be well
equipped to make necessary cultural accommodations in the classroom. Peacock (2001) also stressed that the root of one’s learning styles often develops through one’s educational background, school experiences, and cultural background (Littlewood, Liu & Yu 1996). As a result, teachers often adopt the teaching styles either from how they were taught, use teaching approaches that mirror the ways they learned best, or follow the styles of their teachers that they admire. These approaches to teaching may be quite different from their students’ learning preferences (Peacock, 2001). Reid (1987) even suggests that a mismatch of teaching and learning styles in a cross-cultural classroom can have negative effects on a student’s learning as it can result in frustration, lack of learning/teaching motivation, and even learning failure.

The dramatic increase in the number of American teachers - who probably have a different set of cultural values, norms, beliefs, and expectations about schooling - working in Thailand poses many challenges to their cross-cultural teaching experiences. For example, American educators who were born and raised in the United States will find themselves in a country with a noticeably different historical background and cultural practices, norms and language, such as Thailand - a country constituted by a royal monarchy, a traditional culture founded on Buddhism, and a country that has never been colonized by Westerners. Differences in cultural values and practices in educational settings presumably can result in significant cross-cultural misunderstandings, conflicts, and frustration not only for the American teachers, but for the local Thai students as well.

For the students and instructors to succeed, a better understanding of this cultural phenomenon is both crucial and necessary. However, the issues related to cross-cultural experiences of an individual are complex and often multifaceted. Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou (1991), for example, stated that one’s cross-cultural experience “…should be treated as
multidimensional concept, rather than a unitary phenomenon (cited from Selmer, 2007, p.187). Numerous factors, variables, and different circumstances can all influence and shape one’s cross-cultural experiences in unique and unpredictable ways. As a result, to meaningfully learn about the cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thailand, many issues and variables need to be explored and considered.

**Statement of the Problems**

In order to accurately understand the individual cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thailand, one cannot examine or study their classroom experiences in isolation from their experiences outside the classroom, as all of these experiences are interrelated and can impact one another. In other words, one’s professional life cannot be dichotomously separated from one’s personal life or experiences. For example, having difficulty adjusting to new living conditions will likely impact one’s teaching performance in a variety of ways. For this reason, the influence of the entire ecology of one’s cross-cultural encounter needs to be taken into account. According to Fontaine (1989), ecological variables include the physical, biological, and social environment. For example, differences in environment and climate, unfamiliar and/or different living arrangements, language differences that can lead to communication problems and difficulties, unfamiliar tasks and responsibilities, or lacking or discontinuing social connections and support should also be considered and investigated in order to meaningfully and holistically understand one’s cross-cultural experience (Fontaine, 1989). Brett (1982) also pointed out that when working in a different cultural environment, expatriates often find that their habitual and familiar routines and work patterns will likely be disrupted not only in their professional life, but their personal life outside work as well. The disruption of familiar habits, environment, and routine, for example, can lead to a feeling of frustration,
disappointment, and anxiety (Selmer, 2007). Additionally, the ecology can play as big a role on one’s cross-cultural experience as the culture itself. As a result, it is essential to learn about the ecology, including the physical surroundings, environment, and everyday activities and living beyond the classroom and school, in order to holistically understand the cross-cultural teaching experiences of American educators in Thailand - a country with a culture and ecology that differs significantly from that of the U.S.

Further, most existing mainstream research and theory in the field of cross-cultural studies seems to point to the common assumption that cultural differences pose a significant challenge to one’s cross-cultural experience. This conventional viewpoint is supported by numerous research studies (e.g., Gay, 1993; Hofstede, 1986; Littrell, 2010; Peacock, 2001; Reid, 1987; Samovar & Porter, 1995). Hofstede (1986), for example, states that “…interactions between teachers and pupils from different cultures are fundamentally problematic and cross-cultural misunderstandings often occur because classroom interaction is an archetypal human phenomenon which is deeply rooted in the culture of a society” (p. 303). These researchers believe that cultural differences often generate a negative impact on educators, as well as students, because each of them almost certainly brings with them a different set of classroom norms, expectations, values, and teaching and learning styles.

However, there is another school of thought that argues that the conventional assumption of cultural differences is often taken for granted and that it has seldom been systematically investigated (e.g., Brewster, 1995; Forster, 1997; Selmer, 2007; Selmer & Lauring, 2009). Selmer (2007) for example, states that the assumption that the more different the host culture is, the more difficult and challenging it is for new comers to experience “…appears to be an intuitively plausible assumption supported by a myriad of anecdotal evidence.” (p.186).
Scholars from this perspective believe that in one’s cross-cultural experience, cultural similarity could be as challenging as cultural dissimilarity. Thus, cultural distance or the degree of cultural similarity or differences between home and host cultures may not be a relevant gauge to indicate one’s cross-cultural experience (Selmer, 2007). For example, based on Selmer study (2007), in the process of cultural learning and adjustment, host members may provide more encouragement and support, be more tolerant, patient and forgiving, and “given the benefit of a doubt” to foreigners who they perceive to have significant “strangeness” in their cultural backgrounds. These factors may reduce the cross-cultural difficulties which make adjustment to a new culture more convenient and manageable. The opposite, however, may be true for foreigners who are viewed as sharing cultural norms and having cultural “closeness” with the host (i.e., Americans in Canada, Laotians or Asians in Thailand). The expectation of cultural knowledge and expectation of an easy and quick adjustment may be higher for these individuals and they may be treated with less patience and less forgiveness in the process of cross-cultural adjustment. Moreover, expatriates in a more similar host culture (e.g., Americans in Canada) may not detect or be aware of any potential cultural differences, and hence, may mistakenly associate or link their problems or difficulties with other factors (e.g., blaming themselves or blaming their co-workers or host people they interact with) rather than culture. For this reason, the perceived cultural “closeness” could potentially cause some expatriates to be rather ill prepared. Some may fail to modify unsuitable or inappropriate behaviors, or may even refrain from adjusting to the new culture (Selmer, 2007).

The counterintuitive perspective that cultural differences may not always create difficulty provides an alternative viewpoint that the level of cultural similarity or differences may not accurately predict one’s cross-cultural experience. For example, American teachers in this
present study may or may not suffer serious cross-cultural teaching experiences due to their presumed cultural dissimilarity in Thailand. Some may go through their cross-cultural interactions with Thais without much difficulty based on their personality, prior knowledge of and attitude toward Thai culture, teaching experience, cross-cultural preparation, language skills, awareness, or their willingness and approach to face and overcome differences and challenges. Moreover, the perception and attitude, either positive or negative, of the host members (i.e., Thai people) toward American teachers will also play a significant role on their cross-cultural experiences. With many different variables to consider, it is necessary to learn the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers through the teachers’ own words, in order to accurately and meaningfully understand individual unique cross-cultural experiences, regardless of the presumed cultural similarities or differences.

The conventional view to focus on cultural differences rather than similarities also resulted in possible inaccurate assumptions of cultural patterns and behaviors in binary opposite poles. Some influential theorists (e.g., Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1986; Nisbett, 2003; Triandis & Suh, 2002), for example, explain cultures in a rather binary fashion such as individualism for the West and collectivism for the East, and outward for the West and inward for the East, to name only a few. The assumption of differences and binary separation of the East and the West, in some circumstances, provides a useful and simple framework for comparison and contrast analysis. However, if done without critical awareness of its complexities, it could lead to oversimplification and inaccurate stereotypes which could create negative consequences, especially in cross-cultural educational settings. For example, Ryan & Louie (2007) warn that cultural learning behaviors deemed desirable, such as critical thinking, independent learning, and lifelong and life-wide learning, are often viewed as the outcome of Western education, while
Eastern cultural characteristics such as using rote memorization and being “passive” learners are often viewed as “deficient” or “lacking” in these attributes. Biggs (1996), however, argues that the undesirable learning behaviors that Western researchers have toward Eastern learners may be both misleading and inaccurate, as many students from Confucian heritage cultures such as China, Hong Kong, and Singapore often outperform Western students in academic areas. Biggs further argues that what Westerners believe to be rote learning requires a deep and fundamental understanding on the part of the students, rather than simply miming without comprehension. For these reasons, Biggs cautions that one should not judge other learning and teaching approaches as undesirable, but must interpret the approaches based on their overall cultural context.

This issue also connects to a broader issue, namely that the effect of globalization and Western ideology in academic arenas has spread throughout the world, including Thailand. When examining historical and contemporary academic situations, there seems to be a recognizable shift of policy and curriculum that reflects Western approaches in Thai schools. Phongsakorn (2009), for example, reports that theoretical principles and classroom teaching and learning techniques often come from Western countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the U.S. Further, Prapphal (2008) states that there has been a paradigm shift in English language classrooms from using a teacher-focused, to a more western approach, of learner-focused pedagogy. Independent learning approaches and alternative assessment methods are also being implemented. In many circumstances, local Thai teachers willingly adapt to Western teaching and learning approaches, especially in language teaching classes (Phongsakorn, 2009). The willingness to accept Western teaching approaches may have some implications on the experiences of American teachers in Thailand. For example, American
educators may not have to adapt their teaching styles to fit Thai cultural norms, as their Western teaching approaches may be viewed by Thai teachers, students, parents, and educational institutions as desirable and even superior to Thai traditional teaching approaches. For this reason, there is a need to investigate the actual teaching approaches and methodologies used in Thai classrooms from the perspectives of American teachers themselves, as well as their perception toward Thai learning and studying approach.

**Research Questions**

The primary purpose of this study was to learn about the overall cross-cultural teaching experience of American teachers, including their cross-cultural living experiences outside the classrooms. The study also aimed at exploring other important issues related to cross-cultural teaching, including their own views toward their American identity and their perception towards the globalization process in Thailand. The overall cross-cultural teaching experiences of the American teachers were obtained using a qualitative in-depth interview based on the following four main research questions and seven sub-questions:

1: What are the overall cross-cultural teaching experiences in and outside Thai classrooms?
   1.1: What is it like to be an American teacher in Thailand?
   1.2: Where are the overall descriptions of the Thai students in the classroom?
   1.3: What are the cross-cultural misunderstandings in the classroom?
   1.4: What are the cross-cultural misunderstandings outside the classroom?
   1.5: What are the most challenging aspects of teaching and living in Thailand?
   1.6: What are the most rewarding experience of teaching and living in Thailand?
   1.7: How do American teachers adjust to the Thai culture?

2: What teaching methods do American teachers use in the classroom?
3: How do American teachers view their identity as an American teacher in Thai classrooms?

4: How do American teachers view their role as a teacher in Thailand’s globalization process?

The overall cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers and their perception toward the Thai students, their American identity, and globalization and Western influence were obtained thru the qualitative phenomenological in-depth interview of nine American teachers. This approach allows for a better understanding of each participant’s unique life experience and background, as well as the overall “essence” of cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thailand.

**Significance of the Study**

In recent years, the numbers of studies on cross-cultural teaching are growing. However, there is still a limited amount of a qualitative approach research focusing mainly on American teachers in a country such as Thailand. Based on a review of the literature, I found only a handful of studies that focused mainly or exclusively on Thailand. Many studies in this area either focused on countries with high numbers of foreign teachers, such as Japan, and China (e.g., Watkins and Biggs, 1996; Le Tendre, 1999), or combined countries from the same region such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and South America, based on the assumption that they share similar cultural norms and backgrounds. Although the approach of combining countries from the same region may be useful and practical in some circumstances, it cannot be overlooked that each country has its own unique cultural traits that may be strikingly different and should not be combined as one unit of analysis. In light of the limited number of studies on cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thailand, the study hopes to fill the gap, by focusing exclusively on cross-cultural experiences of some American educators in Thai universities.
Hopefully, the present study will be an addition to the growing and expanding body of research in the field of cross-cultural teaching.

Additionally, most studies of cross-cultural experiences tend to utilize quantitative research methods and approaches such as experimental-based research, surveys, and statistical analyses. In many circumstances, these quantitative research approaches can be effective and suitable. However, in measuring individual real life or “lived” experiences and personal perspectives, such as the one in this present study, a quantitative approach may pose some limitations in data gathering, analysis, and interpretation. For example, the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thailand will likely be diverse, complex, and even multilayered. Their experiences will likely be interpreted based upon their experiences, attitude toward Thailand and the culture, diverse societal views, personal circumstance and cultural backgrounds. To address this concern, this study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, based on in-depth interviews in order to ascertain a more meaningful understanding of unique aspects of cross-cultural experiences of American teachers currently working or previously worked in Thai universities. The aim of this study is to reveal the experiences of American educators in Thailand, contribute to a qualitative research approach, and compile a foundation upon which other cross-cultural studies can be compared and contrasted.

This study also attempts to learn from the American teachers’ own words of their individual “lived” cross-cultural experiences to avoid making a stereotypical assumption based on the common theoretical and belief that their presumed different cultural background hinders their cross-cultural teaching experience in Thailand. Additionally, this study explores the issue of globalization and the dispersion on English language and Western teaching methods in Thai universities, in order to further our understanding of this global phenomenon through American
teachers’ views. This study may also be beneficial for other foreign educators to help them become more aware when teaching or interacting with Thai students. Only by knowing, understanding, and preparing with these cultural differences in mind can a foreign teacher overcome these obstacles when teaching in Thailand. This qualitative interview study of American teachers will provide useful insights and knowledge for teacher preparation so that they will be better equipped when teaching abroad, especially in Thailand. The information in this study regarding cross-cultural teaching in Thailand should also provide a better understanding of cross-cultural issues and useful knowledge for professional development based on multiple “lived” cross-cultural experiences of actual practitioners, which may be helpful to American teachers who are teaching abroad in other countries in Southeast Asia, as well as teachers working in multicultural and diverse classrooms in the U.S. and elsewhere around the world.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This research dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background and intent of the study. It contains a statement of the problems, the research questions, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that includes the definition of culture, and the theory and research on cross-cultural studies, with the emphasis on cross-cultural teaching and learning. Different models of cultural dimensions such as Hall’s cultural description, Hofstede’s Model, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner’s Model are included in order to better understand the dimension of cultural differences likely to have the greatest impact on cross-cultural teaching and learning. The historical background of Thai culture and education and issues related to the impact of globalization and western influence on education with an emphasis on Thai education are also included in this chapter. Chapter 3 focuses on the research
methodology used in this study. This chapter provides a description of the qualitative phenomenological research design, including the conceptual framework of transcendental phenomenology, data collection, data analysis, and research findings. This chapter also includes the role of the researcher in qualitative methodology, the issues in cross-cultural interviewing, and the unique positionality of a researcher as both outsider and insider. Chapter 4 provides the research findings which includes the biographical data of each participant and the seven significant themes that emerged from the data. Chapter 5 provides an analysis and discussion of the research findings and addresses the four main research questions of the study. This chapter concludes with a discussion of research limitations, a summary of the research findings and the analysis, the implications for practice, and concluded with the suggestions for future study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Greater access to communication tools has altered the traditional ways of life in our
global community. In most parts of the world people can readily connect to one another and can
instantly share information, knowledge, and ideas. The national boundaries, thus, have become
more and more fluid (Hallinger, 1998) as people better adapt and move toward a global culture
and worldview. The expansion of globalization and international connections has a tremendous
impact on all social, political, and economic aspects, especially in the arena of education. For
instance, the expectation toward a quality education is often based on a global, rather than a local
or national scale. This prospect often puts immense pressure on many countries, especially
developing countries, including Thailand to catch up with the global quality education in order to
be competitive in the global market (Hallinger, 1998).

The perception of a quality education among many Thais in this current global situation
often equates to the educational approaches offered in developed countries (Hallinger, 1998;
Kosonen, 2008). Therefore, universities, colleges, and schools in Thailand, as well as many
other countries around the world, strive to achieve an educational level that more aligns with the
international and globally accepted values and standards (Gu & Maley, 2008). In addition, most
international connections such as commerce, tourism, foreign affairs, technology, and education
use English as the medium of communication (Nunan, 2003; Warschauer, 2000; Vinke, Snippe
& Jochems, 1998). The combination of a strong demand for Western educational approaches and
the need for English language skills provide an extraordinary career opportunity for native
English speaking educators (Seidlhofer, 2001), especially those from developed affluent countries like the U.S.

In the U.S. alone, for example, there are numerous well established organizations that provide teaching and administrative opportunities for American educators to work in international arenas (Cory, 2007). Some of the most important and well known educational exchange programs include the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), Institute of International Education (IIE), Department of Defense, Office of Dependents Educational Activity (DODEA), Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program, Office of English Language Programs, and the U.S. Peace Corps (www.state.gov). Various government and private institutions such as schools, universities, churches, and private professionally sponsored programs such as the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the Japan Exchange Teaching program (JET), to name only a few, also provide countless teaching opportunities abroad for American educators.

Interestingly, the current economic crisis in the U.S. and in many other countries throughout the world may also be an additional factor to help increase the number of American teachers in Thailand and elsewhere. Slow job growth and a high unemployment rate in the U.S. appear to play a significant role in more Americans seeking teaching job opportunities abroad. A recent CNN article titled “Young Americans Going Abroad to Teach” (Yam, 2009), for example, reports that there has been a big jump in the number of recent American graduates applying to teach in counties such as South Korea, Japan, China, and Spain. The “Reach to Teach” program also has seen more than a 100% increase since about October 2009 and 70% of individual applying for teaching abroad jobs were American applicants. The JET program has also
witnessed a 15% increase among American applicants wanting to teach abroad in 2009 (Yam, 2009).

The economic slowdown in many developing countries, including Thailand, also restricts many middle class families from sending their children to get education abroad. Based on the statistics provided by the chairperson of the International Schools Association of Thailand, each year Thais have traditionally spent about 75 billion baht, the equivalent of more than 1 billion U.S. dollars, on overseas education (Fry, 2002). However, after the Asian economic crisis of 1997, many Thai families can no longer afford to send their children to get education in developed Western countries and some have even opted to bring their children back home (Hallinger, 1998). Yet, the demand, for what many perceive as a quality education from native English speaking educators remains strong. Instead of exporting their children to get a “quality education,” many now choose a more affordable alternative by sending them to international schools and importing Western teachers to provide an education for their children in Thailand (Fry, 2002).

A combination of global situations such as globalization, English as the *lingua franca* and a positive view toward Western education, are among the factors that play a role in the continued increasing numbers of American educators in the international market. Along with this global trend, the demand will likely continue to rise in various regions worldwide including Thailand (Hallinger, 1998). In the past 50 years we have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of English language institutions, international schools, and international programs that use English as the medium of instruction in Thailand (Kosonen, 2008). Fry (2002), for example, describes the current educational situation in Thailand as an “international education boom” (p.16) and predicts that Thailand may become a major regional hub for international education. In 1959, for
instance, there was only one international school in Thailand (International School Bangkok, ISB), but by 2006, the number had escalated to at least 94 international schools, of which more than 60 were located in the capital city, Bangkok (Watkinson, 2006). English bilingual programs are now also offered in 170 Thai schools and 44 Thai universities. Higher education in Thailand also plays a significant role in a booming international education. Various prestigious public universities such as Mahidol, Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Kasetsart and Chiang Mai have an International College that offers an international curriculum with English as the medium of instruction (Fry, 2002). Private universities, such as the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) that many considered to be the “MIT of Asia” are also located in Thailand. Assumption University, the first English language university in Thailand, also offers a high quality international education that attracts a large number of Thai students, as well as students from countries near and far (Fry, 2002).

It is worth noting that the institutions mentioned above only represent the most well established educational institutions in Thailand. In reality, there are countless small, less well established types of language schools throughout Thailand (Persaud, 2005). Some have emerged in large and small shopping malls, “cram schools,” private residences, back alleys, after-school tutoring, test-preparation services, and even on-line English schools. As a result, it may not be feasible to compute the precise statistics and exact numbers of American teachers in Thailand. However, it is reasonable to estimate that there has been a continued significant increase in the demand for English language programs and teachers in Thailand (Persaud, 2005). The rapid expansion of bilingual, international programs, and institutions in Thailand, therefore, has resulted in a significant growth of job opportunities for native English speaking teachers.
especially among American educators. Along with opportunities, there are bound to be challenges.

**Part 1: Issues in Cross-Cultural Teaching**

**Benefits and Challenges of Cross-Cultural Teaching**

Teaching across cultural boundaries can be tremendously rewarding personally and professionally. The benefits include attractive pay, while enhancing one’s cross-cultural horizon, travel opportunities, perspectives and experiences (Cory, 2007). Walters, Garii, & Walters (2009), for example, state that teaching abroad improves one’s intellectual development, cultural responsiveness, adaptability, and expands one’s global worldview. Landis, Bennett, & Bennett (2004) add that teaching abroad increases one’s intercultural sensitivity as it allows educators to recognize the importance of culture in classroom interactions, not only the culture of their students, but of their own. Having a cross-cultural teaching experience, therefore, can help educators become less ethnocentric, reduce negative stereotypes, and have more empathy toward others (Dolby, 2004). Cross-cultural teaching also opens up tremendous opportunities to expand one’s cross-cultural networking and connections that otherwise may not be available in their native (home) country. In sum, cross-cultural teaching may enable an individual to be more bicultural in that it “…creates culturally confident, competent and sensitive world-minded teachers…” (Walters, et al., 2009, p. 156). These qualities allow these teachers to become more effective and desirable educators both at home and abroad.

Despite tremendous benefits that cross-cultural teaching may bring, the experience of teaching in a different cultural environment can be extremely difficult and challenging. Teaching, even in a mono-cultural environment, is already considered to be one of the most challenging and demanding professions. Adding the uncertainties and unfamiliar cultural
conditions in cross-cultural teaching will likely pose an even greater challenge and demands on educators (“A Social Science,” 2003). Bodycott & Walker (2000), for example, report that educators teaching abroad often face extra challenges including family alienation having to cope with new living and professional adjustment. Kim (1997) also reports that professionals undergoing overseas assignments often have to leave behind the comforts of home to construct a new life and are faced with many unknown challenges and uncertainties. The “cultural scripts” such as one’s beliefs, assumptions, routine behaviors that one is used to and familiar with may no longer be relevant or appropriate in the new cultural environment (Gudykunst, 1995). Gu & Maley (2008) further add that common sense and the “natural” way of doing things in one culture may very well be viewed as peculiar, strange, or inappropriate in another culture. These differences and challenges can increase stress and anxiety. Many foreign teachers may also experience a sense of homesickness, loneliness, and isolation due to the lack of familiar social and professional support when working overseas (Walters, et.al., 2009).

This suggests that the encounter of American teachers and Thai students in this study who may not share the same cultural patterns may experience misunderstanding, anxiety, and even a communication breakdown. Therefore, there is a clear need for research seeking to understand the nature of cross-cultural encounters in order to reduce or eliminate conflicts and misunderstandings.

**The Role of Culture on Education**

The cultural issues in educational settings have received a lot of attention in the literature. A numbers of researchers (e.g., Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1986; Grossman, 1995; Samovar & Porter, 1995; Stefani, 1997; Mahon, 2006; Masemann, 2007; Schlein, 2009; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010; Ohmae, 1995; Gu, 2010; Hallinger, 1998; Thongprasert & Cross, 2008; Joy &
Kolb, 2009) share the common idea that culture plays a significant role in educational practices. Hallinger (1998) and Masemann (2007), for example, state that schools are one of the most primary institutions for cultural transmission. Ohmae (1995), further states that “The web of culture used to be spun out of stories a child heard at a grandparent’s knee…” but with an increase in sub-nuclear families, children often absorb the culture from other sources and schools are often the primary social institutions responsible for cultural transmission. Thus, teachers play an essential role to “…weave the fabric of society helping to maintain the integrity of the culture.” (cited in Hallinger, 1998, p. 496).

In addition, Hall (1976) stresses that learning and teaching are culturally determined. Gu (2010), further indicates that culture is an “invisible lens” (p. 42) that educators use to guide their teaching, as well as to evaluate and assess their students. Teaching, therefore, is a highly culturally laden practice (p.42). Peacock (2001) also stresses that the root of one’s learning styles often develops through one’s educational background, school experiences, and cultural background. For example, teachers often develop their teaching approaches that emulate the way they were taught or adopt teaching strategies that mirror the ways they learned best, or they follow the styles of the teachers that they most admire. These approaches to teaching, however, may be quite different from their students’ learning preferences in cross-cultural classrooms. The patterns of communication, cognitive processing, task performance, work habits, self-presentation styles, and problem solving approaches will likely be different in cross-cultural classrooms (Gay, 1993).

Because culture plays a crucial role in school settings, the mismatching of patterns of cultural values such as differing classroom norms, expectations, communication patterns and learning and teaching styles can potentially create many challenging situations and serious value
conflicts (Pailliotet, 1997; Wong, 2004; Stefani, 1997; Gay, 1993). Hofstede (1986), one of the most influential theorists in the field of cross-cultural studies, for example, states that “…interactions between teachers and pupils from different cultures are fundamentally problematic and cross-cultural misunderstandings often occur because classroom interaction is an archetypal human phenomenon which is deeply rooted in the culture of a society” (p. 303). There are many learning styles that reflect different cultural norms, including direct and indirect communication, formal and informal, topic-centered and topic associating, dependent and independent learning, reflective and impulsive, participatory and passive learning, and energetic and calm learning (Stefani, 1997). Interactions among teachers and students who come from different cultural academic styles, thus, will likely be challenging. For example, a teacher who is more familiar with an independent learning style may feel frustrated if he or she has to deal with students who base their learning on a teacher-dependent approach.

Drawn from the literature, in cross-cultural classrooms, teachers and students often come equipped with their own set of beliefs and expectations on how to teach or learn skill sets that are often based on their own life experiences and native cultural knowledge. They, as a result, may not be familiar with other cultures and may not be well equipped to make necessary cultural accommodations in the classroom (Littrell, 2010; Littlewood, Liu & Yu 1996). For this reason, lacking cultural familiarity between teachers and students may lead to a pessimistic stereotype, frustration and even conflict. Interestingly, differences in cultural values tend to be unconscious and students and teachers often unintentionally apply their expectations and judgment in classroom situations that do not fit each other’s values and beliefs. As a result, these cultural differences may cause some unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings (Muller, 2007). Reid (1987) also warns that a mismatch of teaching and learning styles in a cross-cultural classroom
can have a negative effect on a student’s learning, as it can result in an unfavorable stereotype, frustration, lack of learning/teaching motivation, and even teaching and learning failure.

In summary, culture plays a significant role in cross-cultural classroom teaching and learning. Because schools are one of the most common and important institutions where cultural transmission and absorption takes place, the potential mismatching of culture norms between Thai students and American educators in the present study will likely occur.

**Defining Culture**

Because culture plays a significant role in one’s teaching and learning experiences, the concept of culture needs to be discussed to enrich the understanding of one’s cross-cultural teaching experience. However, conceptualizing or defining culture is no easy task (Triandis & Suh, 2002), as the definition of culture is difficult and varies due to its highly subjective and complex nature. For instance, back in 1952, Kroeber & Kluckohn compiled definitions of culture and came up with more than 160 definitions (cited in Jones, 2008). Cohan (2009) also acknowledged that defining culture is “exceptionally tricky” (p.194) because culture consists of numerous components including material, subjective (ideas and knowledge), and social culture. In other words, there are surface and deep (hidden) levels, and explicit and implicit elements that need to be considered when trying to understand culture. The measurement of culture is also complicated as it consists of different levels of analysis including individual, group, organization, regional, national, and even global culture (Erez & Gati, 2004).

Additionally, a review of the literature revealed that there is only general agreement of how to define culture (Walker & Dimmock, 2000). Based on the work of Triandis (2007), for example, “…almost all researchers see certain aspects as characteristics of culture. First, culture emerges in adaptive interactions between humans and environments. Second, culture consists of

Although some common aspects emerge, there is still no precise or clear consensus of how to define or measure culture. Researchers tend to select a definition, measurement, and level of analysis that they deem appropriate for their research focus, objective, or discipline. For example, some researchers may pay more attention to symbolic and intangible aspects rather than explicit forms of culture (Jones, 2008). Kluckhohn (1954), for instance, suggests that “culture is to society what memory is to individuals” (cited in Triandis & Suh, 2002, p.135). Hofstede, et.al (2010) also theorized culture such that each individual has mental programs that influence and guide the way one thinks, feels, and acts. The mental programs are developed and absorbed through one’s life experiences within social environments - from family, neighborhood, school, social groups, and the community one belongs to. Hofstede refers to these mental programs as the “software of the mind” (p.5) which, for him, is a synonym for the term culture.

Generally speaking, examining or understanding culture is like a common Thai saying of “Ta bord come chang” which is roughly translated to English as “A blind man touching an elephant.” A blind man touching the elephant’s tail, for example, would perceive that the elephant is a long skinny object. If a blind man touches an ear, he would think that the elephant is a round, thin, floppy object. Hence, research studies involving culture are hardly absolute, inclusive or comprehensive, because the concept of culture is highly complex, multi-layered, subjective, and dynamic (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou (1991). In effect, culture like the Thai saying, depends on what part of the “elephant” one chooses to study. Abdallah-Pretceille (2006)
also states that “…cultures can no longer be understood as independent entities, but need to be contextualized in terms of social, political and communication-based realities.” (p.475). Myers & Tan (2003) compare culture to a moving target while other theorists view culture as an illusive phenomenon. All these complexities make it quite challenging to measure, interpret and understand.

The cultural and research complexities listed above means that the present study is not exempt. For example, the cross-cultural teaching experiences of the American educators in Thai classrooms in this study may not be comprehensive due to the intricacies of culture. Although all variables may not be thoroughly mentioned in this study, several important variables including individual traits, ecology, and the degree of cultural distance between home and host cultures deemed fundamental and critical in one’s cross-cultural experience are considered and discussed. It is worth nothing that these variables are also interrelated and strongly influence one another as Triandis & Suh (2002) pointed out that “…ecologies shape cultures; cultures influence the development of personalities.” (p.133). Hence, understanding one variable may also link to and help increase the understanding of other related variables.

Factors that Influence Cross-Cultural Teaching Experiences

As stated by Gu & Maley (2008), although culture is the important factor, it is not the only determinant in understanding cross-cultural teaching and learning. Other significant variables such as the individual traits, overall ecological conditions, and the degree of similarity and differences between the home and the host cultures are among the many variables that can be as influential in determining or predicting one’s cross cultural experience. In other words, other variables and different circumstances can influence and shape one’s cross-cultural experiences in unique and sometimes, unpredictable ways. These important variables are as follows:
Individual Traits

A review of the literature reveals that individual traits and personalities play a significant role in one’s cross cultural experience. Black, et.al (1991), for example, emphasizes the importance of individual skills and personality that facilitate international adjustment. For example, newcomers who can develop the necessary skills to manage stress, develop relationships, and maintain a positive perception toward host members will likely adjust to cross-cultural situations better than those who lack these qualities. Kim (1997) also discusses the role of predisposition of each individual and states that each person is equipped with a different set of preexisting internal characteristics that either help or hinder one’s cross-cultural journey. These individual internal conditions include 1) preparedness 2) ethnicity and 3) personality.

According to Kim, Preparedness refers to the levels of readiness of an expatriate to cope with new cross-cultural environments. For example, expatriates who acquire competence in host language skills, cultural knowledge, or are motivated and willing to relocate and are more prepared with realistic expectations toward the host country, may be able to adjust to the new environment better or quicker that those who do not acquire these qualities (Kim, 1997). Expatriates with prior overseas experience may also be able to adjust to international relocations better than those with no exposure to international travel (Black, et.al. 1991; Aycan, 1997). In addition, ethnic background or certain inherited characteristics of an individual can influence one’s cross-cultural experience in either positive or negative ways. According to Kim, certain ethnic backgrounds could present linguistic, cultural, as well as psychological barriers for newcomers to adjust to the host cultures. For example, Japanese immigrants to the U.S. may find it more challenging and demanding than those from Canada as the level of differences between the home and the host cultures are likely high. Further, individual personality or one’s personal
psychological tendencies such as being open minded, positive, optimistic, patient, and flexible may enable newcomers to better adjust to the new cultural environment (Kim, 1997).

Gu & Maley (2008), for example, studied the experiences of Chinese students in UK tertiary level universities and reports that personality factors such as age and maturity played a significant role in the success of the cross-cultural adjustment of the participants. Tahir & Ismail (2007) also conducted in-depth interviews with 20 expatriates working in Malaysia to learn about their cross-cultural challenges and adjustments. They found that participants who were more tolerant and optimistic tend to adjust more easily. These qualities helped them to better adjust to their new life in Malaysia.

**Ecological Factors**

Besides personality traits, overall ecological conditions also need to be examined. Triandis & Suh (2002), for example, point out how ecology influences cultural patterns. Differences in landscape, for example, can influence and develop into certain cultural characteristics. For instance, countries with isolated landscapes (i.e., surrounded by mountains or ocean) may result in being a more homogenized or “tight” culture. Members of these cultures may be more conformed to group rules and group harmony in order to survive. Climate can also influence cultural patterns. According to Triandis & Suh (2002), in cold climates the survival of offspring may be more challenging and critical than in warm climates. Competition, especially among men, may be the tool to survive and, thus, develop into a more “masculine” competitive society in cold climate countries. The availability (or lack thereof) of natural resources also plays a role in cultural norms. For example, in hunting and gathering societies where food and other resources cannot be massively accumulated or preserved for special (i.e. privileged) groups, the level of equality among members of the society may be higher. In farming societies,
in comparison, some people may be able to produce more and, thus, can amass more wealth and/or respect which enable hierarchical patterns to develop in a particular society (Triandis & Suh, 2002).

Further, in order to accurately understand the individual cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thailand, one cannot examine or study their classroom experiences in isolation from their experiences outside the classroom, as all of these experiences are interrelated and impact one another. Expatriates often find that their habitual and familiar routines and work patterns are disrupted, not only in their professional life, but their personal life outside work as well. The disruption of familiar habits, environment, and routine, for example, can lead to a feeling of frustration, disappointment, and anxiety (Selmer, 2007). The ecology, thus, can play as big a role on one’s cross-cultural experience as the culture itself. In other words, one’s professional life cannot be dichotomously separated from one’s personal life or experiences. For example, having difficulty adjusting to new living conditions will likely impact one’s teaching performance in a variety of ways. For this reason, the influence of the entire ecology of one’s cross-cultural encounter needs to be taken into account.

According to Fontaine (1989), ecological variables include the physical, biological, and social environment. For example, differences in environment and climate, unfamiliar and/or different living arrangements, language differences that can lead to communication problems and difficulties, unfamiliar tasks and responsibilities, and lacking or discontinuing social connections and support all impact the cross-cultural individual. Gu & Maley (2008) describe some aspects of culture shock from Oberg (1960) as a sense of loss when social support systems such as friends and family are not available. A sense of deprivation by losing one’s own personal as well as professional status and possessions, a feeling of impotence, and feeling rejected by the new
environment are variables that impact the individual. Black, et.al. (1991) also discusses the non-work factor such as family/spouse adjustment, as well as the level of cultural novelty, and cultural toughness. Black and colleagues further state that non-work factors are among some of the more important factors that can facilitate or prevent international adjustment.

Kim (1997) also reveals that it is necessary for people moving across a culture to learn to meet the demands of the host environment. According to Kim, there are three important environmental factors that play a significant role in the success or failure of an expatriate. These factors include 1) host receptivity 2) host conformity pressure and 3) ethnic group strength. Host receptivity as referred to by Kim is the degree to which the members of the host country are open to, welcome, accept, or the willingness to provide various types of supports to the newcomers (p.409). The degree of host receptivity toward newcomers is often based on such factors as the nature of the relationship between the host and the home countries, compatibility or incompatibility of ideology, social, political standing, and economic status of the home and the host countries. Host conformity pressure refers to the willingness of host members to accept, accommodate, or recognize cultural practices of the newcomers and ethnic group strength as the size of the population of the newcomers, the degree of establishment of institutional support, the economic status, and ethnic political activism the use of newcomers’ language in the host country. A healthy or vibrant ethnic group strength could allow newcomers to establish a strong subculture that facilitates their cross-cultural adaptation and adjustment at least when they first arrive to the foreign land (Kim, 1997).

Wagner & Westaby (2009) also examined different factors that impact on the willingness to relocate and found that participants prefer relocating to destinations that they feel safe. Asmar (1996) (cited in Tahir & Ismail, 2007) report that foreigners residing in Malaysia have
commented on different issues that impact their adjustment, including differences in public services, sanitation, and restriction of local media. Black & Gregersen (1990) and Fisher & Shaw (1994) also report that factors that are related to quality of life such as housing condition and access to medical and healthcare providers are among the essential factors that influence the decision making and overall adjustment of the participants. Gu & Maley (2008) studied the experiences of Chinese students in UK universities and report that students not only have to cope with different learning and teaching styles in the classroom, they also struggle psychologically and physically with overall different life patterns in the UK. Some of the reported issues that these students struggle through include feeling bored and lonely, a feeling of alienation, and adjusting to different food and diet (Gu & Maley, 2008).

Based on these empirical studies, overall ecological conditions, including the physical surroundings, social environment, everyday activities and living conditions beyond the classroom and school appear to be crucial factors affecting one’s cross-cultural experience. As a result, it is necessary to include one’s overall ecological conditions in order to holistically understand the cross-cultural teaching experiences of American educators in Thailand - a country with an ecology that differs significantly in this study from that of the U.S.

**Degree of Cultural Distance**

The degree of cultural distance between the home and the host country also plays a significant role in one’s cross-cultural experiences. In many circumstances, increasing globalization and the exchange of knowledge and information across countries may help bring the world closer, but the “closeness” between nations also results in an increasing awareness and recognition of differences between them (Shah, 2004). Numerous studies in the field of cross-cultural studies (e.g., Hofstede, 1986; Hofstede, et.al., 2010; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner,
Triandis & Suh, 2002; Black, et.al., 1991; Samovar & Porter, 1995; Stefani, 1997) discuss this phenomenon. Black, et.al (1991), for example, state that culture novelty (or culture toughness) will influence international migration. According to Black and colleagues, cultures may be more difficult to adjust to for newcomers due to the degree of cultural distance between the home and the host culture. For example, Japanese traveling to the U.S. may experience more difficulties and require more effort to adjust to the new culture than Canadian expatriates. This is due to the fact that Japanese linguistic and communication patterns, cultural norms, and values, to name only a few, are more distant or different than the U.S.

Bennett (1998) also points out that the interactions among individuals from the same cultural background are often founded on ‘similarity-based’ actions, where shared assumptions, values, behaviors patterns facilitate understanding. In cross-cultural contacts, on the other hand, interactions are often rooted in ‘difference based’ actions and beliefs where values, patterns of behaviors, and assumptions are often diverse and will likely hinder understanding and misunderstanding and result in negative stereotyping, which can lead to conflict and resentment. Barna (1998) further suggests that there are at least six cultural stumbling blocks that make cross-cultural communication prone to problems, frustrations, and misunderstandings. The six barriers are 1) the assumption and expectation that people are all alike across cultures which can cause newcomers to be ill prepared to deal with cultural differences, 2) language differences which not only include differences in vocabulary, grammar used, and definitions, but also the differences in tones and social appropriateness such as who, when, how, why, and where certain words or conversations can be used appropriately, 3) misinterpretation of unfamiliar verbal and non-verbal clues, 4) preconceptions and stereotypes that can lead to false assumptions, 5) tendency to evaluate and judge others (as right and wrong) from different cultural norms, based
on one’s known values systems, and 6) the high anxiety and high level of stress that exists when dealing with unfamiliarity in different cultural contexts that can easily turn a “normal” situation into a crisis. According to Barna, these six stumbling blocks often occur in most if not all cross-cultural interactions and can potentially hinder or prevent successful cross-cultural interactions.

It is worth noting, however, that a review of the literature of most of the influential and mainstream studies emphasize cultural differences as problematic rather than as beneficial in cross-cultural interactions. However, there appears to be another school of thought that argues that the conventional assumption of cultural differences is often taken for granted and that it has seldom been systematically investigated (e.g., Forster, 1997; Selmer, 2007; Selmer & Lauring, 2009). Selmer (2007), for example, states that the assumption that the more different the host culture is, the more difficult and challenging it is for newcomers to experience “…appears to be an intuitively plausible assumption supported by a myriad of anecdotal evidence.” (p.186). Scholars supporting this perspective believe that in one’s cross-cultural experience, cultural similarity can be as challenging as cultural dissimilarity. Similar cultures, as a result, may not always be easier to adjust to than dissimilar cultures.

Thus, cultural distance or the degree of cultural similarity or differences between home and host cultures may not be a relevant in gauging one’s cross-cultural experience (Selmer, 2007). For example, based on Selmer’s study, in the process of cultural learning and adjustment, host members may provide more encouragement and support, be more tolerant, patient and forgiving, and be “given the benefit of a doubt” by foreigners who they perceive to have significant “strangeness” in their cultural backgrounds. These factors may reduce the cross-cultural difficulties and make adjustment to a new culture more convenient and manageable.
The opposite, however, may be true for foreigners who are viewed as sharing cultural norms and having cultural “closeness” with the host (i.e., Americans in Canada, Lao or other Asians in Thailand). The expectation of cultural knowledge and expectation of an easy and quick adjustment may be higher for these “like individuals” and they may be treated with less patience and less forgiveness in the process of cross-cultural adjustment. Moreover, expatriates in a more similar host culture (e.g., Americans in Canada) may not detect or be aware of any potential cultural differences, and hence, may mistakenly associate or link their problems or difficulties with other factors (e.g., blaming themselves or blaming their co-workers or host people they interact with), rather than the culture. For this reason, the perceived cultural “closeness” could potentially cause some expatriates to be rather ill prepared. Some people may fail to modify unsuitable or inappropriate behaviors, or may even refrain or refuse to adjust to the new culture (Selmer, 2007).

The counterintuitive perspective that cultural differences may not always create difficulty provides an alternative viewpoint that the level of cultural similarity or differences may not accurately predict one’s cross-cultural experience. For example, American teachers in the present study may or may not have suffered serious cross-cultural teaching experiences due to their presumed cultural dissimilarity in Thailand. Some may have gone through their cross-cultural interactions with Thais without much difficulty based on their personality, prior knowledge of and attitude toward the Thai culture, teaching experiences, cross-cultural preparation, language skills, awareness, or their willingness and approach to face and overcome differences and challenges. Moreover, the perception and attitude of the Thai host members such as the sense of hospitality, friendliness, admiration towards American newcomers will also play a significant role in their cross-cultural experiences. With many different variables to consider, it
is necessary to learn the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers through the teachers’ own words, in order to accurately and meaningfully understand individual unique cross-cultural experiences, regardless of the presumed cultural similarities or differences.

**Cultural Characteristics of Thailand and the U.S.**

A review of the mainstream literature reveals that cultural differences play a significant role in classroom interactions, especially among educators who find themselves teaching in a country that has noticeable mismatched/dissimilar cultures. As pointed out by Bennet (1998), interaction that is “difference-based” where the values, patterns of behaviors, and assumptions are often diverse, will likely hinder understanding. In this dissertation research, the focus is on the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers and Thai students in Thai classrooms. In order to fully understand their teaching experiences, it is necessary to explore and investigate the cultural characteristics and teaching and learning approaches of the two countries. Knowledge of the cultural attributes of the two countries, as expressed by the American teachers in the present study, is necessary for a better understanding and appreciation of the two cultures and for the purpose of analysis, comparison and contrast in this study. For example, American educators teaching in Thailand - a country constituted by a royal monarchy, a traditional collectivistic culture founded on Buddhism, and a country that has never been colonized by Westerners - may experience steep cultural adjustments due to noticeable cultural differences between the two countries. These differences in cultural values and practices in educational settings will likely result in significant misunderstandings, conflicts, and frustration, not only for the American teachers, but for the Thai students as well.

In this dissertation research, several prominent cross-cultural studies including Edward T. Hall (1959, 1966, 1983), Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (1989, 2010), and Trompenaars &
Hampden-Turner’s cultural dimensions (1998) are mainly used as a benchmark and theoretical foundation and framework for understanding different cultural characteristics between Thailand and the U.S. These influential theorists on cross-cultural studies provide a useful foundation and explanations for understanding some of the cultural differences that are likely to have the most impact on the challenges experienced by American teachers working and living in Thailand.

**Cultural Dimensions**

The field of intercultural communication was founded during the years 1951-1955 when Edward T. Hall, a cultural anthropologist who worked for the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of State, began to apply anthropological concepts to train people to work more effectively overseas (Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002). His work brought to light the importance of several cultural factors that continue to play a significant role in cross-cultural interactions, including the importance of verbal and non-verbal cues, low and high context in communication, and differences in the concept of time (Rogers, et.al, 2002).

Nearly three decades later (1980), Hofstede developed culture dimensions based on the data of cultural values of employees from 40 countries who worked at the International Business Machines (IBM), (Hofstede, et al., 2010). Hofstede’s cultural dimensions consist of five dimensions including Individualism vs. Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity vs. Femininity, and Long-Term vs. Short-Term orientation. Hofstede’s research has lead to a large number of replications and citations, as well as generated vigorous discussions in cross-cultural issues. His work is considered one of the most influential studies in the field of cross-cultural management and his research is ranked to be one of the most cited sources according to the Social Science Citation Index (Fang, 2003).
Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner also developed categories to describe different cultural orientations based on 15 years of their empirical academic and field research in 20 countries (Thrompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Their cultural orientations were categorized into seven groups including Universalism vs. Particularism, Individualism vs. Communitarianism, Neutral vs. Emotional, Specific vs. Diffuse, Achievement vs. Ascription, Attitudes to time, and Attitudes to the environment. These three prominent and influential researchers have contributed significantly to the development and understanding of cross-cultural studies that have become the foundation for numerous subsequent studies and research. Their interpretations and explanations of cultural differences are employed and used as theoretical framework in this research study.

In some respects the cultural explanations in Hall’s, Hofstede’s and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner’s studies are somewhat interrelated and overlap in ideology and concepts. For instance, all three studies stress the cultural differences based on individualistic and collectivist cultural traits as well as social hierarchy. In many other aspects, however, these dimensions offer different viewpoints on how to view and measure various cultures. These three studies also focus on national-level of analysis which serves the purpose of this cross-cultural comparison and analysis between Thailand and the U.S. Using these models as a framework for comparison and analysis, for example, shows that there are many significant differences in cultural values and norms between Thailand and the U.S. which likely play a significant role in making the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thai classrooms difficult and challenging.

However, the discussion and application of these models must be viewed with caution as some cultural characteristics may not be accurate in all situations. According to Hofstede et al, (2010) each dimension represents a characteristic of a culture that can be measured and
compared to other cultures and “…the grouping of the different aspects of a dimension is always based on statistical relationship-that is, trends for these phenomena to occur in combination, not on iron links” (p.31).

For the purposes of this dissertation research, several significant cultural differences from these three influential studies are applied. These cultural traits were selected based on the likelihood of having the most significant impact on the cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thai classrooms.

Language and Communication Patterns

One of the most obvious but significant factors that can lead to serious cross-cultural misunderstanding and adversity between American teachers and Thai students in this study are differences in language and interaction patterns. Many researchers agree that language differences play a significant role in cross-cultural classrooms (e.g., Hall, 1997; Kim, 1997; Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Walker, Bridges & Chan, 1996). Walker et al., (1996), for example, report that difficulties facing cross-cultural classrooms are often magnified with language differences (p.14). Kim (1997) also highlights these difficulties stating that “Communication activities of encoding and decoding verbal and nonverbal information lie at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation by serving as the essential mechanism that connects strangers and the host society.” (p. 406). Especially in cross-cultural classrooms where “Language is the vehicle of teaching” (Hofstede, et.al. 2010, p.393), expatriate teachers, regardless of teaching in international classrooms using English as medium of communication or not, will likely have to acquire some language knowledge of the local people in order to connect and function in the new cultural environment. Without this “local knowledge,” expatriate educators may become
“…handicapped in their ability to function and relate to the system of host cultural pragmatics.”
(Kim, 1997, p.407)

It is important to note that language has special characteristics that make acquiring it challenging for most non-native or newcomers because language is symbolic, rule governed, subjective, and dynamic (Chen & Starosta, 1998). For example, as for being subjective, decoding the real meaning of a language is “…dependent on cultural experience rather than on the words themselves” (p.65). This is why newcomers often struggle in the process of acquiring language competency through the painstaking process of trial and error (Kim, 1997). This struggle is due to the fact that, acquiring host language meaningfully and effectively is not simply learning the meaning of words and definitions, phonetics, and syntax, but involves many levels of learning including 1) cognitive, 2) affective, and 3) operational. First, **cognitive** knowledge means that newcomers need to be familiar with some local aspects such as its history, laws and regulations, perceptions, beliefs, customs, and rules of social engagements in order to effectively interact with the local people. Second, newcomers also have to acquire **affective competence** or the emotional and aesthetic sensibilities that enable them to have a positive outlook and be able to empathize and connect with the local people. Finally, newcomers also need to acquire **operational competence**, the ability to apply cognitive and affective skills in order to recognize or pick and choose appropriate verbal and nonverbal codes in social interactions (Kim, 1997).

In a broader sense, language cannot be separated from culture. Therefore, how one interprets verbal or nonverbal codes is culturally based (Samovar & Porter, 1997). Edward T. Hall, for example, theorizes that the influence of culture on communication is also shown through context which can include a variety of factors including the setting, situation, individual
status, prior experience and cultural background (Hall, 1997, 1998). Although Hall cautions that “...no culture exists exclusively at one end of the scale...” (p.47), he categorizes different countries largely into two groups as high-context and low-context. According to Hall, a high-context (HC) communication “...is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.” (p. 47). Communication with HC patterns tends to be more unifying and long-lasting which reflect the collective aspect of the society (Hall, 1997). In a low-context communication (LC), on the other hand, “...the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.” (p.47) Therefore, the communication can be fast, efficient, more satisfying and to the point especially for people who prefer this style. Hall compares HC communication to twins who grow up together and can understand each other without saying much. LC communication, in comparison, is like lawyers trying to explain their case in court which requires them to go right to the point and utilize more explicit information.

Hall also categorizes Americans in a low-context category while fitting Thailand as the high-context communication type (Christopher, Kabinuntha, Hauge, Karstensen & Pekasut, 2004). Based on Hall’s category, people from HC cultures such as Thai people, may be more sensitive or rely more heavily on context such as gestures, tone of voice, or one’s social status when communicating with others, rather than on words themselves. In contrast, people from low-context cultures, such as Americans who are more used to and familiar with concise, straightforward and to-the-point manners, may not be aware of the context they are expressing or receiving from HC people. With such noticeable differences in communicative patterns, context use and unmatched interpretations, it seems reasonable to predict that the interactions between American teachers and Thai students may be prone to confusion and misunderstanding.
Eldridge & Cranston (2009) conducted an in-depth interview exploratory research to learn how cultural differences affect the academic and management styles of transnational programs in Australia and Thailand. They reported that Australian managers preferred more direct and explicit communication approaches, while Thai managers favored the approaches that considered face and feelings. Christopher et al. (2004) also conducted an interview research of 20 Thai and 20 Norwegian post-graduate students and compared the communication patterns of the two groups used during the interviews. They interpreted the communication patterns of the participants in accordance with Hall’s high and low-contexts. For example, researchers overall felt that the Thai behaviors were ambiguous, less explicit, less straightforward, and used more gestures and facial expressions (i.e., laughing or smiling when nervous) to communicate. They interpreted Norwegian communication patterns as short, direct, expressive, and sometime treating each question as if it were independent of all other questions. These researchers also reported experiencing communication difficulties and frustration when interviewing participants from the other countries. This study revealed that context plays a major role in interaction and that one should not take it for granted, especially when communicating across culture.

**Attitude Towards Time**

Besides the differences in language, communication patterns, and context, another difference in cultural orientation that appears to be distinctively noticeable between Thailand and many Western societies, especially the U.S., is how individuals from different cultures perceive and manage time. As mentioned by Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998), the concept of time varies from culture to culture and the perception of time plays a role in how people plan and organize social activities (Nguyen, et al., 2009). Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, for example, categorizes time as sequential and synchronic. Hall (1983, 1998) also categorizes time into similar concepts as monochronic-time (or M-time) and polychronic-time (or P-time). People
from sequential and M-time cultures such as the U.S., for instance, tend to view time in a horizontal and consecutive fashion and perceive it as real, tangible, and measurable. The perception towards time in these societies is rather valuable because people can save it, spent it, or even run out of it (Hall, 1983, p.43). People in these cultures, therefore, tend to keep and follow plans and schedules rather strictly; some may even value time over relationships (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

The view of time is quite opposite to members of synchronic and P-time societies, such as in many countries in Asia, where time is viewed as unquantifiable, limitless, approximate, and flexible. P-time people, therefore, are more likely to put a priority on relationships instead of an “artificial’ clock time” (Nguyen, et al. 2009, p.121).

The seemingly diverse viewpoint toward time between Thai students and foreign Western teachers can be a source of conflict and misunderstanding. For example, American teachers may expect classroom schedules and class assignments to be completed on a strict timeline, while Thai students may be more accustomed to flexibility and may not cope well with being pressured to get things done on time. According to Nguyen, et al.(2009), students from P-time orientation societies may feel more worthwhile in spending their time getting to know their peers before completing class assignments or trying to keep to a strict schedule or deadline.

**Power Distance**

Another major difference between Thailand and the U.S. is the way people in each country treat and perceive people in power. Based on the explanations in Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, power distance refers to the level of acceptance of power differences and inequality in a society. Countries with a large power distance such as Thailand may be more inclined to accept inequality, as opposed to a society with a smaller power distance such as the U.S. that may view inequality in power as less acceptable.
When discussing and comparing cultural values, one can clearly see the disparity between Thailand and many Western countries such as the U.S. For example, in The U.S. the notion that “all men are created equal” is the nation’s ideology and people tend to behave accordingly. Thailand, a country constituted by a royal monarchy along with the long history of using the sakdina system (power deriving from landholding) to rank every Thai by his/her “dignity mark” (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000) makes Thais more susceptible to social hierarchical and inequality than Americans. Thais highly value education and, for this reason, based on historical and socio-cultural background, teachers in Thailand are usually treated with great respect and as knowledgeable and influential figures, not only by students, but also by the parents and the entire society (Nguyen, 2007). The official National Teacher’s Day celebration when students walk on their knees, bow, and offer flowers to show their respect and appreciation to teachers is evidence of the special treatment and high esteem that Thai people have for their teachers. Teaching in Thailand, therefore, is not simply an occupation, but a highly respected social position in the society (Prpic & Kanjanapanyakom, 2004). With this special treatment also comes social obligations and responsibility. Being a teacher in Thailand means that one has to maintain good behavior and high moral ground and be of a good role model to all people at all times.

High regard toward teachers, teacher-dependent, top-down communication, and one way communication from teachers to students are often the classroom norms in large power distance societies (Wright, 2006). The large power distance between a teacher and a student often results in students feeling reluctant to speak up in class and take the role of passive learners instead of active participants (Hofstede, 1986). Students in high power distance societies often view a teacher more than just as someone who teaches information and facts, but a guru (Sanskrit,
India), or a Sensei (Japanese), or Ajarn (Thai) who educates others from one’s own wisdom. In these societies, the quality of learning based heavily on teachers, as oppose to a low power distance society where quality of learning rest on student’s own effort and capability (Hofstede et al., 2010). In small power distance societies such as the U.S., the higher the education the less dependence will be place on teacher. In large power distance societies such as Thailand, on the other hand, the level of dependency on teachers often remains the same regardless of one’s educational level. Foreign teachers, especially those from the U.S that are working in Thai universities, may not expect this norm and may unexpectedly find themselves under prepared to handle this responsibility. With a high social position and strong professional expectation for teachers in a large power distance societies such as Thailand, Western and American teachers may find these obligations to be too demanding to maintain.

Additionally, the awareness of differences in social status often leads to the feeling of kreang jai (being respectful, humble, and extremely considerate) when interacting with one another, especially one with higher social status (Foley, 2005; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000; Knee, 1999). The concept of kreang jai is often deeply imbedded in the Thai mind set and attitude. Additionally, as reported by George (1987), many Thai students may not seek help, ask for clarification, or discuss any questions they have with their teachers. They may choose to complete their assignments incorrectly rather than “disturb” their teachers. This behavior may be viewed as irrational by many American and other Western teachers who are not familiar with the Thai way of thinking. When teaching in Thailand, Americans and other foreign teachers have to expect to receive this gesture both inside and outside the classroom. As a result, some teachers may find it difficult and challenging to understand or come to terms with this concept.
Other classroom behaviors that are deemed unacceptable by many Western teachers may also be rooted in the respect for authority. Plagiarism, for example, is one of many problems that foreign teachers in Thailand have reported having to deal with. It must be pointed out that in the Thai classroom as well as Western teaching styles treat plagiarism as wrong and unacceptable. However, in Thailand, this behavior may be based on a surprisingly different set of cultural ideologies and circumstances that Western teachers may find difficult to comprehend. The explanation for this “unacceptable” behavior may be due to a unique cultural orientation where age, seniority, and hierarchy are so strongly emphasized that students have developed a coping mechanism to deal with it. Students from Thai society are more likely to respect their teachers and will try to please and make them happy and proud at all cost. It is highly possible, therefore, that when they have to deal with a difficult classroom task or assignment that they know they cannot accomplish on their own, some students may choose to copy or plagiarize rather than submit an incomplete or inadequate assignment which, they believe, may disappoint their teachers. In other words, their desire to respect the requests of their teachers is so important to them that it could lead them to copy or plagiarize (Knee, 1999).

Bogart (2005), however, looks at this rather problematic behavior from a positive perspective. He explains that the reasons some Thai students plagiarize might also be because of the lack of learning methodologies. As a result, Thai students may copy the work of others as a survival tool. Bogart further believes that one positive aspect of Thai copying is that it may help them master the ability to replicate and duplicate, which is a useful learning tool when learning a new language. These classroom behaviors may sound ridiculous and frustrating to many foreign teachers who are used to active participation in the classroom. However, foreign teachers and Thai students both need to be aware that different cultural norms exist that are deeply embedded
in their consciousness, perceptions and attitudes of right and wrong. Compromise and curriculum adjustment must be used in order to “get the job done” with effective cross-cultural teaching and learning.

**Achievement vs. Ascription**

Similar to Hofstede’s Power Distance dimension, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) focus on how individuals obtain social status. In achievement societies such as in the U.S., people are expected to obtain social status from what they have accomplished. This view is quite different from what occurs in ascriptive (i.e., ascribed-status) societies such as those in Southeast Asia where one’s social status can be obtained based on who one is either through birth, seniority, gender, or economic status (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot (2009), for example, examined the use of Western teaching methodology of cooperative learning in Asian contexts and found conflicts and misunderstandings can occur when there is a mismatch between classroom methods and a student’s cultural norms. Nguyen and colleagues describe that in Western cultures the expectation of a good leader is often based on one’s competency, responsibility, performance, and ability to delegate decisions to team members. The best leaders in these societies can be, as Nguyen et al. describe, as a “one-minute leader” who can manage the task at hand effectively. In ascriptive societies, however, the role of a good leader is more than one’s ability to complete the assigned task, but one who has a certain personality that can capture group loyalty and members’ devotion. According to Nguyen et al., in ascriptive societies, “…dignity, kindness, and devotion, rather than work-related competency, are likely to be the key criteria for leadership.” (p. 120).

The way Thais perceive the role of good leadership appears to be comparable with other Asian cultures in Nguyen and colleagues’ study. In Thai classrooms, how a student obtains his or her social status such as being a good leader in group assignments may be judged differently
among their Thai classmates and Western foreign teachers. For this reason, the person that
foreign teachers assign to be in charge for class assignments based on Western criteria, may not
be the leader that is desirable or acceptable by Thai classmates. This mismatching of leadership
criteria can lead to disappointment at best, and even unnecessary group conflict at worst.

**Individualism and collectivism (or Communitarianism)**

The cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism according to Hofstede appear
to be quite comparable to Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner’s individualism and
communitarianism, in many ways. For example, based on Hofstede’s definition, individualism
refers to a society that values individual achievement over group achievement. In societies that
value individualism, a person often looks after his or her own interest and immediate family, as
opposed to a collectivist society where people feel that they belong to one or more groups and
they will protect the interest of the group and its members. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner
(1998) also describe individualism in a similar fashion, as societies where people place more
emphasis on individual needs before the group or the community that one belongs too.

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner describe communitarianism in a similar fashion to
collectivism. In these societies, groups and community are essential for the well-being and
happiness of the individual. Therefore, an individual will place the community or group before
their own happiness and welfare as they believe that the well-being of the group will naturally
and eventually benefit the individual members.

Based on these cultural dimensions, the different social orientations in Thailand and
Western countries such as the U.S. will influence the way Thais and Westerners perceive the
meaning of “self” or the meaning of one’s existence (Kwanjai & Hertog, 2008). Growing up in
individualist society, Westerners may likely view one’s existence with the notion that “you are
what you make of yourself.” Thais, on the other hand, may have a different viewpoint and tend to think of their self existence as “you are what people make of you” (Kwanjai & Hertog, 2008, p.12). The awareness of “self” in relation to others is evident in the use of language, expressions, and gestures. Most Thais learn from early childhood to determine and select pronouns and to gesture according to who they interact with (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). For example, there are countless pronouns for “I” such as khaphachao, phom, krapom, chan, dichan, rao, noo, kha, gu to name but a few (Foley, 2005). The hierarchical level in language is based on one’s social status, relationships, and age of the two individual who are interacting. For example, a daughter speaking to her parents refers to herself as noo, while a son refers to himself as phom. These siblings, when speaking with close friends refer to themselves as rao or chan. When speaking to the King, they use highly formalized pronouns such as khaphachao for both men and women. Most Thais, even at a very young age, learn and can figure out the appropriate pronouns to use, with whom, and under what circumstances.

In addition, when Thais meet and greet, they usually wai, by putting the two palms together in a praying gesture in front of the face, and then bow. The wai and the bow also have different levels for different individuals, ages, and social statuses. The higher the wai toward the top of the head, the more respect one shows to another. Americans, on the other hand, usually shake hands when they greet, regardless of one another’s social status and in most social situations. They also maintain the pronoun “I” regardless of who they interact with from royalty, to the President, to their subordinates and even to their pets. Therefore, having to figure out the appropriate pronouns and gesture in social interactions may be challenging and frustrating for many Americans who are new or unfamiliar with Thai cultural norms.
Additionally, the relationship between self and others and the group is often formed and developed in one’s consciousness since childhood and is often reinforced in the classroom (Hofstede, et al., 2010). Thais typically perceive one’s self existence in harmony with the group they belong to and, as a result, Thai classroom activities often reflect and reinforce these cultural norms. The “cheering” activity (or similar activities with different names) is one of many common practices in Thai universities and colleges where students (especially freshmen) gather together to show support for the department they belong to. One of the main purposes for this type of activity is to increase group cohesion and harmony, help new students to learn how to function in college life, and increase school pride. It also helps students, especially newcomers, to network with other students as well as with faculty members (MOE Thailand). This “cheering” activity, however, can last for a few days to weeks depending on the university and program. Perhaps not surprisingly, some universities place this activity as a priority over regular classes. Students, therefore, may be allowed to participate in the activity instead of attending classes.

As a collectivist and communitarianism society where people feel that belonging to a certain group and protecting the interests of the group and its members is essential, the “cheering” activity in Thai universities is considered important, as it serves the purpose of maintaining and strengthening group harmony. Western foreign teachers, especially those with a strong individualistic viewpoint, however, may view “cheering” activity as unnecessary, wasteful, or even as an obstruction to learning.

Further, in collective and communitarianism societies, the in-group-out-group distinctions are emphasized. Group members, therefore, are expected to receive preferential treatment over out-group members (Hofstede et al, 2010). For example, a Thai teacher may treat
her niece (who happens to be in her class) better than other students. This “special” treatment is often viewed as acceptable in collectivist society as group members should be more important than the out-group members. This special treatment in individualist societies, however, will likely be viewed with resentment and even as nepotism in individualist societies such as the U.S., where one should be treated equally regardless of their membership status. American teachers in Thai classrooms may find it hard to accept such behavior that many of them view as sharply contrasting with their core values.

As members of a collective and communitarianism society, Thai students may also choose to deal with difficult assignments by working together in a group and hand in identical assignments without considering this behavior as cheating or unacceptable (George, 1987). In “Using Cooperative Learning in The College Classroom,” George found that many of her Thai students may have unknowingly practiced one of the most important pedagogical strategies of cooperative learning by working together as a homework cartel on their class assignments (1987). Western teachers, who are more likely to value individual performance, may find this strategy unacceptable, dishonest and even deceitful. However, based on George’s study, using cooperative learning can be a very useful learning strategy to increase the achievement of college students.

Using this study as an example, however, is not an endorsement for Western teachers to accept academic dishonesty or plagiarism in Thai classrooms, but serves as an example that other explanations should be considered before making a final judgment based on what many would perceive as a Western ideology. Hopefully, this study will help increase awareness among western teachers that some classroom behaviors that are considered inappropriate may be based on differing cultural values and norms.
Achievement Oriented vs. Relationship Oriented

Achievement oriented cultures such as that in the U.S. and relationship oriented cultures such as in Thailand, may also be the basis for cross-cultural misunderstandings. In some aspects, achievement and relationship oriented cultural characteristics can be compared to Hofstede’s (1989) cultural dimension of masculinity and femininity. According to Hofstede, this cultural dimension can be used to gauge the extent to which a society values assertiveness or competition as opposed to nurturing and concern for relationships (Hofstede et al, 2010). According to Hofstede’s categories, in “masculine” societies there is more distinction between social roles of males and females, while in feminine societies the social roles of the two sexes are not as clearly defined and their roles may overlap. In a masculine society, respect for power, wealth, performance outcome, and productivity may be emphasized more than in a feminine society where social relations and harmony are more important. Some authors refer to Hofstede’s masculinity culture as “hard” culture, result-oriented culture, or performance-oriented culture and refer to feminine culture as soft culture, relationship-oriented, or cooperation-orientated culture (e.g., Wright, 2006). The cultural values indicated in Hofstede’s cultural dimension also transfer into work values. People from masculine societies, for example, may emphasize earning, recognition, job advancement, and challenge while members of feminine societies may prefer a caring supervisor, cooperative teamwork, desirable work location, and job security for their careers.

Interestingly, based on Hofstede’s cultural model, Thailand has the highest scores in Asia as a feminine society, while many Western countries such as the U.S. score high as being a masculine society. The vast differences in cultural values between Thailand and the many Western countries such as the U.S. may play a significant role in making the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thai universities challenging. The characteristic pertaining
to femininity or relationship oriented societies is strong in Thai culture, as many Thais are often concerned that maintaining social harmony is crucial in Thai society. American teachers with achievement oriented values may view school failure and “low” productivity and performance of Thai students as a serious issue. Thai students, on the other hand, may be more concerned with relationship building than trying to work hard to get good grades, because school failure may not be viewed as seriously in a feminine society as it is in masculine societies.

In feminine or relationship oriented societies such as Thailand, teachers will likely support and encourage average and low performance students in class in order to help increase their performance. This approach may be opposite of masculine or achievement oriented societies such as in the U.S., where teachers often praise and use the best performance students as examples for other students to follow. The method of academic evaluations also tends to be different in educational settings. Teachers from masculine societies will likely stress a student’s performance, while teachers from feminine societies will stress a student’s friendliness, social skills and adaptations as desirable. The career choice among students from the two societies is also diverse. Students from masculine cultures will choose majors that have potential job opportunities while students from feminine cultures tend to follow their intrinsic interests and select their majors accordingly (Hofstede et al. 2010).

Typically, Thais view productivity or accountability as less critical than maintaining social harmony. One important aspect of a Thai social norm is to be sanook (or sanuk) translated to mean the feeling of fun and enjoyment in work, play, and other activities (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000, p. 54). Feeling sanook and being able to work well with others are more critical for Thais than accountability or productivity. Hallinger & Kantamara, even claim that in Thailand the notion of accountability only occurs “…at the level of rhetoric.” (p. 54). In Thai
classrooms, feeling *sanook* is very important. George (1987), for example, reports that Thai students often laugh in class and may not be viewed as productive behavior from a Western standpoint, but can “…bring rather positive dispositions to the classroom - - a pleasant contrast to the curmudgeonly university students many of us have encountered in Western universities today.” (p. 18).

In summary, cross-cultural interactions, especially in an educational setting, are often founded as ‘difference-base’ where values, patterns of behaviors, and assumptions are often diverse and will likely hinder understanding and create conflict and misunderstanding. Differences in language used and diverse communication styles, how people view themselves in relation to others who are in power and their perception of “self” in relation with others, how people obtain their social roles, their attitudes toward time, their perception toward assertiveness or nurturing, all can play significant roles in classroom interactions. Teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds must be aware of these differences in order for them to adjust or compromise and make their cross-cultural journey more effective and successful.

**Limitations and Concerns of Using Cultural Models for Analysis**

Although using the works of such influential researchers as Hall, Hofstede, and Trompenaars as a theoretical framework can be beneficial and useful in helping us understand the common cultural characteristics of Thailand and the United States, applying this knowledge needs to be done with caution. Many possible limitations and concerns also need to be addressed and considered.

First of all, it is worth noting that the cultural explanations from these leading studies focus on the **national level** of culture. Critiques in various fields (e.g., McSweeney, 2002a, 2002b; Myers & Tan, 2003; Signorini, Wiesemes, & Murphy, 2010) express concerns when
using these national cultural categories. Some of the concerns include the complexity issues when measuring culture at the national level. For example, critics such as Myers & Tan (2003) feel that culture is quite complex and dynamic. They and others view it as multi-dimensional, multi-level, and as being invented and reinvented, interpreted and reinterpreted simultaneously. Combined with increasing globalization and international connections between nations, this global trend will make the dynamic nature of culture even more rapid and complicated. For this reason, some critics view culture as “a moving target” that would be difficult to capture or measure accurately using nation-level models (Myers & Tan, 2003). Williamson (2002), also expresses that one should not simply apply cultural models with an inaccurate assumption that culture is uniform and individual values and behaviors can be determined based simply on one’s cultural background (p.1391). Overall, some critics feel that the use of the national level is too simplistic and inappropriate because it may not accurately reflect cross-cultural issues at all levels, such as the organizational level, regional level, local level, and individual level.

However, according to Hofstede, et.al., (2010), although culture is complex, multi-dimensional, and dynamic, changes often occur at the outer layer or visible aspect of culture, such as its symbols, heroes, rituals, and practices. The deepest layer of culture or the invisible aspect, refers to the core values that are quite stable and rarely change through time. Hofstede and colleagues report that the cultural dimensions that measure the core values of cultures from different nations, therefore, should be considered valid for comparison and analysis. They further state that in established nations, citizens often share a tremendous amount of commonalities such as using a common national language, educational, military and political systems, as well as media, products, and services to name a few. This commonality is believed
to serve as a strong force for integration which makes members in the nation possess similar mental ideology.

Masemann (2007) also supports the notion that although we cannot expect homogeneity at a national level of analysis, as members of a nation will not behave or think identically, we need to accept that there are considerable commonalities that are shared among members within a nation. Members of a nation, therefore, are often the product of the same “control mechanisms” (p.102) that influence and govern their behavior. These “control mechanisms” (e.g., instructions, rules, plans) will likely make members of one national group more similar to one another than those from different nations. In other words, a national level will typically predict and reflect individual and organizational cultural norms and values. According to Hofstede, et.al., (2010), a nation-level measurement “… is often the only feasible criterion for classification.” (p.21), but warns that using the nation-level or one’s nationality to measure cross-cultural differences should be handled with caution.

Another concern is that these influential studies derived their data from a business orientated environment (for example, IBM Cooperation for Hofstede’s dimensions, and AT&T, Heineken, and Motorola for Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner’s dimensions). Some critics have expressed concern that the description of culture based on Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner was developed and used in business settings that may not be accurately applied to other social settings such as in the classroom. These critics feel that work values may not be accurately applied to general members of the society. In response to this view, Hofstede and colleagues express their standpoint that business people, whether they are managers, leaders, or average workers, are representative components of national societies. Therefore, they should not be
isolated from other parts of the society as a whole, or be viewed as having significant differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors from their co-nationals.

In addition, in the present study, generalizing or applying this cultural characteristic of Thais and Americans must be used with caution. For example, some dimensions such as those put forth by Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, did not include Thailand in their study. As a result, the application of these cultural dimensions to Thai cultural norms in the present study, has to be done based on using other countries that are close geographically and, it is assumed, that have similar cultural norms, values, and practices (i.e., Southeast Asia).

Further, individual personal differences including gender, social class, or sexual orientation will also play a significant role in their reaction to certain cultural situations (Williamson, 2002). “A Social Science Curriculum for the 21st Century,” for example, reports that because cross-cultural studies are often a “hybrid offspring,” with roots in a variety of disciplines such as social-psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Cross-cultural studies, therefore, shares the strengths of having well established and well developed knowledge and concepts, but it also shares some of the limitations of having to deal with individual subjectivity (2011). When applying knowledge of culture, it often involves “generalization stereotypes.” Even though generalization is an acceptable approach, there will always be exceptions to the rules that must be considered (2003). In other words, there is a high possibility that a certain individual will not be a “typical” Thai or a “typical” American and a person from a certain group may not necessarily behave according to their cultural norms or expectations. The complexity of some variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, individual personality, to name only a few will always influence certain behaviors to some degree. For this reason, individual variation as well as different situational factors must be considered in the process of
understanding, because cultural information is “…an informative tool rather than a defining rule.” (Muller, 2007, P.4)

### Part 2: The History of Thai Education

In order to better understand the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thailand, it is essential to look at the general history and some socio-cultural contexts of Thailand, especially in areas relating to education norms, patterns, and development. This background and overview will hopefully provide information that can be used as a basis for comparison and contrast, and for the analysis and understanding of cross-cultural teaching experiences of American educators in Thailand.

According to the Thailand Ministry of Education (MOE), education in Thailand began in the 13th century during the Sukhothai period (A.D.1238-1378) and continued throughout the Ayutthaya (A.D. 1350-1767) and Thonburi period (1767-1782). The aspects of education during this era were based upon and reflect the moral, intellectual and cultural terms of the period. Education was provided to princes and sons of nobles by the Royal Institution of Instruction (Rajabundit), while commoner males received education from Buddhist monasteries. The beginning of the Bangkok Period (1782 to present) period of education continued to progress and in the mid 1800s, printed books were available for the first time in Thai history. It was at this time that Western missionaries started to play a vital role in Thai education. This era was also the beginning of an increase in Western influences in Thai society. Several treaties were established and the English language became the *lingual franca* for commerce and diplomatic missions. The modernization of education to address global forces and change, thus, became increasingly necessary during this period. Numerous educational reforms and modifications were made during this crucial period, many of which exist today.
A review of the Thai national historical background in education, one sees various aspects of culture that influenced the socio-cultural patterns and behavioral norms and practices in an educational context. One important and undeniable aspect that has shaped the Thai educational system is the pervasive and significant influence of religion in Thai society (Pinyuchon & Gray, 1997). Buddhist principles, for example, appear to greatly influence student values, behaviors, and patterns of relationship that they have toward others. Another aspect based on a review of Thai history is the strong impact of global influences on Thai education, especially reforms, development, policies, and practices. These historical and social aspects that have shaped and influenced Thai educational patterns are as follows:

**The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Thai Education**

Cultural patterns, values, and worldview of Thai society largely develop and stem from religious belief (Pinuychon & Gray, 1997). Buddhism was established in Thailand in the fifth century originating in Sri Lanka (Jones, 2008) and for more than a 1,000 years, has been the guiding force, in all aspects, of how Thais lead their lives (Kusulasaya, 2001). For Thailand, “Buddhism has been the main spring from which flow its culture and philosophy, its art and literature, its ethics and morality, and many of its folkways and festivals.” (2001). Some foreigners even called Thailand “The Land of Yellow Robes” based on the large number of monks who wrap themselves in yellow (saffron) robes as their clothing (Kusulasaya, 2001).

Buddhism can certainly be considered the national religion, as approximately 94 % of Thais are Buddhists who follow Buddhist principles (Kusulasaya, 2001). For example, Thais commonly believe in reincarnation and that life does not end at death. They also strongly believe in the law of “cause and effect” in that each life is conditioned by one’s own action (karma). Foley (2005) defines karma as “…a profile of one’s meritorious and sinful acts and
thoughts.” (p.227). In other words, if one does good one will receive good, if one does evil, one will face bad consequences accordingly. The *karma* regardless whether it is good or bad, will not end at one current life, but will follow each individual to the next life, through the repeated cycle of reincarnation (Pinyuchon & Gray (1997). The belief in *karma* is so strong and pervasive among Thais that it shapes the way they think and behave in nearly all social interactions and situations. For example, many Thais may take the blame for their own past behaviors (either committed during this life or believed that they committed in the past life) for any calamity or misfortune one experiences. It’s common to hear Thais say, “I must have done something bad in my past life to deserve this,” rather than blaming others or the situation for one’s misfortune. This explanation, belief and way of life serve as a coping mechanism in both good and bad times.

The influence of religious beliefs also guides behavior in Thai classrooms. Foley (2005), for example, expresses that “Buddhism is the foundation of the Thai world view…” (p. 227). In Thai classrooms, teachers commonly not only teach topics, but they also provide guidance for appropriate attitudes and behaviors based on Buddhist teachings. The main concepts of Buddhist principles include the belief in *karma, bunkhun* (pronounced “boonkhun”), and *krengjai* (Foley, 2005; Phongsakorn, 2009). For example, as mentioned above, the belief in *karma* is that what happens to a person is an outcome of his or her *karma*. This belief may transfer to the idea of self-blaming and self-correcting attitudes and behaviors among Thai students, rather than blaming the teacher for one’s academic failure. Some Thais also view teaching as a highly respected occupation as it allows individual to educate others and help the society as a whole. Educators, therefore, are people who can accumulate good *karma* and are viewed with respect and admiration throughout Thai society (Phongsakorn, 2009).
Further, the concept of *bunkhun*, what roughly translates in English to “gratitude,” or as Foley (2005) describes as, “…the benefit and benevolence rendered to someone. In other words, the one who benefits from something is obligated to do something in return.” (p. 228). *Bunkhun* is another Buddhist principle that is commonly passed on from generation to generation through socialization and classroom lessons. For example, people are taught at a very young age to appreciate the *bunkhun* of their parents who raise them and their teachers who teach and provide them with knowledge. The return for someone’s *bunkhun* is often through being polite, obedient, courteous, considerate, and respectful toward them. For this reason, classroom interactions between Thai students and teachers often reflect these Buddhist tenets. Moreover, with a respectful attitude toward teachers, students often feel *kreangjai* which roughly translates in English as “…to be considerate, to feel reluctant to impose upon another person, to take another person’s feelings (and ego) into account, or to take every measure not to cause discomfort or inconvenience for another person.” (Komin, 1991, cited in Phongsakorn, 2009, p.41). The feeling of *kreangjai* is so deeply imbedded in the Thai mindset that students feel so *kreangjai* toward their teachers that they are reluctant to ask questions or ask for help from their teachers, even when necessary. The concept of *kreangjai* may be difficult to comprehend for non-Thais, especially Westerners, who might interpret this value and behavior as inhibited or subservient (Foley, 2005; Phongsakorn, 2009).

With respect toward teachers and education derived from the belief in *karma, bunkhun*, and *kreangjai*, classroom norms and interaction between teachers and students are typically formal and school activities such as graduation ceremonies are very strict, reverent and ceremonial. For example, teachers in Thailand are usually very highly respected, not only by students, but also by the students’ parents and the entire society as knowledgeable and
authoritative figures. As reflected in the official National Teacher’s Day celebration which is held on January 16 of each year, students have a chance to pay respect to their teachers by offering flowers and wai-ing and bowing to teachers to thank them for their work, support and teaching. Overall, based on Thai tradition combined with strong religious beliefs, classroom norms and interaction between teachers and students in Thailand are usually formal, respectful, strict, and steeped in conservative tradition.

Buddhist principals also stress the importance of being non-expressive and reserved which is expressed in Thai society as “Withdrawal rather than aggressive encounters is preferred.” (Pinyuchon & Gray, 1997, p.213). A well-educated, well-manned, and strong minded individual is judged based on the ability to control or conceal his or her emotions. This view is supported by Knee (1999), who taught in Thailand for an extended period of time. Based on first-hand knowledge, Knee describes his experience of teaching English to Thai students as extremely difficult, especially when attempting to get any verbal responses from students. According to Knee (1999) Thai students appear to try to avoid conflict and show deprecating behavior. He further explains that classroom dynamics in Thailand typically do not promote active participation and that students are not used to or expected to question points made during class. He also describes the typical characteristics of Thai students as being shy, valuing modesty, and having a strong group ethic. Hallinger & Kantamara (2001) further add that some Thais will try to maintain social harmony and avoid any potential conflict at all cost.

Fieg & Mortlock (1989) describe Thais as having a strong sense of what is considered “proper” behavior, and in this sense Thais would prefer “…congruence rather than dissonance” (p. 45). Fieg & Mortlock then use what Shakespeare expressed to describe how many Thais think that “…though it be honest, it is never good to bring bad news“(p. 46). They point out that
this contrast with the American view that accuracy is better than courtesy and believe that honesty is the best policy. Many Thais, on the other hand, prefer politeness over truthfulness and for Thais it is better to be polite than to be critical in a way that could increase disappointment, show insensitivity to others, or cause others to “lose face.”

Additionally, in Thailand, Buddhist monks, who were (and still are) highly respected in Thai society, have traditionally and historically held the role of teachers. For instance, Jones (2008) states that for Thais, monks are “…living repositories of knowledge and wisdom…” (p.34) and Watson (1980) describes the traditional view toward Buddhist monks as “Whereas parents gave life, monks imparted a way of life and knowledge which make that life worth living.” (cited in Fry, 2002, p.4). Although in current times, monks do not commonly hold the position of teaching, wherever there are monks and temples, there often are schools established on the same premise or very nearby (Watson, 1980, cited in Fry, 2002). In fact, most public schools in Thailand often locate on the same location or near a temple – where there is one, there often is the other. Many public schools even go far as to adopt the name of the temple as the school name (such as Rong Rian Wat Benjamabopit or translated to School-Temple Benjamabopit). Thailand also has two well-established autonomous Buddhist universities (Mahachulalangkorn Rajavidyalaya University and Mahamakut Buddhist University) that provide higher level subjects in Buddhism and develop skills and values based on Buddhist teaching for monks and the general population (Bovornsiri, 2006).

Jones (2008) also points out that ‘Buddhism and education were one and the same for the villager and commoner…Education and Buddhism represent the interface between Siam and what has become Thailand; what was once spiritual has now become religion; what was once living-learning has now become formal schooling…(p.2). Traditionally, young Thai men at age
20 will become monks to learn Buddhist tenets in order to become literate or to “complete”
themselves as human beings. In fact, Buddhism also plays a crucial role in the development of
the Thai educational reform of 1997 (Jones, 2008). The close connection between temples and
schools are still evident today. Most Thais in contemporary society still associate formal
education with temples and view a formal education with high respect and regard
(www.moe.go.th).

The influence of Buddhist principles in Thai society and Thai classrooms is strong and
powerful. It is safe to say that religion and religious beliefs are an inside force that firmly play a
role in classroom interactions, behaviors, and practices. However, there is another outside force
that strongly influences Thai education. This force emerged from the global influences that have
long been a significant factor guiding Thai education, especially the reforms and policy
development throughout Thai history.

Global Influences on Thai Education

Historically speaking, Thailand has long been exposed to international interactions and
global influences. Since the 13th century, the country has welcomed foreign visitors for various
purposes including trade, commerce, and dignitary and diplomatic missions from China, Japan,
Persia, Holland, France, England, Arabia, and India (Jones, 2008). For this reason, global
influences are not a new phenomenon for Thailand. In fact, global influences, especially during
the aggressive movement of colonial power in the late 19th century have compelled Thailand to
reform to be in par with the “progress” and “civilization” expected by the Western imperial
power. The reform of the country in various areas, including the abolishment of slavery and the
development and spreading of mass education in Thailand, was deemed necessary (Jones, 2008).
Based on historical records, these steps toward “modernization” lead by Thai kings during the
colonization period were one of the main factors that have helped and continue to maintain independence and prevent the country from being colonized by European powers (Winichakul, 2000).

Although, Thai education began in the 13th century during the Sukhothai period, the expansion and modernization of mass education, especially higher education, appears to have been instigated during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) during the period from 1868 to 1910 (Thai MOE). It was during this era that the first modernized Thai school was established (in 1871). In 1887 the Department of Education was developed, followed by the development of a law school (1887), a medical school, the Royal Pages to train government officers, and an engineering school. These schools were later merged into Chulalongkorn University in 1916, the first university of Thailand, established during King Rama VI period (Komolmas, 1999). At the initial stage, Thai education used educational models from England and after World War II, American models began to dominate the Thai education, especially the tertiary levels (Chalapati, 2007). The evidence of global influences on Thai education also is demonstrated in the nation’s educational reforms. Fry (2002), for example, categorizes major Thai educational reforms into four periods and described the historical events leading to the reforms as follows:

**Phase I** (1868-1910) during King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). During this era, the king had the vision to transform traditional Siam into a modernized nation through educational reform, hoping that it could strengthen the nation and be responsive to the challenges facing the country during the colonial invasion period (Fry, 2002). This reform resulted in the establishment of modern education, the first Thai university, a bilingual school (*Suankularb*) that offered English as
another language of instruction, and the expansion of modern education to commoners throughout the nation.

**Phase II** (1973-1980): the Student Revolution Period. Educational reform during this era was a consequence of at least two major political revolutions. With the expansion of higher education and knowledge, and an increasing number of young-generation students who graduated overseas, the concept of democracy began to become instilled in the Thai perspective (Komolmas, 1999; Pitiyanuwat & Sujiva, 2000). The quest for democracy, therefore, resulted in the transformation of the nation’s political power from an absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy in 1932. King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) agreed to give up his Kingship with the remark that “…the obligation of a ruler was to reign for the good of the whole people, not for a select few.” ([www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)). Unfortunately, after this major political transformation, a true democracy was not realized, as Thailand was still under the control of the military and bureaucratic elite. This resulted in the uprising of massive student movements that fought for democracy in October 1973 (Fry, 2002).

Providentially, these two major political movements lead to establishment of the 1997 Constitution, the most progressive movement towards a genuine democracy in Thai history (Klein, 1998). These political movements also brought about the second educational reform aimed at addressing the issues of social justice, inequity and inequality of the Thai educational system. It also led to the shifting of the school curriculum from one that was rigid and restricted during military supervision, to one that was more open and progressive. For instance, freedom of expression and liberal ideologies could be expressed more freely in educational settings after the reform (Fry, 2002).
Phase III (1990-1995): Encountering Globalization and Internationalization. During this period, Thailand, again, was confronted with many challenges, as well as the opportunity brought about by globalization. In order to remain competitive, the nation needed to reform its educational system with the aim of producing human resources and a workforce that met global expectations. Not only did Thailand need to prepare Thai students for the global market, Thailand also had been playing a role in providing international education for students from neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar (Fry, 2002). The global influence again led to the third major educational reform. The third reform consisted of the main agendas aimed at modifying the learning approach toward global accepted methodology, fostering diversity of ideas in learning, reforming higher education, improving educational management approaches through decentralization, improving quality assurance system, and allowing more involvement from private sectors in education. All and all, the primary goal of the third reform was to provide relevant skills and knowledge that fit the global requirements and to maintain competitiveness in the globalized world (Fry, 2002).

Phase IV (1997-present): Asian Economic Crisis Period. The Asian economic crisis has shifted the economic landscape, as well as the educational outlook among Thai policy makers. This crisis, for example, compelled many Thais to reexamine the concept of progress and development (Fry, 2002). Some Thais started to question whether the concept of “progress” stemming from such ideologies as capitalism, materialism, and consumerism was suitable for the Thai way of life. This led to a call for a more balanced and stable social, spiritual, environmental, and cultural components in all social aspects of Thai life, including education (Fry, 2002; Pitiyanuwat & Sujiva, 2000). The current educational reform after the Asian economic crisis continues to addresses the issues related to challenges facing globalization which
were the main objectives of the past (the third) reform. However, in the current reform, some
issues such as recognizing and applying local wisdom and knowledge, as well as stressing a
holistic approach of reform to consider local needs were added. In sum, the Asian economic
crisis profoundly influenced the current educational policy which has the major aim for the long-
term economic recovery and preservation of local pride and identity (Fry, 2002).

Based on the historical and political events that led to the four major educational reforms
in Thailand, it appears that global influences were the most significant forces for the
restructuring and modification of Thai education throughout Thai history. Because global,
especially Western influences have long played a role in Thai education, issues related to
globalization must be focused on in more detail. The issues related to globalization will help
increase the overall understanding of the cross-cultural experience of American teachers in Thai
classrooms, as globalization plays a role in shaping classroom practices, curriculum
development, and educational reform in Thailand.

**Part 3: Issues of Globalization and Education in Thailand**

Globalization stands for the process of international integration through the movement of
economy, products, workforce, and ideas (Bloom, 2004). This process brings tremendous
benefits as it enhances economic opportunities and growth to many countries. Globalization has
been credited for promoting foreign investments and increasing global coalitions.
Telecommunication, technology, as well as transportation have been made available and more
affordable through the process of globalization. All and all, globalization plays a big role in
improving the quality of lives of people in many regions throughout the world. Unfortunately,
the process of globalization, like a coin, does not have only one constructive side, but a
destructive side as well.
Globalization is to blame for further widening the gap between the “haves and the have-nots.” For example, the economic opportunities from powerful international financial institutions and corporations are usually controlled by the members of elite G-8 countries (Schugurensky, 2007). Inequality between socioeconomically rich and poor countries continues to rise. The unfair distribution of wealth not only occurs in poor developing countries, but also among citizens of wealthy nations as well. Job losses due to outsourcing for cheap labor, changing global connections, and an ever-changing economic climate are increasing. The unfairness and tendency to favor the rich, therefore, are some of the many reasons why resistance towards globalization continues (Bloom, 2004).

Despite some drawbacks and resistance, globalization still provides both economic and social opportunity. This opportunity is why many countries embrace it without much reservation, and for some countries, accepting globalization in this current world climate, seems to be inevitable. Increasing globalization also plays a significant role in changing the landscape of educational practices around the globe (Schugurensky, 2007). In order to compete in a global economy, governments of developing countries are often faced with tremendous demands to reform their educational system (Bloom, 2004). Unfortunately, the long history of colonial powers around the world has often resulted in the changing of educational practices in a one way direction from “the West” to “The Rest” (Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot 2009, p. 110).

Maintenance of Colonial Power

Many factors play a significant role in perpetuating Western influences on world education, especially in less economically affluent countries. First, educational reform in developing countries has often been developed by or adapted from experts from affluent Western countries (Nguyen, et al., 2009), as policymakers in developing countries often view Western
educational strategies and practices as more desirable and more advanced than in their own countries. Second, the continued increase in the number of international students from less developed countries to Western developed countries such as the U.S., U.K., and Australia also play a role in maintaining Western influences through educational training, practices, and ideologies. International students educated in these Western universities will likely be influenced by Western theories, cognitive structure, and learning styles. When they return home, these highly educated international students often take rather important and influential roles as educators, academic advisors, consultants, and policy makers who will gradually or, in some cases, rapidly change the educational landscape of their home countries toward Western norms (Elliott, 2007). Third, financial assistance from international agencies (many of which are from the West) through scholarships, rewards, stimulus programs, financial incentives, and educational exchange can also play a role in exerting Western ideologies to less affluent countries (Nguyen, et al, 2009). Fourth, the global acceptance of English as the universal language and academic lingua franca is also a key element to make Western powers long lasting (Schugurensky, 2007, p. 262). The widespread adoption of English as the academic lingua franca, for example, may have resulted in “forced inclusion” (Schugurensky, 2007, p. 263). Information, scientific reports, journal articles, and the proceedings of professional conferences, to name but a few, are presented and published in the English language. Countries that use different national languages other than English, especially developing poor countries, will be in a disadvantaged position and may be left behind as they may “lack” the language competency to participate or compete in the global economy.

With Western influences, educational systems in many countries throughout the world are moving in a direction of unification with common structures and practices - in order to be in
alignment with Western practices and thinking (Ginsburg, Cooper, Raghu & Zegarra 1990). Nguyen, et al., (2009), in contrast, states concern about the use of a “false universalism” (p.109), when the pressure for educational reform drives policy makers to believe that educational practices from one country can be readily transferred to another country without taking into consideration of the many differences. In practice, educational reforms “…are highly interrelated with concurrent events in the cultural, social, economic, and political realms.” (Ginsburg, et al. 1990, p. 477).

Differences in cultural norms, traditional practices, and national idiosyncrasies, therefore, play a significant role in the success or failure of a reform. For example, the strong influence from the West may result in a rather uncritical adoption of Western pedagogy in non-Western countries. According to Nguyen, et al., this “cross-cultural cloning” (p.110) in educational practices may be inappropriate and even impractical. For example, the student-centered pedagogy approach is more suitable and useful in countries with liberal democratic standpoints. This approach is also useful for countries that seek to prepare their citizens to function in free market economies (Elliott, 2007). This educational approach, however, may not be practical for students in communist or more tradition conservative collectivist countries where individual expression, needs, and freedoms are not valued, emphasized, or even allowed.

Besides academic ineffectiveness, Nguyen et al. (2009) are concerned that “cross-cultural cloning” may have even more serious ramifications. For example, when unfamiliar policies and practices are introduced in the process of educational reform, everyone involved (e.g., educators, administrators, students) have to struggle to adapt to the new ideas and practices. In these situations, rejection, resistance, and even conflict are unavoidable because each country has its own history and unique educational traditions that are not easily or quickly replaced.
Implementing Western educational practices and ideology may also result in neglecting or ignoring one’s own cultural qualities and strengths and undermining one’s own expertise and assets (2009). Moreover, uncritically adopting Western procedures may help perpetuate a sense of dependency on Western ideology, especially among less affluent developing countries Nguyen, et al. (2009). These are but a few of the possible drawbacks inherent in adopting foreign policies and practices, without taking into account one’s own unique cultural values.

**Impact of Globalization on Thai Education**

Thailand, like most countries that have been influenced by globalization, faces similar opportunities and threats that accompany globalization. Although historically Thailand has never been colonized by a Western power and has been able to maintain its sovereignty throughout history, it has not been able to escape the effects of global influences. In fact, Jones (2008) stated that the country has always been impacted by global influences, but has always found ways to adapt and compromise the global influences to fit the local needs. Some Thais view Western ways of living with admiration and as the sign of modernity (Persaud, 2005, Winichakul, 2000). Evidence of Western acceptance in Thailand can be seen from the most outward appearances such as architecture and modern fashion, to more subtle cultural values such as the obsession with light skin and Western features (e.g., light brown hair and “nose jobs”), the adoption of English words as nick-names (e.g., Stamp, Apple, Arm) among younger Thais (Cornwel-Smith, 2005), and the strong demand for a Western education and English language as a sign of modernity, empowerment, and advancement (Persaud, 2005, Baker, 2008).

As might be expected, acquiring a Western education is one of the most desirable goals among Thai students and their parents. For example, the aspiration for a Western education
makes Thai students among the top ten leading countries striving to get an education in the U.S. in the last decade from 2001 to 2008 (www.opendoors.iienetwork.org). Thailand also receives academic assistance from various international agencies - many of which are from the West and representing government, university, and private sectors - through scholarships, rewards, stimulus programs, financial incentives, and educational exchange. This international assistance, however, brings both tremendous opportunities as well as risks to Thai culture and society. For example, financial support from the West enables more Thais to acquire a Western education, thus, the number of Thais with a Western outlook and who are Western-centric is escalating. On the one hand, increasing numbers of Thais with western attitudes and skills can help Thailand to be competitive in the global arena. On the other hand, these attitudes and commodities can have a negative impact on the Thai traditional culture, society, and identity. Thongprayoon & Hill (1987), for example, identify a new generation of Thais as ‘non-Thai Thais’ because their manner and thought orientation are noticeably different from other traditional Thais.

Further, receiving financial assistance from Western institutions (e.g., the World Bank, and the IMF) and private sectors may provide tremendous opportunities for Thai educational institutions to advance and expand educational services to more students. However, acceptance of financial aid often comes with obligations to comply with a provider’s objectives and goals (Walter, 2002). Bloom (2004), for example, points out that foreign investments based on economic and short-term profit rarely match local interest and academic needs. The compliance to foreign institutions, therefore, may jeopardize the traditional roles of a nation’s higher educational institutions. For example, under foreign direction, universities and academic institutions may have to shift their focus toward enterprise, entrepreneurial, and profit driven
institutions, instead of having the role of preserving and transmitting the national culture and values (Alderman, 2001, Walter, 2002).

The widespread acceptance of English as the universal language and academic lingua franca is also one of the key elements that make Western influences long lasting. Schugurensky (2007) points that the widespread use of English as academic lingua franca can result in “forced inclusion” (p. 263). These concerns appear legitimate as they reflect real situations facing Thai educators and scholars. For example, Thai scholars have to seek publications from Western refereed journals to be able to gain academic acceptance, secure their professional jobs or become tenured. Piller (2007) further reports that many Thai professors have to rely on information from Western sources such as development reports, journal articles, or at professional conferences in order to be current. This information is mostly published and presented using English language. In these circumstances, Thai educators have very few choices but to acquire English language skills and be familiar with Western ideology in order to become members in the global academia. Further, in some classroom situations, lacking English language proficiency among Thai students may be compared with lacking aptitude and intelligence (George, 1987). George, however, argues that English proficiency and aptitude are not comparable and students should not be judged as lacking talent or ability simply because they lack English vocabulary.

Because the need to acquire English language skills is extremely high, and there is no official second language, English, thus, became the de facto second language in Thailand (Baker, 2008). Thai schools - public and private alike – adopt English as the compulsory second language (Foley, 2005; Baker, 2008). Additionally, many Thais consider English/international schools as superior and as more desirable than Thai schools, especially in the areas of teaching
techniques and approach, curriculum and school culture (Persaud, 2005). Persaud, for example, notes that some advocates view English/international schools as “…having the potential to liberalize, humanize and modernize Thai education and Thailand” (p.219). These advocates also view international schools as more suitable to prepare children for today’s world and hope for “…the day when an ‘international school system’ with a universal curriculum and international standard will supplant rather than supplement national school systems.” (p.220) With these “desirable” attributes, Persaud (2005) speculates that English/international schools might have had a strong influence or inspired some policy makers in Thai school reforms.

The adaptation and implementation of new and more “desirable” teaching methods are viewed by policy makers as the way to improve learning outcomes and to prepare Thai students to be sufficient and competitive in this increasingly globalized and interconnected world (Khemmani, 2005; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001). In theory, this adaptation of Western educational methods may sound appropriate and justifiable. In practice, however, Western methods may not be practical or suitable for Thai students, as pointed out by Walker & Dimmock (2000), that “…adopting policies across cultures without recognizing their distinctive historical and cultural dimensions risks false universalism.” (p.12) Educational policy and practices in Thailand, like many other countries, are shifting toward unification and convergence to Western approaches (Phongsakorn, 2009). For example, one educational reform, the National Education Act of 1999, was introduced and implemented in Thai public schools. One of the most noticeable changes in this bill was the shift from focusing on subject matter and being teacher-focused to emphasizing learners (Prappha, 2008). The promotion of a student-centered pedagogy, therefore, is emphasized in this bill (Khemmani, 2005).
Educators, especially those from Western countries view the student-centered approach as effective and promising, as it focuses mainly on individual learners and promotes active, reflective, and deep learning, rather than passive learning (Lea, Stephenson, & Troy, 2003). This approach also promotes a sense of autonomy, helps increase responsibility, and prepares students to become more independent from their teachers (Lea, et al., 2003). Although a student-centered approach appears to be extremely promising and useful in many Western societies, it might not be applicable in other cultures (Nguyen, et al., 2009). Difficulties in implementing such a program may also be due to such factors as the shortage of necessary resources, a lack of shared understanding, familiarity, and the belief system of all involved must be taken into account (O’Neill & McMahon, 2005). The lack of financial support can also be viewed as one of the main roadblocks for implementing a successful student-centered approach in Thai classrooms. For example, most Thai educators are not familiar and are not equipped to apply this approach effectively, as they themselves may have never been educated with this new Western approach. Classroom size in most Thai public schools is also a significant obstacle. For example, a typical U.S. class may consist of 20 or more students, whereas in Thailand a class may have 30 to 50 or more students. To use an approach that focuses on each individual learner’s needs may not be practical or even possible under these conditions.

Ginsburg and colleagues (1990) also point out that educational reform is “…highly interrelated with concurrent events in the cultural, social, economic, and political realms.” (p. 477). With this notion, the “cross-cultural cloning” by using a student-centered approach may not be appropriate, practical or even possible in the Thai classroom. Thai traditional practices and cultural backgrounds must also be critically considered when considering adopting a foreign approach.
For example, Thailand is categorized by Hofstede (1986) as a strong collectivist society. Classroom norms and traditional academic practices, therefore, are likely to be vastly different from Western practices and customs. Further, the Thai teaching and learning style has traditionally been based on a passive approach following Buddhist principles. Thai students, as a result, are often taught to respect parents and elders and to not talk back, argue with, or disrespect adults, especially their teachers (Phongsakorn, 2009). As a result, implementing a student-centered approach in this cultural environment may create conflict and confusion between what is taught in school and what is practiced in the society as a whole. To implement and sustain the student-centered pedagogy effectively, other external forces such as the structural basis of the social and cultural practices outside schools should already be established (Masemann, 2007). In other words, one should not expect Thai students to suddenly become efficient active participants, autonomous, and able to express their individual academic desires in class, when at home and in other social situations, they rarely have the chance, encouragement, or support to voice their opinion. The ramifications of using a student-centered approach may extend outside the classroom when graduates seek employment with skills that are not viewed as desirable or sought after by Thai employers and the Thai society in general.

Further, when new policies and practices are introduced in the process of educational reform, everyone involved (e.g., educators, administrators, parents, and students) will have to struggle to adapt to the new ways of this Western practice and ideology. Rejection, resistance, and even significant conflict are often unavoidable, because each country has its own history and unique educational traditions that are not easily or quickly replaced (Schugurensky, 2007). Nguyen et al., (2009), for example, is further concerned that “cross-cultural cloning” such as that used in a student-centered approach not only impacts the quality and learning outcomes of
students, but may also have even more serious social ramifications. For example, implementing Western educational practice and ideology may result in neglecting one’s own cultural qualities and strengths. This practice may also undermine local expertise, traditional values, and cultural assets (2009). Masemann (2007) further adds that the “…attempts to equalize educational opportunity on a global scale have lead to ignoring local cultural values and traditional forms of knowledge and ways of thinking, which are in danger of becoming extinct.” (p. 114). On the negative side, uncritically adopting Western procedures may help carry on a sense of dependency and reliance on wealthy nations, especially among less affluent developing countries. Even worse, “cross-cultural cloning” using a Western approach may help sustain ‘mental colonialism’ (p.112) which will arguably be an even more powerful and long lasting negative impact on the nation than physical colonialism.

In summary, globalization can be viewed as a “questionable blessing,” as Witte (2000) puts it. On the one hand, globalization helps increase economic prospects, advancement, and social well-being, while on the other hand, it can bring significant risk, such as the loss of traditional cultural identity and values, as well as the potential maintenance of Western influence. With perceptible risks, many Thai scholars have already begun to view this phenomenon with a skeptical eye. Some now even view globalization as “…a corrosive global assault on Thai culture, self-esteem and identities.” (Persaud, 2005, p.213) Fortunately, an awareness and concern over the risks that globalization and Western hegemony have already been wildly and actively acknowledged, realized, and discussed among scholars and policy makers. For this reason, the drive toward localism has been pursued instead of globalism (Persaud, 2005, Witte, 2000). Many Thais, as a result, now put forth great effort to resist this trend. Movement toward self-sufficient progress, the preservation of Thai national identity, and
an increased emphasis on the importance of Thai local wisdom are being implemented in school curriculums (Baker, 2008). With an awareness of the potential threats, as well as the acknowledgement of potential benefits, Thai government officials, educators, and policy makers appear to be seeking to compromise and cope with globalization by trying to find a balance between global visions that can coexist with local needs (Witte, 2000). Only time and experimentation will tell if this balancing act achieves a positive or a negative outcome.

**Summary**

Increasing globalization and international connections have made English and Western education more desirable. Thus, the demand for English speaking educators, especially American educators, is growing worldwide, including in Thailand. It’s logical to believe that teaching abroad can be rewarding, but it can also be extremely challenging and prone to some significant misunderstandings and conflicts. For this reason, more studies are needed to better understand cross-cultural teaching experiences and the factors and variables that most affect it. To comprehensively understand an individual’s cross-cultural teaching experiences, numerous variables need to be considered, as issues relating to culture are often highly complex, subjective, and multifaceted. In the present study, individual traits, environmental factors, and degree of distance of home and host cultures are discussed to better elucidate and understand the cross-cultural teaching experience of American educators in Thai classrooms. Some unique cultural characteristics and dimensions of Thailand and the U.S. that appear to play an important role in classroom interactions will also be analyzed, compared, and contrasted. These dimensions include differences in language and communication patterns and styles, attitude towards time, power distance, achievement vs. ascriptive social status, individualism and collectivism, and
masculinity vs. femininity. Limitations and concerns of using cultural dimensions to measure and compare the Thai and American cultures will also be discussed.

A brief history of Thai education, in order to study change over time, is also included in this chapter. A review of Thai history reveals that Buddhism and global influences play a significant role in classroom practice, policy development, and educational reform. The information gained in this study is crucial and beneficial in helping reveal and expand our understanding of the cross-cultural experiences of American educators in Thai classrooms.
CHAPTER 3
METODOLOGY

The main purpose of this research study is to understand the individual cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thai classrooms. To achieve this research objective, a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was utilized. In this chapter, I will first discuss the general characteristics of a qualitative approach and the rationale for selecting transcendental phenomenology in this study. Next, a rationale for selecting the term “cross-cultural” for this present study is also discussed. Then, I will provide information on the data collection process, the interview procedure, demographic information of the participants, and a brief data analysis process. This information serves as a necessary foundation for data analysis and interpretation. Finally, in a qualitative approach, a researcher is considered a primary research instrument. Several important issues including the role of the researcher, the personal background of the researcher, the motivation to do the research, the issues in cross-cultural interviewing, and the positionality or insider/outsider roles in data collection and analysis is discussed. The reflection of the researcher roles in conducting this study is also presented toward the end of the chapter.

Characteristics of Qualitative Methods

It has long been considered that there is no one right approach for doing social research (Creswell, 1994). The selection of a research approach, whether it is qualitative or quantitative, depends on the suitability of various variables such as the research goal, disciplines, researcher’s personality, characteristic, and skills (Merriam, 1998). It can also be argued that both qualitative and quantitative may be appropriate as both have diverse characteristics as well as strengths and weaknesses. In general, the quantitative approach aims at generating scientific, objective, and
quantifiable information while qualitative approach intends to discover and understand a social phenomenon through the interpretation of subjective information (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative research also consists of various types of methods. Merriam (1998), for example, states that “qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help researchers understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible.” (p.5) Some common characteristics of qualitative research include being descriptive, naturalistic, holistic, cyclical, explorative, open-ended, and inductive (Merriam, 1998). Creswell (2002), in comparison, describes qualitative research as the process in which social or human problems can be studied through a holistic picture from an emic perspective in a natural setting. Qualitative research approaches seek understanding by exploring, rather than trying to generalize the phenomenon (Creswell, 2002). In doing so, qualitative researchers commonly focus on small purposeful samples with the intention of gathering detailed and rich descriptive data.

Conceptual Framework of Phenomenology

Because qualitative research covers various types of inquiry, qualitative researchers are required to select the approach that most closely reflects their research objective and goal. In the present study, the primary research goal is to understand the individual unique cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thailand. To achieve this objective a qualitative phenomenological in-depth interview approach was deemed more appropriate for this type of study. The reason for selecting this approach was that the phenomenological research method is one of many qualitative research approaches with the main objective of examining the meaning of “lived” experiences of individuals regarding the concept or the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998). In general, the guiding principle of the phenomenological research approach is
the belief that knowledge exists and is embedded in our everyday world and that it can be readily extracted through individual life experiences (Byrne, 2001). Laverty (2003) also points out that a phenomenological research approach “…focuses on the structure of experience, the organizing principles that give form and meaning to the life world. It seeks to elucidate the essences of these structures as they appear in consciousness - to render the invisible visible.” (p.15). This research approach, therefore, allows a researcher to gain a better understanding of the essence (i.e. the truth) of lived experience as the informants see it and make sense of it. With this attribute, phenomenology research appears to be an appropriate method for the study of cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thai classrooms.

Although there are common underlying principles that guide the phenomenological research, the orientation of phenomenology appears to vary, depending on different philosophical points of views. Some of the various orientations include transcendental, existential, hermeneutical, linguistic, ethical, and experiential or practice phenomenology (van Manen, 2002). Among these varying orientations, hermeneutic and transcendental are the two major approaches used for phenomenological research. These two approaches, however, differ in their methodological procedures. Specifically, hermeneutic orientation involves reflective interpretation of data using text and historical information, while transcendental uses a descriptive approach to identify the lived experiences as described by the individual being studied (van Manen, 2002).

**Rationale for Using Transcendental Phenomenology**

Of the two approaches, hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology, the latter appears to provide clearer research structure and guidelines for researchers. Advocates and practitioners of transcendental phenomenology such as Colaizzi (1978) and Moustakas (1994)
also offer precise steps and procedures to assist researchers in data collection and analysis. This clear direction is helpful especially for less experienced researchers to achieve their research goals. Many also view transcendental phenomenology as a groundbreaking approach and as the source of inspiration for the development of other orientations (van Manen, 2002). Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German philosopher, is cited as the pioneer of this philosophical thought (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl believed that transcendental phenomenology is a phenomenology of consciousness. He considered transcendental phenomenology as a rigorous human science that “…investigates the way that knowledge comes into being and clarifies the assumptions upon which all human understandings are grounded.” (van Manen, 2002).

Husserl, originally developed the concept of Epoché (or Bracketing, as Creswell referred to it, 1998), the process of setting aside one’s presuppositions, bias, and prejudgments when doing phenomenological research (van Manen, 2002). Other researchers, including Moustakas (1994) followed this approach stating that “Epoché requires a new way of looking at things, a way that requires that we learn to see what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe…In the Epoché, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowing are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego.” (p.33). It is for these reasons that transcendental phenomenology is considered a rational approach in doing phenomenological research such as this study. This approach takes additional effort to reduce and minimize prejudgment and presupposition that may potentially allow researchers to reach “…a transcendental state of freshness and openness…, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience.” (Moustakas, 1994, p.41)
It is important to point out that “pure” objectivity is not possible and will not be perfectly realized or achieved in practice. However, the extra step and determination to reduce assumptions, bias, and presupposition through the Epoche process is beneficial and valuable. The awareness of reducing partiality, subjectivity, combined with clear systematic procedures for data collection and analysis, are some of the reasons why many researchers in various fields (e.g., nursing, business, and education) choose to implement transcendental phenomenology in their research. It was based on these features that the transcendental phenomenological approach was chosen for the present study. The transcendental phenomenology approach allows qualitative researchers to be more alert and cognizant of their subjectivity in the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

**Data Collection**

Before the process of data collection began, all potential ethical concerns were addressed. First, approval from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CHS), of the University of Hawai`i was obtained in April, 2010 before the first interview began. This step was required and critical as it served to protect the identity of each participant, as well as ensured the fair and responsible treatments of the participants and the data they provided.

In this study, the nine participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and each interview was conducted in English. General demographic information including age, gender, teaching duration both in Thailand and elsewhere, and academic backgrounds was collected. Personal information that could identify the participants was changed or modified to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. This personal information includes their names, state born, college/university attended, classes taught, names of teaching institutions in Thailand, and specific names and places mentioned in the interviews. The personal identity information that was modified or
changed to protect the individual’s confidentiality and anonymity is marked with the asterisk in this present study.

During each interview I was observant of signs of discomfort, reluctance, or refusal to answer a question. If any of these had occurred, I would have moved on to the next question and/or asked the interviewee if they would like to take a short break before going further. Fortunately, these incidents did not happen on my interviews.

Before each interview began, I presented a consent form (see Appendix A) to each participant informing them of about the research purpose and their rights as interviewees. They were also informed about the topic of the study, the purpose of the study, and the length of time of the interview. The consent form also informed the participants that I would be the sole data collector, transcriber and analyst. All digital interview records, field notes and transcriptions will be kept at my home office and will be destroyed upon acceptance of my dissertation by my doctoral committee, or upon the request of the participant. Each participant signed the consent form. I kept the original signed copies for my record and provided one extra copy for each participant to keep for their records.

**Defining the Main Terminology**

In order to learn more about the cross-cultural teaching experiences of the American teachers in this study, the main terminology, in this case the term “cross-cultural” must also be discussed. In general, the term “cross-cultural” is commonly defined and understood as a study that is “…dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas…” (Merriam-Webster, 2012). The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language (Fourth Edition), also defines the term “cross-cultural” in a similar fashion, as a study that is “…comparing or dealing with two or more different cultures.” However, in some specific
fields of study, such as in communication, there are several specific terms that are used to precisely and accurately describe studies related to culture and communication, including the terms intercultural, cross-cultural, intracultural, interethnic, or interracial (Lustig & Koester, 1999). Gudykunst (2003), for example, describes the term “cross-cultural” communication as a study that involves a comparison of communication across cultures, while using the term “intercultural” communication as a study that involves communication between people from different cultural backgrounds (p.1).

With these specific definitions, some may feel that the term “intercultural” may be more accurate when describing the experiences of the American teachers with Thais in this study. However, for the purpose of simplifying the concept and to be more applicable to the general research and audience, the term “cross-cultural” is used as a study that focuses on a comparison and contrast between two cultures – in this case, Thai and American.

**The Interviews**

To learn about the lived cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thai classrooms, the data collection method as suggested by Moustakas (1994) was modified and used. In general, the process of data collection suggested by Moustakas is similar to a typical qualitative interview research. However, one significant difference in transcendental phenomenology is the use of the “Epoche” or bracketing in data collection and analysis. To prepare for my interview meeting, I began with the Epoche approach in mind. Before starting the conversation and during each interview, I reminded myself to be aware of my own subjectivity and tried to set aside my previous cross-cultural knowledge, experiences, and preconceived ideas about teaching or studying in Thai and American classrooms.
The data in this study was collected through in-depth face-to-face interviews. This method is considered the typical method of inquiry for collecting data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994, Creswell, 1998). According to Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland (2006), intensive interviewing is one of the core methodologies of a naturalistic approach, as it enables investigators to gain meaningful insight based on informants’ own words and experiences. Seidman (2006) further states that “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.” (p. 9). According to Seidman, informants will go through the process of meaning-making when they tell stories by using their consciousness to select, recollect, reflect, and put stories in order from beginning to end. Thus, Seidman believes that “Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness.” (p. 7)

The interviews were conducted over a 11-month period. The first in-depth face-to-face interview was conducted in July 2010 and all of the interviews were completed by the end of May 2011. Each interview lasted approximately two hours and the time and location were arranged based on the participants’ convenience and preference. Seven interviews were conducted at participants’ offices (both in Thailand and in Hawaii), one interview was done at a local restaurant in Hawaii, and one was conducted at the participant’s residence in Hawaii.

I started each interview with casual conversation in order to set a more relaxed and friendly environment for the interviews. Of the nine participants, five resided in Hawaii while four resided in Thailand during the time of the interviews. I had an opportunity to meet and conduct face-to-face interviews with the four participants at two universities in Thailand during my two summer breaks from graduate classes at the University of Hawaii. My original plan was
to conduct classroom observations at the Thai universities where my participants were teaching. However, I was informed that the international programs where my participants taught had the same academic calendar as in the U.S., and that students were also on summer break during both of my trips to Thailand. For this reason, I missed the opportunity to observe the classrooms as previously planned.

The semi-structured interview with open-ended and topical-guided questions was used. This approach provided an opportunity for participants to be flexible in their responses that reflected their unique lived experiences, while remaining in the general topic being studied. In this study interview questions were divided into two parts (see Appendix B). The first part consisted of questions aimed at compiling participants’ biographical data such as age, gender, birth place, and educational background. The second part focused on addressing the main four main research questions. In the process of formulating the interview questions Bouma (2000) cautions that “it is better to answer a small question than to leave a large one unanswered” (p.13). With this notion, I broke down the key four research questions into twenty minor related questions in order to better address the four main research questions on 1) the overall cross-cultural teaching experiences both inside and outside Thai classrooms 2) how these American teachers viewed their identity in Thai classrooms 3) the teaching methods that they used in Thai classrooms and 4) how they viewed their role in Thailand’s globalization process.

The Participants

In this study, a purposeful non-probability and a snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit the nine participants. This type of sampling is considered appropriate for qualitative inquiry when information-rich and in-depth data is what a researcher hopes to obtain (Merriam, 1998). My participant recruitment started with my classmate at the University of Hawaii who
was an American teacher and program coordinator who had taught in Thailand for several
semesters. He agreed to participate in this study and also helped connected me with another
teacher from his program. I also contacted the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs of a large
university in Northeastern Thailand who provided me with a list of names and contact
information of American faculty from several international programs. I e-mailed the faculty
members to introduce myself and my study, and invited them to participate. Four American
teachers accepted. Three more American teachers were invited and recruited through my own
personal contacts.

The American teachers in this study were defined by their nationality. The term
“American,” as used in this study, means an American who was born and raised in the United
States of America, regardless of his or her ancestral, ethnic, or regional backgrounds. For
example, an American born and raised in any state in the U.S. with European, African, Spanish,
Italian, Filipino, or Japanese ancestral backgrounds would have been counted as American, as he
or she reflect the reality of American diversity. The decision to include all Americans regardless
of their ancestral or ethnic backgrounds was made based on the assumption that citizens of a
well-established nation often share commonalities such as language and communication patterns,
educational practices, political systems, media exposure, products, and services consumption
(Hofstede, et.al, 2010; Masemann, 2007). This commonality is believed to serve as a strong
force for integration that makes citizens within a nation share a similar mental ideology and
cultural patterns, regardless of their ethnic or regional backgrounds.

The term “America” also refers to the United States of America, the country and not the
American continent which includes Canada, and countries in Central and South America. The
reason for this exclusion was for the purpose of developing a meaningful cross-cultural
comparative analysis between the U.S. and Thailand. In order to meaningfully utilize the national level of analysis and to learn about the cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thai classrooms, it is necessary to focus on the two nations inclusively.

The demographics (see Table 1) of the participants recruited from the non-probability and a snowball sampling from this study consisted of eight American males with white ethnic backgrounds and one Japanese-American female. The age of the participants ranged from 29 to 61 years. All nine American teachers have or are pursuing advanced degrees in various fields and all nine are either teaching or taught at the university level in various levels ranging from undergrad freshmen to graduate doctoral levels in Thailand. The participants also consisted of teachers from various teaching locations in the large capital city of Bangkok, the outskirts of Bangkok, and two universities from the rural areas of Northeastern part of Thailand.

Table 1. Demography of the American Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE/GENDER</th>
<th>HOME STATE REGION</th>
<th>ETHNIC BACKGROUND</th>
<th>HIGHEST DEGREE RECEIVED</th>
<th>TEACHING LEVEL</th>
<th>TEACHING LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lance</td>
<td>54/M</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MA/Doctoral student</td>
<td>undergrad</td>
<td>Upper Northeastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>56/M</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>undergrad</td>
<td>Upper Northeastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>29/F</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>BA/MA student</td>
<td>undergrad</td>
<td>Lower Northeastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>52/M</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>undergrad</td>
<td>Upper Northeastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>61/M</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm</td>
<td>53/M</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>undergrad</td>
<td>Outskirts of Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>60/M</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>undergrad</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>44/M</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MA/Doctoral student</td>
<td>undergrad</td>
<td>Lower Northeastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>61/M</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Grad/undergrad</td>
<td>Lower Northeastern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

All of the interviews were recorded using a digital MP3 device. Each interview was transcribed for data analysis and interpretation. To prepare for the data analysis portion of the research, all digitally recorded interviews from the MP3 were downloaded and stored on a personal home computer. The *Express Scribe* software program was downloaded and used to assist with the transcription process. This program has many useful features such as audio playback, speed control/playback, and file management, which makes transcription easier, accurate and less time consuming.

All the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed mostly word by word (i.e., verbatim) and as close as possible to the sounds heard on the recorder, in order to reproduce the written form of information as close to the participants’ original spoken words as possible (Yow, 2005). During the transcription, some grammatical mistakes, sentence fragments, sounds that reflected hesitation, verbal “place holders” or “clutch” words such as “mmm,” “uh,” “well,” or “you know,” were transcribed as these words may indicate deeper meaning, or can be used to describe speaking habits of some of the participants.

Because I was both the interviewer and the transcriber, I felt that I gained some insight and knowledge about each participant and the interview situations. In some cases, I had to make a judgment call based on my knowledge about the participants whether to include or exclude some habitual or repeated sounds (such as coughing) that I believed were not relevant or significant to the meaning being conveyed (Yow, 2005). In the process of transcription, my main objective was to reproduce written words that most closely reflected the participant’s original spoken words (Yow, 2005). During the process of transcription, information from
researcher’s notes (e.g., reactions and notes about experiences with participants) was also included to fully understand the phenomenon under study.

After all of the interviews were transcribed, the process of data analysis and interpretations were conducted. In this study, I modified Colizzi’s (1973) procedure and used this as the foundation for my data analysis as it provides specific steps for data analysis which has been frequently used in numerous phenomenological research studies. Colaizzi’s procedure consists of the seven following steps:

1) **Read the transcriptions:** I started the data analysis procedure upon completion of all of the interview transcriptions. I read each transcription several times to gain a feeling and to better understand the context. In some cases, this step also included re-listening to the digital recording of the interview conversations to better “hear” and “see” the messages being conveyed.

2) **Identifying significant statements:** This step is commonly referred to as a data reduction process which is considered to be a difficult but important step. This step not only allows a researcher to reduce the “raw” data into a more manageable task, but it also requires a qualitative researcher to exercise his or her own judgment to exclude or include data that they deem significant and relevant (Siedman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Wolcott, 1994). For this step, I re-read the transcriptions and identified information and statements that I believed to be important, relevant, and/or that reflect research questions on cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in this study. I also followed Seidman (2006)’s recommendation that in the process of data reduction, information should be handled with an inductive rather than a deductive approach. In other words, I tried to investigate all of the information “…with an open attitude” (p.117) with the aim of reasoning from the particular to the general.
3) **Formulating and interpreting meanings:** after the significant and important statements have been identified and separated from the “raw” data. I began the process of formulating and interpreting the meanings. In this process, I considered and combined other possible clues such as nonverbal clues, tone of voice, silent, or choice of words, other actions, and indicators from my field notes and personal observations. This step was to ensure that the data reflects the message that the participants intended to convey as accurately as possible.

4) **Theme clusters:** I began this step by arranging the data for themes clustering process. I placed all of the significant statements into a two-column table, one column for the significant statements and another for my coding, memos, and notes. A coding process was then utilized. According to Hahn (2008), data coding is the process of organizing ideas and concepts and reducing qualitative data to make it more manageable to analyze. I began by using open coding (Lofland, et. al, 2006) to assign code words and wrote down memos and notes to each statement without restrictions or a specific purpose in mind (i.e., language barrier, special treatment towards teachers, low motivation students, etc.).

5) **Integrate themes clusters:** After the code words and notes for each statement were assigned and completed through the open coding process, I conducted a more focused coding by rereading the open coding notes to identify important themes that emerged from the statements. I then sorted and categorized the repeated and recurring themes that I felt were significant and relevant to the research questions. I then integrated and categorized them into seven core categories consisting of 1) the Thai students, 2) Lost in translation, 3) Cultural “speed bumps”, 4) Adjusting to Thai culture, 5) Teaching methodology, 6) The American identity, and 7) Views toward globalization.
6) **Description of the phenomenon:** In this step, the main themes were described and explained. This process provided information beyond simply reporting data, but applied some theoretical explanations as well as other deeper meanings that the participants intended to convey. The main purpose of this step was to lay the foundation for data analysis, interpretation, as well as address the four main research questions.

7) **Conducting the member check:** At the final step of data analysis and interpretation, I conducted the member check by contacting some participants on information that needed further explanation or clarification. This process was to allow the participants to check and validate the information to ensure accuracy of the analysis, the interpretation and the findings.

Because this present study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach, the report of my data analysis and findings consisted of two chapters (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Chapter 4 - the findings - consisted of the biographical information on each participant to allow a better understanding of each participant’s response based upon their personal traits, backgrounds, and unique “lived” experiences when teaching in Thailand. For example, a participant who can speak Thai or has prior experience living in Thailand or other Southeast Asian countries may report having less cross-cultural difficulty than those who have never had any exposure to Thailand.

This chapter also serves to report important themes that emerged from the data. The next chapter (chapter 5) will address the four research questions with the analysis and the discussions of the research data.

**The Role of Researcher in Qualitative Methodology**

Having well-defined and clear steps for data collection and analysis was beneficial to the researcher to be confident and move the research project one step closer to completion.

However, there were others issues such as the role of a researcher that played a significant role in
this research study. Because qualitative research is the process in which social or human issues are studied through a holistic picture from an emic perspective in a natural setting (Creswell, 2002) and a qualitative approach is inductive and explorative in nature (Merriam, 1998), the researcher is viewed as a primary research instrument. As a result, a qualitative researcher has a primary role in the process of selecting the research topic, participants, research location, and for collecting, interpreting and reporting data. With this essential role, a qualitative researcher is required to have certain skills and personality traits such as having a high tolerance toward ambiguity, being intuitive and sensitive to the data and the physical surroundings, and being a good communicator (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, with this essential role as a primary research tool, it is essential for qualitative researchers to be aware of their own predispositions, possible biases, and perspectives as these attributes play a significant role in all research, from inception to completion. It is, therefore, necessary for a researcher to reveal one’s personal background as this information will be useful and beneficial to the understanding of the data and the direction and potential bias and subjectivity of the research.

**Personal Background of the Researcher in Cross-Cultural Education**

“Diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with, and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without.”

William Sloane Coffin, Jr.

My interest in cross-cultural issues began with my journey from Thailand to Hawaii 15 years ago. It was an anxious experience having to move half-way around the world and leave behind all of the comforts and familiarities in Thailand, only to be faced with many uncertainties. But, at that time, I felt that I was well prepared. After all, I still had a strong social support from my husband, who is an American. I also had a bachelor’s degree in English from a Thai university, could communicate well in English, and had experience many years working and
interacting with foreigners in multi-cultural companies in Thailand. Considering these preparations, I thought that my cross-cultural experiences to the U.S. would be rather easy. I quickly found that was not the case.

The saying that “culture is like the air we breathe,” or that “culture is like water to the fish,” become a reality for me. As soon as I was removed from the “water” that I was used to “swimming in,” I started to notice many differences of “ordinary” things I used to take for granted. What had been “simple” tasks like answering a phone, ordering food, or grocery shopping became challenging and sometimes nerve-racking experiences. I began to do research on cross-cultural issues and found that newcomers often experience some forms of culture shock (Oberg, 1960) and that many go through different stages of adjustment, starting from a honeymoon stage, through hostility, humor, in-sync (feeling at home), reentry culture shock, and re-socialization (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). My cross-cultural experience in many respects mirrored these stages. I was excited to learn new ways of living in the U.S. as everything seemed more modern, luxurious, and comfortable in comparison to Thailand. However, after a few months, the excitement started to fade away and was replaced with feelings of nervousness, frustration, and I even fear of just doing “ordinary” things. I also started to realize that my English skills were far from adequate if I wished to communicate or make myself understood in this new home. I often felt embarrassed, out of place, and had a hard time carrying on conversations. Going to a party became extremely stressful and nerve-racking rather than fun. I began to avoid socializing with others whenever possible. This change in my behavior patterns surprised my husband, as he knew me as an outgoing and talkative person when I was in Thailand. At that point in my life, I began to appreciate everything Thai and often felt homesick.
It took me almost a year to start adjusting to the new “water.” I realized that I needed to go back to school to improve my English in order to function better in Hawaii. I also started to get more and more interested in cross-cultural and intercultural research as the information I’d learned personally helped me put things more in perspective. I enrolled in the English Language Institute (ELI) program at Leeward Community College (LCC), Oahu, Hawaii, in 1997 to improve my English. In 2003, I received a master’s degree in Intercultural Communication from the University of Hawaii and four years later, I decided to continue my doctoral degree in educational foundations, also at the University of Hawaii. My research interest continues to be strongest in areas related to cross-cultural issues and I focused my doctoral studies on cross-cultural and multicultural education.

My personal cross-cultural experiences these past 15 years have definitely influenced and inspired me to pursue my professional path in cross-cultural studies. As a foreign student in Hawaii, I started to realize how substantially culture plays a role in the educational environment. For example, communication patterns and language differences between teachers and students, classroom expectations, activities, class assignment, and teaching and learning approaches are quite different between Thai and American classrooms. Being more familiar with passive learning, top-down communication, and teacher-dependent styles in Thai classrooms, I had a difficult time adjusting and performing in American classrooms.

My cross-cultural experience as a foreign student was reversed when I took a part-time job teaching English Language Learners (ELL) at Waipahu Elementary School (Oahu) while working on my Ph.D. As a foreign teacher, I encountered different types of cross-cultural challenges and this experience offered me a new perspective on cross-cultural education. On the one hand, as a one-time ELL student, I felt that I could relate well with my students and they
always reminded me of myself when I first arrived to Hawaii with limited English proficiency. I could also understand some of the struggles and difficulties that students experienced when acquiring English skills. On the other hand, I often felt uncertain of what teaching approaches I should adopt and whether I was being an effective teacher. Most of my students had recently migrated to Hawaii from such places as the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and the Philippines. I often wondered if I should use Eastern teaching styles that my non-Western students (and I) were more familiar with, or if I should adopt Western learning approaches that my students would eventually use.

With the new role as a teacher, I could also see other impacts that culture has on the classroom environment that I couldn’t see as a student. As a teacher, I had more control and authority over classroom interactions and practices than the students and started to be aware that my attitude and perception toward the students were critical to the success or failure of my students. Zeichner (1993), for example, points out that teachers who share different cultural backgrounds with their students may view differences as a problem, rather than as a resource. Some teachers may use cultural judgment of what is the “right” way to teach and what constitutes “good” learning as universal. As a result, some may view students from different cultural groups as “incompetent,” “universally disadvantaged,” “culturally deprived,” or they may doubt their students’ capability to learn (Gay, 1993). These studies help point out that simply having a different cultural frame of reference can lead to many negative consequences. Therefore, it was even more crucial for me, as a teacher, to be aware of my own culture as well as my students’ cultural backgrounds. This awareness allowed me to be more considerate and careful when making assumptions or interpretations about my students. It also helped me remember that each one of us has a different cultural lens that we use to “see” the world.
Therefore, it is helpful and crucial to always separate observation from interpretation in any cross-cultural situation (Hofstede, Pedersen, & Hofstede, 2002), as one interpretation may be wrong or inaccurate in a different cultural framework.

**Motivation to Conduct this Study**

My personal, academic, and professional background led me to be interested in cross-cultural issues. However, these factors alone were not the main reasons to conduct this present study of exploring the cross-cultural experiences of American teachers in Thailand. During the time that I struggled and endured my own cross-cultural experiences in Hawaii, my husband, who is an American, seemed to really enjoy and felt at ease in his cross-cultural journey to Thailand. It seems that our cross-cultural experiences were noticeably different – one was easy to adjust to and pleasant, the other was difficult and sometime unpleasant. This “contrast” led me to be curious and tried to search for more explanations on this issue.

My preliminary research revealed that issues relating to individual cross-cultural experiences are highly complex and multilayered. Numerous variables such as personality traits, ecological conditions, and degree of cultural distance or cultural acceptance of the home and the host cultures are among many factors that play a role in making one’s cross-cultural experiences different. For example, my husband’s personal backgrounds such as being a frequent traveler in various countries, as having a laid back and easy-going personality, and his adventurous nature may have helped him to be more prepared for his trip to Thailand. He is also considered a sojourner who travels to Thailand temporarily and not as a permanent resident, as in my case. Because of this, the period of time for him to cope with or “endure” any uncertainties is usually shorter. He can also select to only deal with short-term, rather than long-term concerns and problems. For example, he can opt to interact with only Americans or with native English
speaking Westerners and doesn’t have to be concerned with expanding his social networks with other Thais as a long-term survivor. The mindset as being a temporary visitor may also help make cross-cultural adjustments more bearable and even enjoyable. In addition, being a Westerner from the U.S., one of the most influential and powerful countries in the world, may provide him with more cultural “privileges” or advantages. Most Thais, for example, view Americans with admiration and with positive attitude. They, therefore, will likely try to accommodate, adapt to, and welcome his stay in Thailand. The issues of a language barrier may not be as serious, as in my case, as most Thais will likely try to adopt English in conversations, rather than expecting my husband to learn Thai. The difference of our cross-cultural experiences can be illustrated by the use of one word. For example, if my husband is able to say only one word in Thai, he would likely be received with excitement, admiration, and appreciation for “speaking Thai,” or at least for trying. I, on the other hand, if I were to make a mistake, even with only one word in English, may be viewed as lacking or deficient. “She’s in the U.S., why can’t she speak English,” some might say.

Drawing upon the above explanation and illustrations, it seems reasonable to conclude that numerous variables can affect one’s cross-cultural experiences. This notion served as a stimulus for me to explore and learn more about other cross-cultural experiences, especially among Americans migrating to or teaching in Thailand. I was interested and curious to learn if other Americans had fewer difficulties in their cross-cultural journeys as my husband. Further, because my cross-cultural experiences over the past 15 years mostly involved the areas of education, as a foreign student and a teacher, this prompted me to focus and aim only in the areas related to education and classroom settings. These are some of the reasons I chose to conduct this research.
Because this research utilized a qualitative approach, the information of my own personal background, professional and academic interests, and motivation were discussed. This “disclosure” was deemed necessary, as in a qualitative inquiry the researcher is considered the primary research instrument (Merriam, 1998). It is essential, therefore, for both the researcher and the reader to be able to identify and recognize the research stance, subjectivity, or possible bias that may surface or emerge in this research. Further, in this study the researcher, once again, had to cross cultural boundaries by interviewing American participants. As a result, many issues in cross-cultural interviewing also needed to be discussed.

Issues in Cross-Cultural Interviewing

The increasing world globalization and international connection requires researchers to investigate and examine social issues across cultures in order to better our understanding of diverse phenomena. Researchers in this global dynamic environment are often faced with even more challenges when they undergo research in countries and with people who may not share linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Especially in the field of cross-cultural studies such as this present study, researchers not only have to face many “typical” complexities and challenges in doing a qualitative interview research in mono-culture, they also have to be more aware and alert to manage the complexities of differences in cross-cultural interactions (Shah, 2004).

When using a qualitative interview approach such as this present study, the interaction between researchers and research participants is viewed as participative, two-way learning, and a knowledge-building process (Shah, 2004). For this reason, subjectivity of both parties will influence data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Seidman (2006), also states that interviewing is not only a research methodology but a social relationship that requires a researcher to find ways to nurture, maintain, and at the final stage of research, to end
appropriately. As a form of social interaction, the exchange of information between the researcher and the participants will exist in a social context and individual traits such as gender, age, social class, and ethnicity will play a significant role.

Individual traits, for instance, will not only shape the types of data a researcher seeks to get but also the meaning and direction of data interpretation as well (Yow, 2005, Mullings, 1999). Individual traits such as gender can greatly affect the researcher as well as the participant’s attitude and behavior in an interview. With the issue of power relation, a female researcher interviewing male participants may feel reluctant to take control over the direction of the interview, and some males may not take a woman researcher seriously (Seidman, 2006). Other issues that relate to gender include possible sexual exploitation, and romantic attractions that can greatly impact data collection and analysis (Yow, 2005). In addition, different traits such as social class and status can influence the information the participants are willing to share. In many cases, researchers in a higher educational level have more academic experience and the power relation, in this situation, will shape the information being generated (Seidman, 2006). The differences in age and seniority may also influence the interaction between the two parties. Older participants, for example, may feel uncomfortable to be interviewed when they view their role as lower or inferior than the younger researchers (Seidman, 2006).

According to Shah (2004) the above social identities and traits will impact the information being produced in every interview. Partiality, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation are to be expected. But with the addition of another factor such as culture, these problems will likely intensify. Barna (1998), for example, states that there are at least six cultural barriers that make cross-cultural communication prone to problems and misunderstandings. These six barriers include the tendency to assume things based on one’s
knowledge and cultural background, language diversity, misinterpretation of non-verbal clues, preconceptions and stereotypes that can lead to false assumptions, tendency to evaluate with the known values systems, and high anxiety when dealing with unfamiliar in different cultural context. These six barriers will greatly affect data collection, analysis, and meaning making.

Shah (2004) also adds that the increasing globalization and exchange of knowledge and information across countries may help bringing the world closer, but ironically, the “closeness” between nations often results in increasing the awareness and recognition of differences instead of similarities. For this reason, communication and interaction in a mono-cultural setting, regardless of social trait differences, are often founded on “similarity-based,” where shared assumptions, values, behaviors patterns facilitate understanding. In cross-cultural communication, on the other hand, interactions are often “difference based.” Values, patterns of behaviors, and assumptions, therefore, many not be shared or predictable. These dissimilarities will likely impede understanding (Bennet, 1998).

The cultural mismatch between researchers and their participants, in this case a Thai researcher interviewing American participants, may lead to some confusion and misunderstandings in cross-cultural interviews. With different cultural backgrounds, researchers may be more prone to make false assumptions about concepts that are not aligned with their frame of reference. For example, in “difference based” interaction, using a different cultural perspective to collect and analyze data, researchers may unintentionally interpret “difference” in a negative light, such as viewing non-verbal clues or messages provide by interviewees as being abnormal, weird, or peculiar. Messages and information that go through different cultural filtering processes may also increase the tendency for misinterpretation (Mullings, 1999). Further, some concepts such as “high” social status can mean different things across culture.
Shah (2004), for example, explains that in tribal societies individuals that are considered high social status are often linked to age and seniority. In Chinese and many other Asian cultures, high social status may refer to individuals with wisdom and knowledge. Muslim societies may link individuals in high social status to religious knowledge, while many capitalist societies such as the U.S. and many other Western countries may view high social status as monetary wealth and socio-economic positioning. Additionally, common practices and norms for conducting interview research from one culture may not be applied in different cultural contexts (Shah, 2004). For example, it may be an ordinary practice for an American woman to interview male participants. This practice, however, may not be appropriate (or even possible) in other parts of the world such as in a Muslim society (Shah, 2004). For this reason, misunderstandings in concepts can lead to incorrect and misleading interpretation in the process of data collection and analysis.

**Positionality in Data Collection and Analysis: Insider/Outsider Role**

Different social attributes such as gender, age, social class, race, ethnicity and culture/subculture play a significant role in the process of data collection and analysis (Yow, 2005). These social attributes can also influence how participants perceive a researcher as an insider or outsider and this position can greatly shape the types of information being collected and interpreted (Dwyer & Buckel, 2009). For example, being an insider can “…enhance the depth and breadth of understanding.” (p. 57). Insider-researchers may have an advantage in recognizing verbal, or non-verbal clues, and social behaviors known only within group members. Hidden assumptions underlying certain behaviors and some unwritten rules and regulations may also be recognized and interpreted correctly among in-group members (Shah, 2004). Sharing social identity, spoken language, and experience, also enable an insider-researcher to gain
acceptance and good rapport among participants from the same group (Dwyer & Buckel, 2009). Insider status can also make both parties feel at ease and more relaxed to open up and share information in a comfortable and friendly environment. The biggest advantage of being a social insider, however, is gaining access (Shah, 2004). This factor alone can make or break a research project because the insider-researcher can gain access to the participants with little effort, while for outsider-researchers, this goal may be difficult or even impossible (Dwyer & Buckel, 2009).

Having an insider position provides numerous advantages for researchers, and many researchers (e.g., Shah, 2004) even view this position as superior to an outsider role. Although they are many benefits, some limitations are also to be expected. With insider position, the “nearness” between researchers and participants may ‘blunt criticality’ and the familiarity can blind an insider-researcher to recognize issues that may be taken for granted by in-group members (Shah, 2004). With the assumption of shared experience and knowledge, informants may assume that the insider-researcher knows what they mean and may not explain some concepts clearly. This can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In some circumstances, participants may feel threatened or reluctant to reveal sensitive or personal information to an insider-researcher because they may be concerned about possible retaliation, embarrassment, and humiliation. The outsider role, for this reason, can minimize some of the constraints associated with the insider role. Because of the in-group shared experiences, outsider-researchers might be in a better position to recognize subtleties and commonalities that might be taken for granted or go unnoticed to the in-group members (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009)

How access is granted also has a significant impact on not only the types of information being offered by participants, but also on the climate and mood of interaction between
researchers and informants throughout the research interview project. Shah (2004), for example, points out that “Access is not just the question of ‘getting in’ (physical access), it sets the tone for ‘getting on’ (social access) as well.” (p.557). This is especially true in cross-cultural interviewing where “difference-based” is the norm, both ‘getting in’ and ‘getting on’ access become even more challenging. For example, using a different frame of reference, a researcher who is viewed as successful and prominent in one culture may not be able to ‘get in’ into collective societies where relationships and social ties are very important (Shah, 2004). Being able to ‘get on’ is another story and it is even be more challenging because it requires more complex cultural knowledge and understanding in order to maintain a good rapport with participants from different cultural backgrounds. In mono-culture, for example, shared cultural values and knowledge enable the interviewer and interviewee to adjust their behaviors in order to avoid offensive situations that can cause problems or communication breakdown (Shah, 2004). In cross-cultural interviewing, on the other hand, interviewing may be viewed as more threatening, as both parties may lack a shared sociocultural context to avoid unpleasant or insulting social situations. Additionally, in most cases, ‘getting in’ and ‘getting on’ will not be a one-time event, but multiple episodes. Researchers in cross-cultural interview studies need to develop relevant cultural knowledge and understanding in order to have a successful and productive research project (Shah, 2004).

Although it is necessary to gain knowledge and an awareness of the pros and cons of being an insider or outsider, when conducting interview research, one does not necessarily have to take one side or the other. Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, and Muhaman (2001) find that the boundaries between being an insider or an outsider are not clearly demarcated and often shift throughout the process of interviewing. Dwyer & Buckle (2009) also
state that “Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference.” (p. 60) This notion helps qualitative researchers to view their roles in a more flexible and adaptable way. With the awareness of role differences and the pros and cons that can come with it, qualitative researchers can even take advantage of the pros and avoid the cons in order to effectively reach their research objective. For example, with the awareness of some limitations as an insider, researchers can be more alert by not letting the closeness they have with their in-group participants blunt their criticalities. They can be more attentive to not simply take things for granted or make conclusions based on their personal assumptions. They can also be more vigilant and more exploratory when interviewing members of their own group. For outsider-researchers, they can take advantage of their unique role as “stranger” to explore some issues that participants may not feel safe or appropriate to share with in-group members (i.e., express their frustrations and dissatisfaction toward group members). With benefits and limitations that come with different roles as insider and outsider, Dwyer & Buckle (2009) recommend a researcher consider the ‘space between’ as they suggest that “…the time has come to abandon these constructed dichotomies and embrace and explore the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched perspectives.” (p.62). Dwyer and Buckle strongly believe that qualitative researchers are “uniquely equipped for the challenge” (p. 62).

**Reflections of the Role of the Researcher in This Study**

Throughout this research journey, I became increasingly aware of my role as a qualitative researcher. The notion that a qualitative researcher is considered one of the most important research tools (Merriam, 1998) became even more valid and compelling as the research proceeded. I became increasingly aware that, from inception to completion, I was the person
“behind the wheel” who could “steer” this research project in the direction that I deemed fit. With this responsibility in mind, I put my best effort to maintain impartiality by selecting the research methodology that I believed would help me maintain my own impartiality. In this case, I chose to use transcendental phenomenology as my research method.

In theory, selecting transcendental phenomenology approach with the use of the “Epoche” or bracketing was deemed appropriate, as it helped me increase my awareness of my own subjectivity, bias, and predisposition. In practice, however, this approach was difficult and challenging to implement. Shah (2004), for example, cautions that the interaction between researchers and participants will likely be a participative, two-way learning, and a knowledge building process. Seidman (2006) also points out that interviewing is not simply a research methodology, but a social relationship that requires interaction and the exchange of information between two parties. For these reasons, the subjectivity of both parties may unintentionally emerge in the interview conversations. My interview research was no exception. In my case, there were incidents that required me to share some experiences, to insert my viewpoint and perspective before and during the interview conversations. For example, some participants asked me about my experience teaching in Hawaii and some asked me to share my own opinion about Thai students and Thai culture. On the one hand, I felt it was appropriate to share some information in order to develop good rapport with my participants. On the other hand, I was concerned of not being able to maintain the Epoche approach during the interviews. To minimize and remedy this dilemma, I tried to keep in mind that a qualitative researcher must be able to adjust and be flexible in order to achieve the “best” outcome as an interview progresses. As a result, I tried to find a good balance by choosing to share some information with the interviewees that I deemed appropriate to develop the relationship with the participants,
encourage the conversation, and move the conversations forward. I did, however, try to keep my ideas and opinions to a minimum in order to “see” and “hear” the participants’ experiences as impartially as possible.

Throughout the research project, I was also aware that my identity and personal background as a Thai graduate student, a Thai researcher, a part-time foreign teacher in Hawaii, a female, and a person who crossed the culture from Thailand to the U.S for the past 15 years, would inevitably guide and shape the direction of my analysis and interpretation. From my own perceptions, my identity brought both strengths as well as possible limitations to this research study. For example, the familiarity and a “deeper” understanding of the Thai culture as a native Thai may provide me with the “inside” cultural knowledge that the “outside” researchers may not have in the process of data analysis and interpretation of the Thai culture and the people.

However, my identity as a Thai also created some significant limitations. For example, I was faced with several challenges throughout the entire research process. During the time of the interviews, my identity as a Thai might, on a certain level, have influenced how some American teachers responded to my interview questions. The concern based on the possibility that some of my participants might have been reluctant to express their true feelings, especially negative feelings toward Thai people and Thai culture believing that it might be offensive or upsetting to me. To reduce this potential problem, I discussed my concern with each of the participants before beginning our interview and we agreed that this project would be based on their true reflection of Thai students and culture and that any negative expressions would not be taken as offensive or hurt my feelings.

My identity as a Thai researcher also greatly influenced data gathering, analysis, and interpretation. As a Thai, I had to be aware of my personal predisposition and try to maintain my
impartiality as best I can throughout the research process. One particular challenge that I experienced was trying to avoid being a “protector” of my Thai culture and the Thai people. I had to be aware and attentive to not become a “cultural protector” by defending, misinterpreting, or “softening” the data to make the Thai culture and Thai people look better. On the other side, however, I had to be a “protector” of my participants who shared their personal cross-cultural teaching experiences in Thailand with me. For example, I had to be mindful when reporting sensitive or negative comments expressed by the participants that could potentially have an adverse effect on their personal or professional lives. I also had to be aware to modify or change any identifiable information that could be linked to the participants or their identity. In addition, Seidman (2006) advises that interviewing is not only a research methodology, but a social relationship that needs to be maintained, cultivated or ended with respect and grace. For this reason, it was a challenge to maintain a delicate balance of criticizing or expressing disagreement without making the participants feel like they were being evaluated, criticized, or judged.

As a Thai interviewing American participants, I also had to be aware of many issues in cross-cultural interviewing. The potential mismatch in cultural attitudes, perceptions, and expectation, for example, can potentially cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the message being conveyed. As a non-native English speaker, there were many potential pitfalls such as mispronouncing words, mishearing, and misinterpreting both verbal and nonverbal messages. Additionally, being a non-native English speaking interviewer introduced some variables that native English speakers are not faced with, such as recognizing and interpreting idioms and slang used throughout the interviews.

As a female interviewing a predominately male group of interviewees, there were some circumstances where my participants may have been more reserved and more careful in their
responses (i.e., not using curse words or showing frustration). The issue related to positionality also seemed to play a role in the interviews and their responses. While conducting the interviews, I felt that I slipped in and out of the insider and outsider roles. First and foremost, I’m not an American, which may make some interviewees uncomfortable as they didn’t see me as “one of them.” I would not be someone who truly shares or understands what they went through when teaching in Thailand. Second, I have never taught at the university level or taught in Thai classrooms. Because of this, I’m an outsider who doesn’t really know what it’s like to be an American teacher working in Thai higher education. However, in some situations, I personally felt that some of the teachers were able to connect to me as someone who has been living in the U.S. for an extended period of time and who had some “deep” inside cultural knowledge. Some of the participants also viewed me as having similar cross-cultural teaching experiences as a Thai teacher in the U.S - a foreign country, in my circumstances. For this reason, in some aspects and circumstances, I became the insider “one of us,” for many of the teachers and they seemed to connect to me at a deeper level.

Summary

In order to understand the unique cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thai classrooms, a qualitative research approach was selected and utilized. In this chapter, the general characteristics of a qualitative approach and the rationale for using a transcendental phenomenology is discussed. In addition, this chapter also provided information on the data collection process, interview procedures, demographic information of the participants, and the process of data analysis. This chapter concluded with a discussion of several critical issues deemed to be significant in conducting a qualitative research project. The critical issues included the role of the researcher, the personal background of the researcher,
motivation to do the research, issues in cross-cultural interviewing, as well as the positionality or insider/outsider roles in data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

To understand the cross-cultural teaching experiences of American teachers in Thailand, a qualitative transcendental phenomenological in-depth interview approach was selected for this study. The transcendental phenomenological research method allows a qualitative researcher to understand the “lived” experiences of individuals about the concept or the phenomenon under study and to gain a better understanding of the essence or the “truth” of lived experience as the informants see it and make sense of it (Seidman, 2006; Creswell, 1998).

In order to realize this research objective, the report of data analysis and findings will consist of two parts. The first part focuses on the general demographic and the biographical information of each participant. This information allows a better understanding of each participant’s response based upon such variables as their overall personal demographical background (i.e., ethnicity, places born and raised, gender, educational background, teaching level, and location) and other “unique” personal attributes (i.e., language ability, cross-cultural exposures, preparation, motivation, and teaching experiences). This demographic and biographical information is considered crucial and necessary as they help “put behavior in context” (Seidman, 2006, p.10) and serves as a necessary foundation for meaningful understanding of the cross-cultural teaching experiences of the American teachers in Thai classrooms. The second part reports the research findings and the important recurring themes that emerged from the interview data which serve as the foundation for analysis of the general findings.
Part 1: The Participant’s Personal Background

As mentioned briefly in the Methodology section (Chapter 3), the demographic information of the participants in this present study provided several important indications of their personal backgrounds and attributes. It is important to note that the composition of the sample was due to the purposeful non-probability snowball sampling and not selection bias. Therefore, there were some imbalances and disproportionate representation of the participants sample such as gender, age, ethnicity, educational background, teaching levels, and teaching locations, which has some ramification in the analysis and the interpretation of the data.

The Participants’ Biographical Information (see Table 1)

In this study, the participants consisted of eight European American males and one Asian American female. The absence of reliable statistics precludes me from determining if the sample used in this study is representative of the composition of educators teaching in Thailand. Regardless, this disproportionate number of males in the sample resulted in data that reflect more toward the male cross-cultural teaching experiences in Thai classrooms than female experiences. Further, the predominately male composition of the present study could possibly reflect three things. First, it could reflect the actual educational trend that there are more males teaching in higher education than females (American Federation of Teachers: www.aft.org). Second, it could suggest that males are more likely to migrate or take overseas jobs than females especially in countries such as Thailand. Third, the disproportionate number of males may indicate how snowball sampling could result in a gender-biased sample. For example, there is a possibility that a of male-to-male and female-to-female connection may exist between and among genders that can shape the composition of the sample.
The majority of the participants recruited through non-probability snowball sampling also consisted of a more senior and mature individuals in the 50s and 60s (7 of 9). The data, therefore, reflected more toward the cross-cultural teaching experiences of an older group of American teachers rather than younger generations. Further, the majority of the participants (8 of 9) are European Americans with only one Asian American of Japanese descent. The high number of White American teachers, thus, resulted in data that reflect more toward White cross-cultural teaching experiences in Thailand than other ethnic backgrounds. In this study, many of the participants (7 of 9) have earned or are working toward doctoral degrees in various fields. The other two are also acquiring advanced degrees. One participant earned a master’s degree and another participant is working on her master’s study. Based on their educational backgrounds, it is reasonable to conclude that the participants in this study consisted of highly educated individuals and their cross-cultural teaching experiences, therefore, reflected these conditions.

In this study, all participants are currently teaching or have taught at universities in various levels and disciplines at different universities in Thailand. The cross-cultural teaching experiences derived from tertiary level such as this study are considered unique, as the tertiary education in Thailand, like many other countries in this globalizing world, is heavily impacted by the expansion of internationalization toward Western teaching and learning approaches. The cross-cultural teaching experiences, as a result, reflected this global trend which may not be applicable or comparable to cross-cultural teaching situations in lower levels such as the K to 12 levels in Thailand.

Finally, the majority of the teachers (6 of 9), teach or have taught in rural areas far from the capital city Bangkok. Differences in teaching locations are predicted to influence one’s
cross-cultural experiences, as they might reflect the impact of ecology on one’s cross-cultural teaching experience.

Besides the basic biographical data such as gender, age, ethnicity, educational degree attained, teaching levels, and teaching location, mentioned above, the interviews also provided additional biographical information as seen in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Additional Biographical Information of the American Teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Lance</th>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>Lisa</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Larry</th>
<th>Norm</th>
<th>Ken</th>
<th>Nathan</th>
<th>Dean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language spoken (besides English)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Some Thai</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Some Thai</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Some Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>Some Thai</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Some Khmer</td>
<td>Some Khmer</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Thai Thai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thai Laotian</td>
<td></td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to speak Thai* (at the time of teaching</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Novice</td>
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<td>in Thailand)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place(s) lived/visited before Thailand</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
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<tr>
<td>(besides U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>countries</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Europe</td>
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<td>around the</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>Cambodia</td>
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<td>South Amer.</td>
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<td>Easter Is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching before Thailand</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(executive coaching)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year(s) Teaching (before Thailand)</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
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<td>10 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Currently teaching (in Thailand)</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Year(s) teaching (in Thailand)</td>
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<td>1 year</td>
<td>3 months</td>
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<td>12 years+</td>
<td>10 years+</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>6 months</td>
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<td>(summer)</td>
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<td>Teaching subject**</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intention to teach in Thailand</td>
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<td>By choice</td>
<td>By chance</td>
<td>By chance</td>
<td>By chance</td>
<td>By choice</td>
<td>By chance</td>
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<td>By chance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having Thai spouse/significant other</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No (Asian non-Thai wife)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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*Based on the researcher’s interpretation from the interview data

**Teaching subjects were modified or used in general terms to protect participants’ identity
The biographical information above serves as additional data about the participants. Based on the interview data, all of the nine participants had acquired at least one foreign language besides English at the time of the interviews. However, the majority of the participants (7 of 9) did not have Thai language skills at the time of teaching in Thailand. They either acquired some basic Thai language during, or after living in Thailand. For this reason, most were considered novices of the Thai host language while teaching in the country. Only Kevin and Larry reported to be fluent or proficient in Thai language prior to teaching Thai students. The lack or the low proficiency of Thai language skills probably contributed to the extensive reports of their cross-cultural difficulties when teaching and living in Thailand among the majority of the teachers.

When it comes to prior cross-cultural exposure, more than half (6 of 9) of the participants had traveled to at least one foreign country prior to teaching in Thailand. Especially Kevin, Sam, Larry, and Dean were frequent travelers, as they have taken foreign trips extensively in various countries prior to teaching in Thailand. They also reported having more cross-cultural experiences and appeared to be better equipped and more prepared for the trip to Thailand. Three participants - Lance, Norm, and Ken – did not have prior travel experience before going to Thailand. Thus, they reported experiencing some difficulties adjusting to the Thai culture.

Further, more than half (5 of 9) of the participants also have extensive teaching experiences ranging from 10 to more than 25 years in the United States and in other countries. The majority of the participants (7 of 9) is also currently teaching as full time professors or as frequent visiting professors. They have taught in Thai classrooms from 1 to more than 12 years in various subjects. Having more mature and well established individuals resulted in data that
reflect cross-cultural teaching experiences of veteran and skilled teachers, rather than beginner or novice teachers.

However, the data from the interviews revealed that the majority of the participants (6 of 9) did not intentionally or personally choose Thailand as their teaching destination. Their journeys to Thailand occurred by chance rather than by choice. For example, according to Lance, Sam, Larry, and Dean, Thailand was simply their stopover or intermediate country in route to their intended destinations. For Lisa and Nathan, Thailand was the teaching destination already set and designed by their practicum training programs as a part of their degree requirement. In this study, only Ken, Kevin, and Norm intentionally picked Thailand for personal reasons. The willingness to relocate has been reported to play a role in one’s cross-cultural journey (e.g., Wagner & Westaby, 2009) as relocating by choice rather than by chance, may contribute to one’s psychological readiness and preparation to cope in the new cultural milieu.

The data from the interviews also show that only two participants (Nathan and Lisa) received formal training prior to traveling to Thailand. The majority of the participants (7 of 9) either did not plan at all, or planned their trip on their own using information from books, the internet, other travel sources, or talking to others who have been there before. Some of the participants (Kevin and Lance) relied on their own previous experiences in Thailand and other foreign trips as the source of their cross-cultural preparations. The lack or limited formal cross-cultural preparation among many participants may have resulted in being ill-equipped or facing some unexpected difficulties. For some participants, lacking adequate or inaccurate information could even result in being misinformed about the country of destination. For example, Dean discussed his preparation to Thailand.
My first exposure to Thailand was at Nana Plaza [Thai red light district]. That was crazy. That was not a good way to learn the culture. I was single and I went with a group of young single guys who've been to Thailand and they gave me orientation (Dean).

The big shock for me really is that I've heard about Thailand and I knew about bars and bar girls, a lot of crazy drinking stuff like that, uhm like Mardi Gras every night. When you get out of the plane and go to Nana, Patpong, or Soi Cowboy [Thai red light districts], but when you get away from these places, you realized you don't see these craziness in any other places. There're really those three big areas. So, it's kind of an unfortunate reputation Bangkok has, and it was kind of based on those three areas as far as I know. It's as big as Bangkok is, it's interesting that it's known only for these three areas. When you have a chance to travel more, you realize that it's much more conservative. The other areas, rather than those bar areas are very conservative, very traditional, very old style. But people who come over here for a day or three days or a week or two weeks, and they only go to the bars that's what they're going to see and they would think that Thailand is nothing but bars. They don't see the other side of it (Dean).

Misperception about a culture can lead to misunderstandings, confusion, and cultural stereotyping. Inaccurate perceptions, for example, can act as a “lens” one uses to view, interact, and interpret the culture, which can significantly impact a successful cross-cultural integration.

In Dean’s case, it took several trips to Thailand, as well as an expansion of his social networks, before he realized that his first impression about Thailand was “too narrow.”

This leads to the last, but certainly not least, biographical information derived from the interview data. In this study, the question about one’s significant other was not directly asked because of the concern that it may be too personal or intrusive for some of the participants.

However, in the interview conversations of the eight male participants, five voluntarily divulged that their wives are Thai and that one has a Thai girlfriend. Another participant later married a Thai woman and another one married an Asian, non-Thai woman after they completed their teaching assignments in Thailand. This information, although derived unintentionally, appeared to be significant in understanding the participants’ cross-cultural experiences in Thailand.

Kevin, for example, stated,

My wife, she can read and write English quite well but she can’t speak it, really. It’s the kind of thing that my Thai is so much better than her English, we never have to bother with English so. We just don’t ever use it. You can say that my entire personal life is in Thai (Kevin).

If you consider that I only speak Thai with my wife and her family and I've been living in Thailand for many years...there is really nothing that surprised me (Kevin).
Having a Thai significant other may offer additional incentive for language and cultural learning. Being with a cultural “expert” can also provide a deeper understanding of some sensitive cultural customs and norms and taboos that otherwise may not be available to foreign visitors or an “outsider.” For example, Larry shared his experiences living with his Thai wife and her family.

One time I put my hand and rest on my wife's back and her mom said people are looking. We were in a very non-foreign context, we were in a little market and she complains about that. I've known my wife for 11 years. My mother-in-law complained to my wife that I was calling the kids khun [a polite and formal Thai pronoun to address people] and that was confusing. That was before I learned noo [an appropriate pronoun for young child]. I don't call my kids khun now. I call them noo (Larry).

For Kevin, living in Thailand with his Thai wife and her family also enables him to gain some unique cultural practices and socio-cultural patterns that other foreigners may not understand. For example, Kevin revealed his experiences with other expats.

I know many people who, you know they met their girlfriends in a bar…who is working in a bar. I used the term working and you know in what way. And that creates a lot of problems because they married the wrong kind of person who may be a liar or some kind of different, so they have a lot of problems. So, it was entertaining to listen to these stories. Having to pay for the wife sin sord [bride price] you know. It's very strange to Americans. The family structure is very confusing to Americans, say like the Thai women put her family above the husband and above everything. They don't understand that and they're like why why why? (Kevin).

The deeper cultural knowledge from a cultural “insider” can assist some newcomers to be more resourceful when navigating in the Thai culture. All and all, the biographical variables mentioned above serve as a necessary foundation to understand the cross-cultural teaching experiences of these American teachers. However, to adequately analyze and interpret the data that addresses the four main research questions, the individual unique life stories of each participant also needed to be revealed. The personal life backgrounds will, again, help “put behavior in context” (Seidman, 2006, p.10) which is a crucial and fundamental step in qualitative phenomenology study such as this present study.
Individual Stories: Getting to know the Participants

Lance

Lance was born in 1957 and grew up in the Central part of the U.S. His ethnic background is Irish and Welsh. Lance can speak Chinese and some Thai. He took a Thai language class at one of the most prestigious universities in Thailand for three months when he arrived in Thailand. However, he felt that he would never been able to speak Thai very well. His academic expertise and interest expands to a variety of fields. He earned two bachelor’s degrees in the field of social studies and is currently finishing his doctoral degree in Information Technology. Before teaching in Thailand, Lance taught in the U.S. for almost 20 years. His first teaching job was in the 80s and he continued to teach in a full-time and part-time capacity since then. Besides teaching, Lance also worked as a computer programmer in the U.S. for over 15 years.

After his long professional career, Lance decided to retire somewhere outside the U.S. He originally planned to go to China as he minored in Chinese in college and already had a job offer in China. However, on his way to China, Lance stopped over in Thailand and he said, “I stopped here and I never left. That's kind of how it happened. I like it here.” Lance said that there was really no particular reason to choose Thailand, but he continued,

I like the freedom here…I came to Thailand…I wanted to simplify my life. My life in the U.S. was very complicated. It was high strung fast pace high tech, that kind of things, and I felt that it's going to kill me, so I decided that I was going to take the step. I moved here to simplify my life and try to get in touch with myself and what's real in me…I think Thailand has more freedom than the U.S. in certain areas (Lance).

Lance also felt that there was no reason for him to go back to the U.S. “I don't have any family, I'm not married, I don't have kids. My mom and my dad passed away a long time ago…there's no real reason for me to be there [in the U.S.]” Lance first thought that he would stay for a couple of weeks, but he never left Thailand and now considers Thailand as his home.
For the last four years Lance taught at various universities in Thailand, both public and private institutions. He is currently teaching computer sciences* to college students from the international program at one of the largest universities in Northeastern Thailand.

**Kevin**

Kevin was born in 1955 and grew up in the U.S. Southwest. He has a Spanish background and can speak fluent French, Russian, Portuguese, and Thai. Kevin is considered a world traveler and expatriate (“expat”). During the interview, he tried to recall places he has been and concluded “It’s pretty much everywhere in the world except Africa… I have over two million miles for two airlines and that’s just the two that I use most” (Kevin).

His long list of countries he had visited around the world includes the Soviet Union, various countries in Europe, the Soviet Union, Asia, the South Pacific, and Southeast Asia. Kevin earned a doctoral degree in International Business* and has extensive experience working at high executive levels, as well as with business owners in various countries around the world for more than 25 years. Although Kevin did not teach in formal academic settings, he had extensive experiences in executive coaching and mentoring in business sectors and managed up to five or six hundred employees for more than two decades before landing a teaching job in Thailand.

Kevin noted that he always loved Thailand and has vacationed in Thailand many times while he was working. At age 45, Kevin retired from his executive position and, for Kevin, Thailand was “a natural place to retire.” However, after about nine months, he got tired of his retirement and went back to work in the business sector for another 10 years. He then retired again from his business profession, and started his new career path teaching in the area of his long experience and expertise. Kevin is currently teaching business courses for third and fourth
year students and an upper division business class in the international program at one of the biggest universities in Northeastern Thailand. He has been teaching at this university for about one year. He is married to a Thai wife and they live in the Northeast part of Thailand.

Lisa

Lisa was born in 1982 and grew up on the U.S. West Coast. She is a Japanese-American. Lisa can speak Japanese and she is also learning a few words of other languages here and there like Hawaiian and Khmer and some Thai. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree from the West Coast, she went to Japan through the JET Program to teach English to high school students for two years. During her teaching at the high school in Japan, Lisa also visited and taught short courses at elementary schools that served children with special needs and junior high schools a few times a year. She also taught an evening English conversation class for adults in Japan.

Lisa returned to the West Coast of the U.S. and started to pursue her master’s degree in English* in 2009. To prepare for her master’s studies, Lisa attended one of the most well-known teaching certificate programs, which provided her an opportunity to participate in a one-month intensive teaching program to gain more formal training and knowledge on how to teach non-native English speakers in the U.S.

As a part of her master’s studies, Lisa had an opportunity to participate in a summer-teaching training program* at a university in the northeastern legion of Thailand. At this university, Lisa taught English reading for first-year students of the international program for about three months during the summer session. Although Lisa did not personally choose Thailand as her teaching destination, she felt that it was a good place to go. She had never been to Southeast Asia and was actually excited and happy that the program was held in Thailand.

Before her trip to Thailand, Lisa attended one of the meetings provided by the teaching training program to prepare her for the trip. At these meetings, the pre-service teachers received
update information on the progress of the program, what to expect, what the place will look like, how they can get by, and learned some cultural knowledge and useful basic Thai words such as greetings, numbers, etc. Lisa also had a chance to meet and talk with other teachers who went on the program before and used some guide books and on-line information to prepare for her trip to Thailand. As a part of a training group, Lisa also surrounded herself with other classmates and other advisors who went along on this trip to Thailand.

Sam

Sam was born in 1959 and grew up in the West Coast, U.S. A. He identified himself as White American, but expressed some objections of classifying people by race and ethnicity. Although he felt that it was acceptable for the sake of a research survey, he, somehow, felt offended to be classified by ethnicity for political purposes or social policies. Sam can speak a little bit of French and described his Thai as “not very good.” He called it a “bar room Thai” and usually will not speak it.

I will just embarrass myself. If I have to, like when I go shopping or get something to eat I can speak, but I'll never try to, you know, engage in intellectual conversation or just try to teach cause I'd just sound stupid (Sam).

Before Sam moved to Thailand, he lived in several countries in Europe for six years, in Cambodia* for one year and had been traveling on and off in Thailand for about 10 years. Sam earned his Business* degree in England and received his PhD in Business* from a university in the U.S. He also had extensive teaching experience before teaching in Thailand. He started lecturing when he was a graduate student as a teaching assistant, then a teaching associate. After that, he taught full time in the U.S. and England, then in Thailand and Vietnam. He also taught short courses as a visiting lecturer many times in France. All and all, he has been teaching as a full time-teaching professor at a university level for nearly 11 years.
Sam said that he did not have any formal cross-cultural preparation or orientation before coming to Thailand.

I just pull all my stuff and go. You know, I have lived in, uhm I mean this is my fourth country and I go out a lot. It's not a big deal to me. I'm single so I didn't have to deal with finances and all that…I just moved with one suitcase and that's it (Sam).

The decision to teach in Thailand was not intentional. Before Sam went to Thailand, he taught at a well-established university in Europe, which also had a new program set up in South Asia. Sam, therefore, had an opportunity to travel in this region many times. On one of his trips, Sam had a chance to stop over in Bangkok. During that time, he started to entertain the idea of changing his career path from academic to business and was offered a job in the business sector in Thailand. Unfortunately, after he started working, the company went out of business during the major economic crisis in 1996. Right after that, Sam was offered a teaching position at a new private university in the eastern part of Thailand. However, Sam said,

It never worked out...I left because it's a private school and he (the owner) is kind of Thais of ethnic Chinese and they have the way of doing business that is different from the West. You know, you have a recruiting department and (inaudible) and all that, and he wouldn't hire a recruiting person so the student numbers weren't very big. So he has the meeting with all these Chinese and OK now each of you go find five students and we were just….like this is not our job (Sam).

Sam left his teaching at the private university and traveled back and forth between Thailand and the U.S. until he started working at a large, well established public university in the northeastern part of Thailand. He enjoys teaching at this university and has been teaching there for more than three years.

Larry

Larry was born in 1949. He grew up in the Northeastern region of the U.S. and now resides in Hawaii. His ethnic background is mainly English and Irish, and he has a little bit of American Indian in his blood. He has two daughters from his previous marriage and they live and attend colleges on the mainland, United States. Larry is now married to a Thai woman who
also has two children from her previous marriage. Larry has a PhD in Social Sciences* and is currently teaching full time at a big university in the U.S. He has been traveling back and forth to Thailand to be with his family and also to teach graduate levels at one of the most prestigious public universities in Thailand. It has been almost 12 years since he started teaching formally in Thailand.

Before teaching in Thailand in 1999, Larry had lived in Europe* for almost 10 years and traveled to Cambodia several times for about a year. In addition, Larry had extensive teaching experience in several universities in the U.S. for about 10 years before starting to teach in Thailand. He also teaches short courses in several countries in the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands and serves as a visiting professor at several well known and prestigious public universities throughout Thailand.

His trip to teach in Thailand was not by choice, but by chance. He specifically went to Cambodia to teach, but he stopped over in Thailand and during that time he had a chance to meet with the former president of the university in which he is currently teaching. She invited Larry to teach and he has been teaching at this university on a regular basis since then. However, his first exposure to teaching in Southeast Asia was in Cambodia, not Thailand. In his opinion, Thailand and Cambodia share somewhat similar cultural backgrounds, but the two countries also have many cultural differences.

Before Larry started teaching in Thailand, he did not formally have any cross-cultural training or cultural orientation, but according to him, he simply uses his “intuition and past experience” to help him with his cross-cultural journey in Thailand. However, Larry had some language preparation before he traveled to the country. Larry took a Thai language course in the U.S., and continued learning Thai during his stay in Thailand at the American University Alumni
(AUA), one of the most respected and well-known language institutions in Thailand. He also keeps trying to learn Thai whenever he can and collects many language-learning CDs and tapes to help him continue practice his Thai. In general, Larry feels that his prior cross-cultural experience in Thailand and other countries as well as his interest in learning the Thai language before and during his trip to Thailand help prepare him in the process of cross-cultural adjustment to the country. Besides English and Thai, Larry also speaks Italian and a little bit of Cambodian. While teaching at the Thai university, Larry uses English as the medium of instruction, but he feels that knowing some Thai greatly helps him in with his classes. Larry is currently traveling back and forth between the U.S. and Thailand to teach and to visit his family.

**Norm**

Norm was born in 1959 and grew up in the Western part of the U.S. He identified himself as White American. He has a Ph.D. in Business Administration.* Norm came to Thailand in 1996 and lived in Bangkok before he moved to a province near Bangkok where he is currently teaching. The university where Norm was teaching at the time of this interview is considered to be one of the most prestigious, most developed, and leading public universities in terms of international programs and international education in Thailand.

Before teaching in Thailand, Norm worked as a staff member at a university in the U.S. for six years. Even though he was in an academic environment, he did not actually teach in a classroom before teaching in Thailand. Right now, Norm is teaching undergraduate students in business. He did not really have a particular reason to choose Thailand as a place to teach, but Norm had a lot of Thai friends while he was in the U.S. and felt that it was time to do something different. His Thai friends talked him into coming to Thailand to teach. Norm did not have any formal preparation for his trip to Thailand, but learned to speak Thai when he started living in Thailand. He learned Thai at the American University Alumni (AUA). At AUA, Norm had a
chance to not only practice Thai, but to also develop new networks with other Americans, Thais, and other foreigners which helped him in the process of cross-cultural adjustment. Although he feels that his Thai is still considered not at all fluent, it helps him to function and communicate with the local Thais more easily than he would without the language skills.

Norm has been teaching in Thailand for about 10 years and went back home to the U.S. for about two years for personal reasons. After that Norm has been living and teaching in Thailand ever since. He lives with his wife, who is Thai, on the outskirts of Bangkok.

Ken

Ken was born in 1951 and grew up in the Northeastern part of the U.S. His ethnic background is Swiss and English. Ken has a master’s degree in English* and a doctoral degree in Linguistics* both from Ivy League universities in the U.S. He can speak fluently in Thai and Khmer and a little bit in Laotian. He also studied Chinese, and Vietnamese but is not at the level to be able to communicate in these two languages.

Ken intentionally chose Thailand as his teaching destination as he recalled “I don't even know why Thailand popped in my mind, but it popped in my mind and I say that's a great idea.” For Ken, Thailand was “…the country that in my mind fills with mystery and intrigue. It was exotic and it was as far away from Maine * as you can go, the other side of the earth.”

Ken went to Thailand and started his job search by contacting several places, and a university in Bangkok offered him a teaching position. He taught English at the Thai university for two years, from 1975 to 1977, right after he received his master’s degree from an Ivy League university in the U.S. At that time, Ken was a young, newly graduated student from the U.S., with no teaching experience. The Thai trip that he took at that time was also his first trip outside the U.S. He did not have a deep knowledge or understanding of Thailand and the culture and could not speak or communicate in Thai.
Ken prepared for his trip to Thailand by reading books, because the internet had not been invented in 1972. He also got some information about how Thai people act and what Thai culture was from his American friends who went there before him.

It was in 2004, more than three decades after his first teaching in Thailand, that Ken had an opportunity to go back to teach a short course for teachers in Thailand again. By this time, he had gone from a young, inexperienced, and novice instructor who knew very little about Thai culture and the language, to a journeyman instructor holding an executive position at a U.S. college. He also continued to learn Thai even after he left the country the first time and now can speak Thai fluently and continues to have a deep interest and understanding of Thailand and the culture. He currently lives in Hawaii with his Asian (non-Thai) wife and their children. He still travels to Thailand for business and leisure as the opportunity arrives.

Nathan

Nathan was born in 1968 in the West Coast of the U.S. He has two master’s degrees in English* and Linguistics* and is currently working on his doctoral degree at a university in the U.S. Nathan taught English for an international program at a university in Northeastern part of Thailand. Most students in this program were Thais in their freshmen and sophomore years. Nathan has been teaching at this university for three summers as a part of his teaching training program* at his university. All and all, Nathan has been traveling back and forth between the U.S. and Thailand for the past three years to teach during summer breaks while pursuing his master’s and doctoral studies.

His trip to teach in Thailand was not entirely by his personal choice, but by chance. He went to Thailand with the teaching training program* that had been conducted in Thailand for the previous few years before he got involved in the program. His teaching trips in Thailand were also quite unique in comparison to other American teachers in this study. As a part of
teaching training course, Nathan went to Thailand on his first trip with a big group of classmates from his department. He also had his American professor who has extensive teaching experience in the U.S. accompany his group as the program director, advisor, and mentor. Thus, for Nathan for his first trip to Thailand “It was very comfortable….I was surrounded by a bunch of classmates and Dr. Anderson* was there for something that I missed.”

Nathan can speak Spanish quite well and he also learned and can communicate in Japanese and Vietnamese as well as Thai. He also had cross-cultural experiences in Vietnam, Japan, and Korea before his trip to Thailand. Nathan continues to travel back and forth to Thailand to teach as well as to visit his significant other in the Northeastern part of Thailand.

Dean

Dean was born in 1949 in the Eastern U.S. but grew up in the South. He can speak a little bit of Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Laos and Thai. He has a doctoral degree in Science* and has extensive experience working as a scientist at one of the most prestigious organizations in the mainland U.S. for over five years. Then he moved to Hawaii and has been working for nearly twenty years for another government organization that has a worldwide mission. His professional career provided him with an opportunity to travel to numerous countries including several countries in Europe, the Caribbean, South America, Easter Island, and Canada.

While he was working on his master’s degree, Dean served as a graduate teaching assistant for several years and continues to teach and provide professional training in his field on a part-time basis at several universities in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to his full time job, he currently teaches as a visiting professor and lecturer at both graduate and undergraduate levels at one of the largest universities in the Northeastern Thailand. He also continues to serve as an instructor and trainer to several organizations in Thailand, as he has done for more than five years.
His trip to Thailand was not by choice but by chance. As part of his job, Dean went to Southeast Asia to work and had an opportunity to stop over in Thailand in 1992. Although Dean is considered a world traveler, he did not have any formal preparation or cross-cultural training prior to his trip to Thailand as he explained,

Nobody told me how to act or what it would be like. I went there totally blind, no knowledge, no expectation. When I went there, it was no more than an airport stop for me, really the first time (Dean).

That was his first exposure to Southeast Asia and Thailand. Despite lacking preparation, Dean enjoyed his experience in the country, especially the unique culture of Thailand as he recalled,

I thought I would like to live in Thailand. I’d never been to Southeast Asia before and I really enjoy Southeast Asia (Dean).

Dean continued to work in Southeast Asia for many more years and started to establish some professional connections with other Thai scientists and educators. These connections ultimately landed him professional training and teaching opportunities in Thailand. Dean is married to a Thai woman and they travel back and forth between the U.S. and Thailand to work and to visit his wife’s family as they have for the past 15 years.

Part 2: The Emerging Themes

The face-to-face in-depth interviews with the nine American teachers provided substantial data related to their cross-cultural teaching experiences in Thai higher education. After the interview information was transcribed and analyzed, the following seven significant themes emerged:

Theme 1: The Thai Students

The general description of the Thai students provided by the American teachers in this study focused mostly on undergraduate Thai students from various international programs in Thai universities in Bangkok and the Northeastern parts of Thailand. For example, Lance,
Kevin, Lisa, Sam, Norm, Nathan, and Ken (7 of 9) reported teaching undergraduate students in international programs. Ken, however, taught undergraduate students, but his students were not from an international program. Only Larry and Dean reported teaching older groups of students at the graduate level who may be more mature and have more academic experiences. Dean, in particular, described his students as “super achievers” in science and pre-medical programs. The cross-cultural teaching experiences of Larry and Dean, therefore, may be different from other American teachers in this study. Five of the nine teachers (Lisa, Dean, Nathan, Ken, and Larry) also described their Thai students as the majority being women. The gender of students appeared to play a role in cross-cultural experiences of the majority of male teachers in this study. The overall characteristics of the Thai students described by the American teachers included passive learners, avoiding confrontation and criticism, low motivation and low desire to read, lacking critical thinking skills, being dependent, and lacking English language ability.

**Passive Learners**

In the present study, all of the nine American teachers described their Thai students as being passive, shy, and introverted in class. They described their Thai students in the following ways:

Students tend to be very quiet and waited for me to tell them what they were supposed to know and what they were supposed to do… the empty receptacle waiting for me to fill them with knowledge (Nathan).

My expectation for them to be more actively engaged individually, more involved individually, and so instead what I got was kind of like, a very passive group of people sitting politely listening to me (Ken).

Students are very hesitant to talk. I used to try to ask for hands and nobody raise their hands (Lance).

One thing I notice about the Thais is that they're pretty introverted in class. They were quiet, they were very shy. You don't know what they know and you don't know what they don't know because they don't express themselves verbally very well. They're shy, they're quite and they're timid. I don't know what's the right word is. They're not just going to speak out very much in the class. No matter what you do (Dean).

Thais are very reluctant to speak out (Kevin).

Thais [students] are, uhm…difficult to get them to interact (Norm).
The passive behavior of Thai students was viewed by many of the American teachers as an obstacle to learning. Sam, for example, expressed his personal viewpoint toward student passivity.

I think that's [student being passive] the obstacle for Western teachers cause we expect students that if they have questions to ask and that's part of the learning process. We don't consider that disrespectful for these students to ask questions. We don't want them to sit like zombies (Sam).

Other teachers such as Ken, Nathan, and Dean also expressed some concern regarding student passivity. They viewed student passivity as problematic, as this behavior made it more difficult and challenging for them to accurately evaluate and assess students in order to improve their teaching methods.

I try to excite some interaction because from my cultural perspective a way in which a student shows interest in the subject matter, a way in which a student shows that he or she likes the subject matter, is engaged, is stimulated, is enjoying the class, is connecting or that I, you know, connecting…as the teacher I'm connecting and pushing the right button, as opposed to not connecting at all is through that demeanor of a student sitting there and of whether she or he is engaged. So, if there's a lack of engagement, just passive listening, it's really difficult for me, with my own cultural bias, to gauge and to assess whether or not I'm being effective (Ken).

I look for visual cues, you know you study visual and communication studies and you know that 90% of what's conveyed is through our eyes and seeing. And when you see a student that is sitting there and very passive and very disconnected, this passive way, you might think that what, you don't like English or you don't like me, or they don't understand? I have no way of answering these questions (Ken).

To me it was very important for them [Thai students] to answer questions when I asked them. Most questions aren’t. I was almost never rhetorical. I’m hoping that they’ll tell me what they know. The only way that I can know what to teach them was to find out what they know and if they don’t understand…to me that’s no problem. I find that when they don’t understand it, I’m OK. But, I want to know that they know, cause I can teach them again in another way (Nathan).

They’re quiet. They may be well mannered, but it doesn’t mean they’re learning anything. Just because they’re looking off or looking like they’re taking notes doesn’t mean they’re necessarily learning anything. They could be thinking about something completely different (Nathan).

I don't get feedback as much feedback in Thailand like I do in the United States like the place that I've been teaching for many years. They do instructor evaluations. When I get these evaluations back I always get this glowing like the teacher is awesome, or it changes my life, or I would take more courses…you know what you're doing with the students in the U.S. and I get that in Vietnam. But, I don't get that in Thailand. They have no formal evaluation and they don't really come up afterward and say I really enjoyed your class, and they don't come up and say I really hated your class. They don't tell you anything, so when the class is over with, there is no chit chat, no little talking (Dean).

The student’s evaluation is important otherwise it'll become a one-way street. Information only goes that way. Of course you get the information back in the exam, but if the student is scoring poorly, you don't know why they're scoring poorly. They're not going to tell you, they're not going to say, like why you got a 40 on your exam, oh because I couldn't understand what you were saying. That's not going to happen.
They're going to be what are you stupid? You got only 40 on your exam and they would say...what were you saying? The teaching method may be wrong (Dean).

To improve class participation and to encourage students to speak up, several of the American teachers tried to find ways such as calling on them randomly, asking a simple question, or creating a friendly and relaxing classroom environment to remedy this challenge.

I will see that they will not fail no matter what they say, just say something even I don't know because like…I tell them nobody knows anything and something that I don't know. So, it's OK not to know something (Lance).

I always tell everyone that I don't care if you fluent in English. Just talk and let me know what you think. So, I constantly ask people for their opinions (Kevin).

I try to get them to draw them out a lot which for them is very strange because they used to their whole life for teacher talks and students write...top down...which is…umm I think I'm shaking them up a little bit (Kevin).

I try to have a relaxed atmosphere when I'm teaching or instructing. I try not to be professorial and I try not to jam things on or force concept on them. I try to be understanding, I know there are differences in language, differences in what I know and what they know. I try not to force things on them. And by smiling a lot with them and by showing them that I understand and telling them that I understand that you may not understand everything I was saying, but if you have any questions you can ask me, I'll be happy to answer your questions and I'll show you. So, I try to let them know that I expect them not to know everything and they feel a little more relaxed. They're still very shy and they're very embarrassed sometimes to speak English (Lance).

Students are very hesitant to talk. I used to try to ask for hands and nobody raised their hands. So, I have to do kind of a technique where at the beginning when the class starts as far as the first week or two, I just call on people, you know, for answers. The idea is that, I really don't care what they say. If they say anything close, I'll try to attach it to something that is true, you know. So, when I call on them initially, it's not to really get answer from them is to make them talk and to feel and to know that I'm not going to embarrassed them no matter what they say. I'm not going to...make it safe to talk that one of the concepts of trying to get to them (Lance).

If he asks and they don’t respond, Nathan used this question,

Do you understand this? And I don't get a yes or no. OK, well since you have no questions, I guess we'll have a quiz on this topic. And right away, there some students recognize this that the quiz is not a real quiz, but the quiz is I'm actually asking them do you understand (Nathan).

Avoiding Confrontation and Criticism

Besides being passive, some of the American teachers depicted their Thai students as being non confrontational, avoiding conflict, and uncomfortable giving or receiving criticism. For example, Sam expressed that in some circumstances it was difficult for him to detect any misunderstandings that occurred in the class.
I'm not aware of it [cross-cultural misunderstandings] because if there is misunderstanding with Thai students they would talk among themselves, and they wouldn't say anything to me and I just assume that everything is going fine (Sam).

Larry and Dean also experienced similar incidents. Larry, for example, felt that some Thai students take academic criticism personally. Instead of debating or talking it out with the teachers, some Thai students would rather avoid confrontational action and opt to get around, or get out of the potential conflict situation passively.

Some Thai students are very stubborn. When they get confused, they just closed down. Instead of saying... understanding that, hey this is just the problem and we can figure out how to write this dissertation, they sometime just close down (Larry).

They seem to just close and you can't get them to provide materials or something or they will go on another track and try to switch supervisor. I had that happened a couple of times (Larry).

They don't realize that we try to work together to get to the same place. The problem of the dissertation we have to realize that we both are on the same side of the same fence. It's not pleasing the teacher or pleasing something (Larry).

Dean also learned, while having a Thai master’s student practice her presentation before presenting at a national conference, that she had felt embarrassed and upset when a senior professor gave her comments and forthright criticism. Dean then realized that Thai students may not be as prepared or as accepting of public criticism in comparison to American graduate students.

You give your paper in advance and you give it to your peers you give it to your colleague and they will give you constructive criticism. They will help you and they're going to tell you what you do right and what you do wrong because if they are very nice to you, that's not going to help you. Why give it if nobody is going to help you correct what you're doing? So, in the U.S. it's very common, and it's unusual, apparently, in Thailand (Dean).

**Motivational Issues**

Many of the American teachers reported to feel frustrated because they perceived their Thai students as lacking learning motivation. Some of the teachers, especially those who taught the undergraduate freshmen and sophomore, even viewed Thai students as being lazy and irresponsible. Sam, Kevin, and Lance, for example expressed,
They are not here necessarily to get a job and I don't think they know why they are here. They're distracted a lot by other phones and other nonsense now. When they go on their computer they don't do their assignments they're playing the video games (Sam).

In western schools it's all about my competence and what I'm doing and being able to answer those students’ questions and make sure they understand. Here is a lot more motivational, gaining student's interest (Sam).

I have a small class with some very dull students, honestly speaking. When some of them don't have a clue and I feel like I'm just wasting my time teaching these students...they just don't have a clue (Sam).

I find that Thai students, by and large, compared to Chinese students and other students here like an international college, I find that Thai students are lazy compared to them, because Chinese students that I'm familiar with, especially in Eastern University* almost half of the students were Chinese and very serious (Lance).

Based on the interviews, the low motivation seemed to be rooted in several factors. One possible factor may be because of a strong parental influence on their education. The real motivation may be because they may be forced to attend college rather than attending by their own choice. Some students select the program based on their parents’ preferences, not their own.

I'm not sure who is the customer, the students or the parents of the students? I'm not so sure about that. But in America, it's pretty sure that the kids are our customers. I made them happy. Here you got to worry about the kids and the parents too (Sam).

I don't really know what drives them, or maybe they just get pushed by their parents, something like that. So, there is this motivational issue and so I'm constantly working on keeping their attention (Sam).

The low motivation may be due to the lack of clear academic and professional goals among the students.

I don't know whether it's, to what extent it's cultural and in part it's psychological part too because they don't really know why they are here (Sam).

I was working at the university. We have a lot of rich kids. I mean kids from wealthy families cause otherwise they can't afford to go to that school. Most of them come from families that have family businesses, so in my mind they don't really care what I said, because when they leave they will go work with their mom and dad and are going to do what they tell them to do. They will have some people below them of course. Most of them are just going to listen to their mom and dad. They're always right and when they talk to somebody below them it will be like that too, so why bother going to school (Sam).

The low motivation may be because they never have real life experience working in the field or know what is expected of them in the field that they want to be in.
In comparison, the American students have a little bit more exposure to these (business related) experiences. A lot of them work in high schools, so they understand that kinds of thing (Sam).

If the kids want to be a doctor they’d know that they have to learn this stuff to be a doctor. But what if what they know about business is from somebody rich and has a Mercedes and tells people what to do, to be the boss, or they want to be a businessman because they can have somebody drive you? They [some Thai students] don't know what that means. They don't know the skills they’re required to (Sam).

Lacking motivation may also be based on a variety of factors such as maturity, interest, and experience. It is important to point out that of all the American teachers, Dean, who taught graduate levels in science and pre-med students, was one of only a few teachers who reported more positive experiences regarding students’ motivation and ambition to learn. Dean also perceived his students as “super achievers” and described them as hardworking and motivated students.

In Thailand, they’re so genuinely interested in learning what I'm teaching them and the field that I'm teaching them. They'll come up afterward…you know that they want to learn. They tell that they spend a lot of time studying and they want to do what I'm doing and they want to know how they can do that. I inspire them to study and to learn and they inspire me to be a better teacher, it goes both ways. For me, it was a very interesting and energizing endeavor. It was fun for me. I thought the students were very interested in what I had to say and what I was teaching. I really enjoy it (Dean).

I thought the students were very courteous. They were typically very attentive. Listened to what I said. They were always very polite. I always thought that was very interesting. That's not something you typically see in the U. S., or in Vietnam, umm that polite. They always say kha and krub, something like that. So, overall, I thought it was a very good experience. I really enjoyed it. I enjoy teaching in the U.S. and I enjoy teaching in Thailand (Dean).

**Reading Ability and Habit**

Many of the American teachers were also concerned about the reading habits and reading ability among many Thai students. Norm, for example expressed his frustration.

Thai students, they don't like to read. You really have to fight with them. It's just not part of the culture and even the Thai professors. I know friends that don't like to read. They don't like to read text books and stuff. They do it cause they have to. It's not a natural thing for them (Norm).

It's very different in America…you'd say go read those chapters and come in if you have questions if not here is your exam next week you know you're on your own go do that. Here you just...all your homework and everything you have to bring in to the classroom and have to keep the reading as minimum (Sam).

When you're teaching in America, the book companies want you to get their books in your classroom because they figure you're the customer. If I were teaching 200 kids, they like giving me books and then they can sell to 200 kids. So, they give you the books and I assign them to the kids. Then I can tell students to read chapter this and that, and they, if they have the questions, they’ll ask and get the answers
for me right, so that's great. Whereas here the kids…number one they don't read books they don't like to read. So, you're going to read all of this. I mean you have to, but the kids don't do it (Sam).

Sam also continued that his knowledge about the Thai students’ reading skills also came from another faculty member who warned him about the “lack” of interest in reading among Thai students.

The Dean [inaudible] she told us after a meeting of the faculty, she was telling us that Thai students they don't read a lot like Americans. If you give them a text book, 500 pages you know to read chapter 5 or whatever. She was telling us that Thai students, they won't read (Sam).

**Critical Thinking Skills**

About half of the American teachers, especially those who were teaching younger groups of students considered their Thai students as lacking critical thinking skills. This was another characteristic of the Thai students that appears to create a lot of frustration and dissatisfaction among many of the American teachers.

The Thai method of teaching does not produce critical thinkers, in my opinion, and that reflects on students that I’ve seen (Kevin).

I think, to me, one of the most difficult factors about Thai students is that, uhm and Thai people in general...is the idea that they have not really developed methods for critical thinking (Lance).

It's a wrestling match, 'cause the students don't want to think. I get the freshmen, sophomore, and juniors, uhm juniors, they start to think. The freshmen and sophomores don't want to think and just want to sit and memorize things and read and spit it back out. But you have to give.. to start thinking and actually talking and actually being able to communicate (Norm).

However, other American teachers such as Dean and Ken had a different perception towards Thai student’s critical thinking skills.

I've met as many bright and as many intelligent Thai people as I have any nation. Bright people are bright people, you find them everywhere. I've met very critically very insightful Thai people, but they don't express that because the culture, it's such that the nail that sticks up gets whacked. Out of deference some other person they may think it's superior in authority, superior in rank and stature, class, and society. They may just say, ahh, I'm not going to say anything, I'm just gonna button my lip and I'll just let it ride. It's not worth countering that argument or bringing up a critical thought because I might risk embarrassment (Ken).

I think Thai students, you know they're smart students and they're smart people. I think a lot of time they just, they don't verbalize it. They may not say it. Anyway, I think they can think critically because I talk to students and they come up with the same questions that American students come up with. I think they're just quieter (Dean).
Teacher Dependence

Many of the American teachers described the learning behavior of their students as depending on the teachers. They explained that their Thai students appeared to rely on them to motivate, encourage, and provide guidance to them more often, in comparison to their American students.

The students seem...they’re university students, but they're from high school. I felt like they needed more guidance. I think university students here [in the U.S] are more independent, but there [Thailand] you're the teacher and you should tell them what to do, how to do, and give clear instructions and be like a role model for them, kind of (Lisa).

This is much more teaching oriented than in Western universities. In America, the kids are going to school and some of them are better than the others and they want to get through the university and get a job and go on with their lives (Sam).

You try to bring a lot more in class, it's very different. In America you'd say go read those chapters and come in if you have questions, if not, here is your exam next week you know you're on your own go do that. I spend more time [in a Thai classroom] trying to get them to do homework and trying to help them understand things. Your role is a lot more, uh, I don't want to say parenting, because it's too strong. But, you kind of look at them and you treat them more like your own children (Sam).

Limited English Proficiency

Most of the American teachers described their Thai students as lacking English proficiency in all areas including speaking, reading, listening and writing. Especially among the American teachers who taught relatively new and young college students in their freshmen and sophomore years. Below are the descriptions of English language ability of the Thai students as observed by some of the American teachers:

The students’ [English] level was very low. It was not about low, medium and advanced students, but low, and lower, and lowest low (Nathan).

Our first year [students] had to be taught by the Thai teacher because the students couldn’t understand. Their English was so low that it couldn’t be taught in English (Nathan).

When asked to compare the English language levels with American students, Lisa responded,

Maybe elementary school or I would say junior high or less than junior high actually because in junior high you expect to read novels with little pictures. But for lower level they [Thai students] read very simple like just a few sentences per page with a big picture, and then turn the page and another big picture with a few sentences. The higher level has more complex books with some pictures to guide them but some of them
were kind of advanced, well not advanced but compared to each other ‘cause they are the same year. They read more challenging books, but I'd say that they are still quite low (Lisa).

They need to develop their English ability cause it was very low, very low. I would think some people say that it's about junior high school level in Japan. Quite low, even though it's first-year college (Lisa).

The interview data indicated the lack of English ability among many Thai students, especially among the young and inexperienced first and second year college students.

To accommodate students with limited English proficiency, some of the American teachers tried to add Thai words to increase understanding. Some allow students to use Thai in class. One teacher used a “go to” student or students who can understand English and can translate or explain some difficult concepts to their classmates. Another teacher had a Thai teacher in class to act as translator or a “go to” person.

So, they recognize Thai was not gonna be able to bridge the gap. They did use (Thai) in among each other a little bit, but I only...I didn't stop them. It's one of those things that I don't think that L1 should be crushed to produce L2. But, if they went too long or too much dialog in Thai, I would just say, hi guys this is English class. I understand if they used to ask what that word means and turn to others and the other said oh, that's mean a noun or noun is this in Thai, I don't really have a problem with that. I actually encourage it, cause understanding is more important than being one language exclusive certainly in that level that was the case (Nathan).

I throw in some Thai words because they may get confused when they don't know the English words. I'd ask them you know what I mean and I sometimes, I give a Thai word (Larry).

When I started, I actually used Thai cause some of the students were not strong in English, but I was not encouraged to do that because they want English spoken here (Kevin).

So if I asked one of the other students and they had no idea of how to answer it, I could choose one of the more capable students to double check and if they can’t get it (Nathan). I used them as a way to check for myself in order to see whether or not the other students are getting it. But uh, we called them the go-to students – the ones you go to when you need something from the class (Nathan).

I usually have another Thai instructor with me. Somebody who's not a student. They would be in there and they would be learning and listening to what I was saying as well. They would help guide the class sometimes. Sometimes they actually encourage the students to speak out more (Dean).

Most of the time, however, the teachers appear to allow the use of Thai as minimum and only if necessary in their class.

If it goes on for too long or if it seemed like it was going off topic then I would stop them and say whoa, whoa, whoa and stop them. But if I said something and only one student understood, I could spend five minutes explaining that one idea [inaudible] and talk around it until everyone understands. Or the one person understands could say what it is in Thai and they all understand within a couple of seconds. So, I’m not against using Thai. I don’t know Thai, I’m learning, but it was especially that first year, I didn’t
know Thai at all. So they said sit back, I have no way of knowing whether or not their translation is correct. But, pretty much for the most part they all had dictionaries and they’d use them and I don’t mind (Nathan).

Respect and Appreciation Toward the Teacher

Despite some negative perceptions toward Thai students, American teachers also described their Thai students as respectful, polite, well behaved, eager to please, and trying very hard to accommodate. Some of the American teachers appreciated that Thai students are fun and loving, which makes their cross-cultural teaching experience in Thailand pleasant and rewarding. The American teachers described their experiences regarding respect and appreciation toward teachers in Thailand as follows:

In Thailand, what I see in education is I think they appreciate you. To me, that's kind of an emotional currency that makes a difference to me, you know. They do appreciate if you have been able to do something good for them. That makes a big difference (Lance).

It’s this thing that once you're someone’s teacher, you're always their teacher (Dean).

They seem very nice. I mean, I like them all. They're very respectful and playful compared to American students (Sam).

I think it's flattering at first because Thai students are very polite and they laugh easy and they seem eager to please, you know. So I think in a way it makes it flattering for teachers (Larry).

At the end of the class, I kind of like the Thai tradition when one of the students is delegated to thank the teacher, I think that's very nice. When the students did the speech at the end [of the class] it's quite touching sometimes (Larry).

Especially for Lisa, she seemed to be extremely impressed and fascinated by the respect and the special treatment she received from her Thai students while teaching at the lower Northeastern university. Lisa described her experience,

I felt very welcome, and I was amazed at how respectful the students in Thailand are toward teachers in general. The way they interact with me, the way they greet teachers with the wai and asking permission to come into the classroom like "teacher may I come in?" I'd said, come in come in, don't worry you don't have to ask, but they ask before they come in. They are very respectful. They don't say negative things and they are always going like this nodding and smiling and the Wai Kru [The Thai’s Teacher’s Day celebration]. That event itself it's to show a lot of respect to educators. So, as an American, I felt a big difference on the attitude towards teachers (Lisa).

Lisa also provided an example of how Thai students took care of her and her friend when she went to see them play a game at the gym one evening.
When they finished, it was still raining and my friend and I said it was dark and we had a moped how were we going to get home? We didn't even ask our students but they already were talking to each other about how to take us home. And we thought, wow, how considerate of them and how respectful of teachers! One student organized everything and she said, OK, I'll call my brother who was not at the university…she called her brother and yes he took us back to the dorm in his truck. So, we were dry and we said oh, what about our moped? And the students said "teacher it's OK I drive" and so they drove our moped. But, it was raining. They said, no problem it's OK. They rode our mopeds in the rain back to our dorm, dropped it off…then they had to go back and forth two times in the rain to get their own mopeds too. They came back to the dorm and they were drenched. We were so worried and we said, oh no you rode in the rain and they said "it's OK" in that lovely Thai smile. So, that was just so powerful. How much they did for us and how much they cared for us, not just because we were their teachers, but maybe because we were not from Thailand or because we were guests. I don't know, but they have this very strong feeling of wanting to take care of us (Lisa).

My friend and I feel very lucky to experience something like that. We'll never forget. I don't think I would do the same. It's so dangerous because I'm really scared to drive a moped…I'm so influenced by that now. They're giving, so giving. I'll never forget that day, but there are many other things, but I'll never forget that day (Lisa).

Although high respect toward the teachers made teaching more pleasant and rewarding for many of the American teachers, some pointed out potential pitfalls of receiving too much deference. Some negative consequences stem from high regard toward educators that could impact the quality of learning include pleasing teachers and students reluctant to voice their opinion in class as stated by Larry.

A lot of the educational system here is pleasing the teachers… so some of them are confused they think if they can please me then they can get the PhD and they are confused and I said no no no, we are working together now to improve the quality of what you are doing, so both reach some standard, not just please me. That's the hard thing for some students. They don't understand it's [thesis or dissertation] a product. I try to explain to them that not exactly like everybody is going to read it and people in teaching business have an idea what a standard is. What's acceptable and it will be examined. Because you please the three examiners it doesn't mean it will be acceptable (Larry).

High esteem toward educators among Thai students also seemed to create some distance between the teachers and the students. Ken, for example, compared his experience as a student in the U.S. with his experience teaching in Thailand and felt that there was always some social distance between him and his Thai students.

When I was going to college I used to call my professors by their first name, Thomas Dean* was one of my teachers and Jeff* was another one. I used to play basketball with them. I mean we were on a first name basis. I would have no problem talking about my problems and sharing with them like I would over a beer or something. [In Thailand] I couldn't get most of my students to that point where they would feel comfortable being informal. It was always a distance. I never knew whether it was mistrust, whether that they didn't like me, but the distance can communicate a lot of things. Social distance can communicate a lot
of things and can be misunderstood. And I never was sure there was connecting, they didn't like me, or why they didn't want to be informal (Ken).

Nathan also experienced a similar situation that his students felt uncomfortable being informal or expressive with him.

They never felt…it seems they never really felt comfortable until the very end. At the very end, they would talk to us at lunchtime but as far as clarifying the questions and stuff like that, almost never. So if they understood in class and they understood if they did it wrong, that’s because they didn’t understand and they didn’t ask. That’s hard to know, hard to know what’s the cause of those kinds of problems (Nathan).

Nathan and Dean felt that the high respect lead to students feeling reluctant to express their idea or to be more expressive in class. This behavior can prevent students from providing feedback or class evaluations that could be useful and beneficial to teaching and learning.

Part of it might be the level of respect is so high. They wouldn't say anything about it. And the instructor can't improve themselves. They can't improve any of that (Dean).

There’s something else there that may be a Thailand thing that the teacher, umm.,students feel that teachers may feel that they did something wrong that students don’t understand that (Nathan).

All and all, the characteristics of the Thai students in general were passive, they avoid criticism, have low English language skills, “lack” enthusiasm to learn, and appear to rely heavily on teachers for motivation and guidance. However, the teachers also described their Thai students as respectful, obedient, accommodating, and friendly. These general characteristics, both positive and negative, appear to fit the description summed up by Larry that the Thai students,

Seem to be very polite and they are quick to laugh, eager to be liked, and eager to get along well. Not so eager to learn things, though...I don't think [laughs] (Larry).

**Theme 2: Lost In Translation**

One of the most obvious, yet significant factors leading to serious cross-cultural misunderstandings between American teachers and Thais, seemed to be grounded in the differences in language – verbal and non-verbal - as well as differences in communication patterns.
Language Limitations

Based on the interview data, most of the American teachers reported that the limitation of English proficiency among their Thai students as well as their own limited Thai language skills were the main components that made their teaching and living in Thailand challenging. Language diversity in both verbal and non-verbal communication, therefore, resulted in extensive reports of cross-cultural difficulties and misunderstandings among the American teachers. Lisa, for example, considered language limitation as the main factor for her cross-cultural misunderstanding as she expressed,

I think the language is the misunderstanding. It's difficult to communicate, but it's just the language limitation (Lisa).

Dean also described his language difficulties.

So, there is a lot lost in…the word that I use most of the time is…lost in translation. And it's lost in translation for a million reasons. The tones, the words, the vocabulary, the real meaning that's in there. The subtle meaning, subtle tones are….is there an aggressive tone [in the discussion] or not? That's very important (Dean).

Especially in the classroom where the exchange of language and communication between teachers and students is essential and frequent, most of the American teachers reported experiencing some confusion and difficulty inside the Thai classrooms because of the limited English proficiency among the Thai students. Dean elaborated,

In the U.S. it's not a language barrier, so it was very easy to just speak. I say what I think to the students. In Thailand, I got to be more careful. I have to slow down my words, slow down the speed that I talk and try to select words that I think they can understand. I really do slow down my speech a bit. I try to also ensure that they understand what I'm saying. I'll say "do you understand what I'm saying?" Do you understand that? For the most part, they would either nod, you know nod their heads, yes. A lot of time, they were quiet (Dean).

…sometime they said they did understand it, but they really didn't and I know that because afterwards, sometimes students would walk up to me and ask me a question after the class in private and it be more like "can you explain this more?" and I would think, although students in the U.S. do that to, but it's more common in Thailand. They would say, can you explain more about it?" And I could tell that they didn't really grab didn't really understand what I was saying or what I was explaining. They may understood the concept somewhat, but not everything and other times, students would come up to me and it was absolutely clear that they didn't understand what I said, but they were just going to go along with it and they would say yes or chai kha [yes] I understand. In reality, they don't (Dean).
It's just me trying to get my point across in English and not knowing if the students understood what I said and even then sometime the way they phrased the questions back to me, I don't understand. And they would ask something specific...an example would be they would ask me questions and the way they're phrasing it, the sentence doesn't make sense, or I don't understand. Then we're kind of both lost and I'm trying to figure out what is it that you're asking me? That's very difficult because if it's in English or a native speaker, I would understand them right away, can answer them right away. There'd be no confusion. But, the way they phrase the question to me, I could answer the questions totally wrong, or I may be answering another question. So, the language is very difficult (Dean).

Other American teachers also encountered some misunderstanding, struggles, and difficulties in the classroom based on students’ English language limitation.

When I thought they were bored, they were actually...they aren't bored they just didn't understand what I was saying. A lot of time I would think that they were bored and I’d get mad at them...it's like...you're not listening to me...actually, a lot of them do not understand English at that level. So they would just kind of blur off and drift off (Norm).

My students had considerable exposure to reading English and they had difficulties composing sentences (Ken).

Not always [understand the conversations]. They [her Thai students] would always say hmmm and try to ask and we try to say it slowly or more easily, but they still wouldn't understand and they would turn to their friends like "what did she say?" [laughs] They had to translate or we used body language (Lisa).

It was so difficult sometimes. When I am teaching and am trying to explain some difficult ideas. I use some pictures. [We] used all body language, gestures, and drawing and I think they understood. But we also have to use the computer and then translate, but it would show the words in Thai, but we don't understand Thai. But, we didn't always use it. We tried to explain it in English as much as possible (Lisa).

Lisa also continued,

Sometimes when we give instruction and say, OK let’s start and they would look confused and say...huh what are we doing? So, it was so difficult to communicate and make sure that they understood what we wanted them to do. We were asking them questions, they couldn't answer sometimes and we didn't understand what they wanted to say (Lisa).

Nathan described the limited English language ability of his Thai students.

The lowest of the low were taught by foreign teachers who could speak Thai. Their English was so weak that they couldn't learn English in English...They are very sloppy. Sometime they're accurate, but other times they are just...just by chance that they can put the sentence together correctly (Nathan).

Nathan also pointed out that the limited English proficiency among his students was much more complicated than simply lacking English skills.

They are capable of expressing all the ideas in Thai, so they are not really beginning language people. It's not like they are six year olds, that they don't know what the direct object is, that they don't know what a passive sentence is (Nathan).

It’s more complicated than that. They had the ability with the language that they had been exposed to it, but they couldn't use the language because they never really used the language. So, they would write
sentences that were nonsensical. The subject and the object were wrong, but if I ask them come on guys, you know that every sentence has a subject, verb, and object. They knew this. They have the understanding of the meta knowledge about language, they just don't know how to apply the knowledge and noun, verb, and object is the basic sentence, but they couldn't do that (Nathan).

Language barriers seemed to also prevent the Thai students from effectively participating in class activities or developing a more meaningful relationship with the American.

But speaking in English, sometimes they're shy because they're embarrassed that they're going to make mistakes when saying something. Of course, I would be embarrassed or shy to speak Thai to them because I know that I'm going to make a mistake (Dean).

Some of it I know they want to talk, but they're afraid that they're gonna say something that is going to be taken wrong (Dean).

It's very difficult for many of them for group discussion for two reasons. Many of the Thai girls are very shy, number one, and their English ability is not very good (Kevin).

In addition to limited English proficiency among Thai students, other American teachers also mentioned their own lacking of Thai language skills as the obstacle in the Thai classrooms.

With the teacher who couldn't give them scaffolding in Thai because I didn't speak Thai. I spoke zero Thai. They had to function in English. They were really afraid of the White teachers. I mean, it was clear that they knew that Thai was not gonna be utilized as the way to navigate the class. It was going to be in English 100%. (Nathan).

I can sit with these students and they're going to be a half or a three quarters of the students that I can sit and talk with and carry on a regular conversation after the class more likely, but the minute that I say a couple of words in Thai, they think I understand Thai and they response back to me and I'm lost (Dean).

When I mispronounce a Thai word, sometimes they will correct me and they are very relentless about that… Sometimes it’s frustrating to me because it's like they're picking back at me. Say ahh now you know what it’s like when we're trying to figure it out. I think it's 99% they're trying to help me pronounce words and I think it’s 1% that they're saying kind of stick their finger in my eye, saying see! If you want me to understand what you're saying you have to say it like this (Dean).

Other American teachers such as Ken and Lance reported encountering some difficulties learning the Thai language.

It was extremely difficult to learn the Thai language and I felt rather depressed that I have been in the country for 6, 8, 12 months and still felt that (Ken).

During that first 18 months, it got so tiring to me to always hear this yack yack yack yack. The constant din [inaudible] of foreign language in the background, and for the first half hour of my life when I wake up in the morning from 8:00 to 8:30 or whatever that was OK, but after 8:30 my brain was just fatigued and I found myself frequently saying oh, I don't want to hear any word of Thai. My brain was just very tired of processing it (Ken).
I just feel like I just heard these strings of utterances and now let me translate that, oh, that in English means this, now how do I response and oh, I think in English and I translated into Thai and then I would say it. So, it was always these coding and decoding and coding and decoding and I found it to be oppressive, you know, after 10 hours. I just would…wanted to just…get away from it (Ken).

When I first came over here I thought that I could speak Thai. And then I studied at Chulalongkorn University and ever since I got out of there, I studied…umm, well, about three months, and from the first class I have never been able to speak Thai very well (Lance).

The limited Thai language skills of most of the American teachers in this study also seemed to be the main factors for cross-cultural difficulties outside of the Thai classrooms as well. Norm, for example, described some frustration that he and other foreign teachers had regarding the limited English proficiency of the faculty and staff.

Most places that have foreign teachers, they'll have other staff or they'll have other faculty that can speak English, but the staffs don't speak that much English. So, most places if a lecturer doesn't have a certain level of Thai they will have difficulty understanding the system and a lot of them [foreign teachers] they get frustrated because they don't understand how the system works. Then they'll get mad and they'll blow up…they get quite angry. I've gone through my share of that. I'm getting better now (Norm).

Sam and Lisa also indicated some difficulties outside the classroom based on their lack of the Thai language skills.

If somebody asks if I can speak Thai, I would have to say "pood Thai mai dai” [I can't speak Thai] then they would freak out. They don't know what to make of it. They don't know if they just said mean things and they don't know what they're allowed to say. I don't even know they are bad words too you know (Sam).

In general it's hard to communicate because we didn't speak Thai, so our language barrier makes it very difficult for us to live everyday. So ordering food, because in the province we stayed, all menus are in Thai. It was not miscommunication, just lack of communication. We look at the menu and think, oh I have no idea what it says (Lisa).

It was difficult to navigate. We took the Songtaew [Thai minibus] and we had to ask which one goes where but we couldn't communicate with them very often, so we just sometimes took a chance and went the wrong way (Lisa).

Some of them [Songtaew - minibus drivers] actually spoke a little bit of English and that was helpful. I think we were traveling in a foreign country but we know we don't speak the language, we anticipate problems (Lisa).

Lisa also continued that the lack of Thai language skills prevented her from developing a relationship with the local people.

I actually wanted to speak to so many people to get to know them more. For example one lady who has a restaurant she, uh, we always went to her place and she always makes good food. I wanted to ask her more questions to get to know her and her family… I wanted to get to know them more but we just can't
communicate. So, that part was the lack of communication ability and didn't get to connect with people at a deeper level. For me personally, I wanted to, but I just couldn't (Lisa).

Dean also explained his language difficulties when living in Thailand.

I don't hear tones well. I don't speak Thai well, but the way somebody speaks to somebody, there's two things going on...I guess in Thailand there is three because they're a form of pee [older brothers or sisters] or nong [younger brothers or sisters] or whatever that is implied and that's stated and the aggressive tone of the voice like “oyy” [exclamation] or whatever and you wonder is that a good word or bad word that everybody uses, or that somebody says hey jerk. And then the word that they are using, so two of those three things are lost because I don't know the words they are saying usually. If they're cussing at them, I don't know what the words are, so I don't...[know] if they're angry or not. Pee or nong I can understand that, but the tone as aggressive or not aggressive voice I don't understand. I don't interpret that well, so I'm lost (Dean).

I'm a person that if we say we're going to point A then B, C, and D then I expect them to go from B, C and D and A, not meeting at A and go L and J and 1 and 2 and B and...especially with the language barrier. It's hard to get thing that’s out of the ordinary explained to you (Dean).

Based on Dean’s response, it reflects the complexity that acquiring a new language is not simply learning the definition of words, the sound, and the grammar rules. It also involves many levels of learning including the cognitive knowledge about the language, the affective aspects and sensibilities toward the language, as well as the operational competency to apply cognitive and affective skills in order to recognize or pick and choose appropriate verbal and nonverbal codes in social interactions (Kim, 1997). The complexity also extended to the use of context in conveying and understanding the “real” message. In Dean’s case, being from a culture where low-context communication patterns are more common, it was more challenging for him to accurately “decode” both the verbal and nonverbal cues in Thailand, a country that uses a high-context communication pattern.

**Misinterpretation and Misuse of Non-Verbal Clues**

In addition to the limitation of verbal and spoken language, the misinterpretation or misuse of gestures and non-verbal clues were also factors that lead to various classroom misunderstandings among the American teachers in this study. Dean described his limited cultural knowledge to determine other’s behaviors.
In the U.S., I'm a very good judge of character, almost every...every single time, but in Thailand, I'm not a
good judge of character. In the U.S., I can look at somebody and can tell for the most part if it's somebody
that you want to be around or not be around. They can be dangerous, if they look like a criminal or look
like someone that has been out of jail, or looks like someone who's a minister or a choirboy, or whatever.
Somebody who's safe or somebody who could be dangerous to me or somebody who...I don't know.
Which are they? Are they safe, are they a good or bad person? We all know that we can't judge a book by
its cover and you can't always judge somebody's aggressiveness, or if they're good or bad based on what
they look like. Someone can look like a homeless person, but he can be the nicest person out there.
Somebody else could be very well groomed and look very nice, but can be aggressive (Dean).

In Thailand, the problem that I have was that when I see somebody walking down the street, I don't
recognize those cues that the way they dress that's something a good person or a bad person or a
dangerous person or not. The way that they move their arms, the kind of shoes they have. All those subtle things, like
cheap watch or expensive watch, they have gold jewelry on or they don't have jewelry on, are they rich or
poor and that's a hard thing (Dean).

That's something I have to deal with every single day and I don't think I'll ever be on a comfort level, no
matter how long I live there. I'm not going to be able to recognize the good and the bad people like I can in
the United States (Dean).

The limited cultural knowledge also prevented Dean from assessing Thai people based on
their different tones and accent. This limitation can create uncertainty which can lead to
confusion and misunderstandings.

In the U.S., Just their accent, the way somebody talks to me, I know they're southern, they're northern, or
western or whatever, or they're aggressive in their tone or not. In Thailand I can hear somebody screaming
at somebody and I can ask somebody what's wrong, what's the problem and they'd say mai chai [no] they're
asking to bring the carrots over. But, I'm hearing the tone and I was like oh, that person is angry at them
and they'd say no they're not angry, they asked to bring the pot and pan over. So, the tone is so important to
Thai language, for us it's just an aspect that we don't deal with, so I don't understand very well (Dean).

Greetings

Based on Thai history and socio-cultural background, the country is heavily influenced
by social hierarchical status. Social positions, therefore, play a significant role in all aspects of
cultural norms and behaviors. Ken, for example, concisely experienced the importance of social
status in Thai society.

There are different degrees in which you show respect and acknowledgment and the status in the society
both linguistically as well as in terms of physical gestures and demeanor and the way you carry yourself.
Whether you look them in the eyes for a while or you keep your eyes down and how high you raise your
hands to wai them in terms of respect (Ken).

Especially, in the area of social interaction such as greeting and addressing one another,
the complex social hierarchical system in Thailand seemed to create great confusion among the
American teachers who may be more familiar with an egalitarian social concept. For example, Thais meet and greet, they usually *wai*, by putting the two palms together in a praying gesture in front of the face, and then bowing. The *wai* and the bow also have different levels for different individuals, ages, and social statuses. The higher the *wai* toward the top of the head, the more respect one shows to another. This specific cultural gesture appeared to be problematic for many of the teachers. Dean, for example, explained in great length of his confusion toward Thai greeting custom.

One thing that we do wrong over there is for Americans or foreigners they see the Thais *wai*, they put their hands together and *wai* to us to say hello *sawaddee krub* [hello]. We just, as foreigners, not knowing the culture so well, we assume that's the form of saying hello, like instead of waving our hands and saying hi, we put our hands together in a praying motion and *wai* somebody and say hello, but in Thai. So, when we see anybody we say *sawaddee krub* and we put our hands together and we *wai* to them and the reality is if they're younger than us, then we are doing something that is inappropriate. We're supposed to be *waiing* people who are older than us, not younger than us and that's a very common thing. I know some of the Thais say well if you *wai* somebody younger than you they think it's taking years or months or whatever, taking time away off their lives and they'd rather not do that (Dean).

I've done that many times and I have a tendency to *wai* to somebody and if they're younger than me the whole thing of respect and *wai* to people over there is really difficult and complicated because for me I still don't understand it. For example, if I meet an attorney or somebody...say I'm 40 years old and I've met somebody and I'm a teacher from the U.S. and I meet somebody who is 25 and he's a well respected attorney or something like that or a doctor, for example, and I might think I should pay more respect to them like in the U.S., hello or whatever. I'm supposed to wait for them to *wai* me because I'm older than they are and that's kind of...you just want to say hi and shake their hands and *wai* to them, but you have to kind of wait until they *wai* to you first (Dean).

Ken also mentioned the confusion he experienced regarding the Thai way of greeting.

I can remember giving children a very high *wai* and giving older people a very low *wai* and not realizing that the elevation of my hands determines the degrees which I respect them or how they're relatively important (Ken).

The class comes in and they assemble and say good morning class and they *wai* to you, you might simply just nod to them, but you certainly don't raise your hands and *wai* them in the way that is higher than what they *wai* you in the classroom, or out of the classroom (Ken).

Likewise, Larry observed some mistakes in using a Thai greeting among other Americans. According to Larry, the misuse of gestures can lead to confusion for other local Thais.

I see that happens a lot to foreigners. They come into classroom and they see their students and they will *wai* and that's confusing. So, I kind of know that I have to wait to be *waied* (Larry).
I have an interview with the American embassy, the guy who interviewed my kids really quick and know just a little bit of Thai. I guess, they teach them enough to talk, but he wai ed the kids and you see that it threw them off at the beginning. That was confusing to them. He was actually trying to be nice [laughs] (Larry).

Larry, who has lived and taught in Thailand for an extended period of time, also pointed out some of the cross-cultural confusion based on inconsistency in greeting that he received from some Thais. The inconsistency of greeting may be the way the Thai students and the Thai people in general tried to accommodate and adjust (i.e., be more Westerneized) their behavior to fit American norms. Americans, on the other hand, may view this inconsistency as rude or demeaning.

One of the confusing things was when Thai people know enough about foreign culture and they drop the Thai things. And sometimes that happens in teaching. They know that foreign teachers don't wai, so they're afraid to wai cause they're afraid you wouldn't know what to do. And so sometime you feel they're rude if they don't wai. Like when you get into the elevator they should wai, right? Everybody wais you. Nobody thinks about it. Students wai, but sometime they won't wai foreigners. But if I'm with the Thai teachers, they'll wai. You know, foreigners are quite quick to pick up on waiing and it seems rude when they don't [laughs] (Larry).

One time my wife and I went to Hua Hin [popular tourist destination in Thailand]. When we went there, I think they figured foreign people don't know. Staff hasn't been well trained, so they never wai, and I found that I was, hmm, normally I wouldn't think about it, but in Thailand, you're so used to service people waiing. And the fact that they didn't wai seemed rude (Larry).

They call me Dr. Hudson* [his Last name] even though in Thailand I know it should be Ajarn [teacher] Larry. But some of them know enough about American culture that they switch. That actually seemed a little rude in a way because I'm so used to be an Ajarn Larry. When they say Dr. Hudson,* it seems too formal. So, you kind of want to have the same rules for that (Larry).

Dean was another American teacher who experienced inconsistent greetings from some Thai students.

They change a little bit because I'm a westerner and they know that how we do. Sometime being...uhmm I'm a Westerner they will just come on in [to class] and quietly take a seat (Dean).

**Gestures and Behaviors**

Thailand is known as “The Land of Smile.” Visitors traveling to Thailand will likely be welcomed with the ubiquitous “smile.” However, the smile may convey a variety of different meanings in the Thai context. Newcomers unfamiliar with Thai cultural concepts may be
puzzled to learn that the “smile” can convey various meanings that can be a significant source of cross-cultural confusions. Ken, for example, explained,

Thai people, they smile a lot and the smile does not necessarily mean that they're happy. Again, that's one of those things that I learned having lived there that...not every smile is not like “we like you”. It could be embarrassment. Just smile out of embarrassment or because of nervousness. You're reading these things, as the demeanor in your classroom from your students and you see them smile that you would say, oh, I'm doing all the right things. But really there were smiling cause they're anxious as hell and they didn't know what you were saying. They don't understand what you've said and they smile and you think ahh perfect class. I've covered all and they're smiling and they're nodding their heads...perfect! That was a great class. They're smiling and think what the hell is he saying? I don't know anything, I don't understand this, but I don't want to embarrass myself. I don't want to embarrass him, yah this is good [laughs] (Ken).

In addition to the variety of “smiles” in Thai culture, other unique Thai gestures were also viewed as a source of cross-cultural confusion among the American teachers in this study. Based on the interview conversations, many of the American teachers said that they observed some classroom gestures and behaviors among Thai students that were not ordinary in the American classrooms, which caused them to ponder in some circumstances. Lisa and Dean, for example, described their students’ gestures.

The way they interact with me, the way they greet teachers with the wai and asking permission to come into the classroom like "teacher may I come in?" I'd said, come in, come in don't worry, you don't have to ask, but they ask before they come in (Lisa).

Thai students when they need to use the bathroom, they bow to you and kind of walk out and when they come back they stop at the door and do the courtesy a little bit and then come on in (Dean).

When they come in late they have a courtesy bow and kind of walk in when their head is below you and they'll quietly and quickly take their seats (Dean).

The different use of gestures among Thai students may be unanticipated and surprising for some of the American teachers teaching in Thailand. For example, permission to use the bathroom or permission to get back in to the classroom of Thai students in college or graduate level may sound unnecessary or even juvenile to some American teachers. For Thai students, however, this gesture is customary and the norm in Thai classrooms.
Outside of the classroom, many American teachers reported to experience some uncertainty of what constituted appropriate gestures and behaviors in Thai society. Ken, for example, recalled his experience regarding some public behaviors.

Americans tend to talk loud and whenever I was on the bus, it wasn't until one of my friends tapped me on the shoulder and said to me 'you're speaking very loud' that I realized that in a public area you don't want to necessarily draw attention to yourself. Well the old [inaudible] the nail that sticks up gets whacked, right? In the classroom, you don't. In that society, you don't want to be the nail that sticks up. I found after living in Thailand for nearly a year or so, I found that whenever I was riding a bus, and tourists in Thailand, those from the west, I began to actually feel…umm, I would shrink and cringe when they got on the bus cause they'd be speaking so loud and at that point there were a lot of turned heads (Ken).

Ken also described another gesture that he used in Thailand, which he later learned that it may not be viewed as appropriate according to the Thai cultural norm.

My mother so frequently taught me you know “clean your plate”, so I would clean my plate cause all these starving people who're in India or what not. I try to be polite in Thailand to show my guest that it was delicious and I enjoyed every last bit of it and they kept bringing me more. I realized that…I was showing that they were not gracious in giving me enough food. So there was a big misunderstanding on both sides that I was showing that they were not gracious in giving me enough food and I thought they were just feeding me. It wasn't ’til I realized that the way you graciously show your host that it was delicious and that you have enough is to leave your plate and fold your spoon and your fork together and just signal them that you're done (Ken).

Ken continued with another polite gesture when receiving things in Thailand.

To take something as something is given to you even if they give you a glass of water and the water has mosquito larvae swimming around you just have to graciously you...pretend to take a sip or whatever, but you always take a little bit of something that is given to you. Never give back or just not acknowledge the gift (Ken).

The limited cultural knowledge regarding the use of appropriate gestures and non-verbal behavior were also reported by other American teachers. Dean, for example, provided some examples when he used different gestures in Thailand that appeared to convey unexpected and sometimes inappropriate meanings, when used in a Thai context.

There are gestures like when we cross-fingers like this, like a good luck sign, but in some countries that means something else…it means a man and a woman together (Dean).

Put the thumb between your index and middle fingers just like you're going to steal someone's nose and you go up to the kid and you grab it and you put your thumb out between the index and the middle fingers and it parts of Asia, that's also mean like an equivalent of giving someone the finger (Dean).

When we say "come here" and we put our palm up and then we bring the fingers toward us and say “come here” and in Thailand and in Asia that is not polite; so they do the limp thing where the fingers are pointed down and palm down and say “come here come here” “μα μα μα” [come here, come here, come here]. For us, we have to get used to that because that's kind of feminine. We don't do that in the U.S.(Dean).
“Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes”

In addition to appropriate gestures and behaviors, other significant non-verbal clues in Thailand also created a lot of confusion and misunderstanding. For example, the social hierarchical system not only influences how one interact with others, but it also has a strong impact on how Thai people consider certain body parts, in different levels, as high and low. For example, the head, which is the top of one’s body and is believed to be the place where Buddha resides to protect the individual, is considered the highest and the most respected part of the body. For this reason, Thais may get offended if someone (especially someone who is not close to the person, someone who is younger, or someone who has a lower social status) touches their head, as well as their shoulders. The feet, on the other hand, are considered the lowest part of the body and should not be intentionally used to point at other individuals or things, especially objects with the image of the Royal Family, senior family members, or a Buddha image on it. The deep conscious view to constantly rank individual or things is deeply imbedded in the Thai mindset. Americans and other foreigners unfamiliar with the Thai hierarchical system may be surprised to learn that even common activities such as sorting laundry follows a hierarchical protocol. Most Thais, for example, will sort their laundry according to body region rather than by colors. Thus, it is unusual to see Thai people wash their socks with their handkerchief or face towel. Also, men are considered to be of higher social rank as they can become a Buddhist monk, and, as a result, Thai women will not wash their undergarments with men’s shirts. This is one of many examples which reflect the unique social condition in Thailand.

In this study, the interview data seemed to also echo this social norm. Ken, for example, explained,

Teachers don't generally…umm…don't clearly understand is that the shoulders and the head are the place that houses the spirit of an individual and it's holy and sacred part of the body and you just never touch that
part. You could get close to the students in an American class. I would have no problem, in the 1970s, touching the shoulders of a student or even crouching down so that my head would be below that individual. What I come to learn, instead, that makes a student extremely uncomfortable because… the elevation of one's head is important. Well, can you imagine how horrible students feel when all of the sudden, this student's head is now higher than the teacher's and they begin now thinking about, oh my God, is another student seeing this. I'm feeling so embarrassed now. And they're not at all attuned to what it is a teacher is trying to say. So, whatever a teacher individualizes to help, or a teacher may be trying to help give that person at the time, it's just not being heard because of the embarrassment (Ken).

Ken also continued to talk about the use of one’s feet.

If you cross your legs like what Westerners so often do, it could easily be possible that you be pointing your foot at the head of one of the Thai students (Ken).

Dean and Ken also described their experiences when using their feet in several social interactions outside the classroom. The outcomes of their gesture were surprising and puzzling to both of them.

I remember I used my foot to do things that I shouldn't. One time one child was about to fall out of a door and I ran over there and I used my foot and leg to try to catch her so that she wouldn't fall through the doorway. The family screamed and was more upset that I used my foot to try to catch her than the fact that I was keeping her from falling on her head on concrete, using my foot and my leg. So, that was one thing that I did wrong (Dean).

In Asia [people] will frequently sleep on the floor. Some will, some on a regular westernized bed, but it's more common to roll out mats and just park yourself right there. Well, if the whole living room, whatever, is covered with bodies, the proper thing to do is to sort of weave your way around and preferably stay on the foot side of somebody, rather than the head side and definitely, definitely do not step over an individual (Ken).

In America, it's absolutely no problem if you're camping and you're out there and you have a lot of people in a sleeping bag, you know, you're gonna step over and nobody gives a rip. Nobody cares, you know, in America if somebody steps over you and you're in your sleeping bag or whatever, right. Well there [in Thailand] it's a big deal (Ken).

I remember one time dropping a coin and it was rolling away from me. In America, the thing you'd do is trap it or slap it with your foot to stop it from rolling away, right? Well, it's amazing that I'm still alive because I didn't realize that it has the King image and it's extremely offensive to...let's put it this way…that you need to treat the image, all the images of the King or Queen with utmost respect (Ken).

Addressing People

The Thai high social hierarchy also extended to how one addresses others. This unique cultural norm appeared to be an important factor that caused cross-cultural confusion among the American teachers. Ken described the Thai complex ways of addressing people.

Thai society is a very class bonded society and they have in their own registries different languages for different people in different stations in life whether you're a teacher or a monk or a member of the Royal Family, or whatever (Ken).
Larry, also provided examples of how important it is to know the appropriate way to address others based on the Thai social ranking system.

They use the first name among each other except the older ones you know they use *pee* [older brother/sister] and *nong* [younger brother/sister]. I joke with my students that I'm *loong* [uncle] Larry. I signed my letter to them *loong* Larry. The students I know well always call me *loong* Larry and I like that...that's good too. Because it's also separated me some too...to be more older. And that means I am not going to be hitting on the girls. I'm like uncle Larry. I make it very clear that it's like family. I'm your uncle and that works out better (Larry).

Maybe 10 years ago, I've known my wife for 11 years my mother-in-law complained to my wife that I was calling the kids *khun* and that was confusing. That was before I learned *noo*. I don't call my kids *khun*. I call them *noo* (Larry).

**Male and Female Interactions**

Many of the American teachers in this study also encountered some confusion and uncertainty regarding appropriate behavior between the opposite sex, especially in this study where the majority of American teachers were males and the majority of Thai students were females. The issue of appropriate male and female interactions was apparent. Ken, for example, was a young American male teaching in Thailand during the 1970s and encountered some cultural mismatches that left him feeling confused.

The cross-cultural misunderstanding also includes what men can do to women like touching, and you know body language and so on and so forth in the classroom. In America, you can, actually back then in the 60s and 70s, you can put your arm around the shoulders of a student boy or a girl to show that you know you're a familiar person and you're care. But this doesn’t show that you care. This is outright rude and very insulting and very offensive (Ken).

Norm also inserted his experience regarding gender interaction with Thai people.

Here [Thailand] you have to be careful about...like in the U.S., it's not a big deal to go up to a girl and pat her or hug her like that, but you know here you can't. You know it's just the opposite here you can pat guys on the back but I won't touch women (Norm).

The mismatching of cultural norms of gender context between the U.S. and Thailand also led to an awkward and uncomfortable situation experienced by Dean.

One thing that is kind of weird...is that men will come up to you and they'll put their hands on your lap and on your legs and they rub your legs. The first time I was over there I thought this guy is hitting on me. I hated it. In the U.S. touching someone else, a guy in particular touching another man is very unusual. So, for men to walk down the street with their arms over each other like they do in Southeast Asia is just almost unheard of in the U.S. If you're actual brothers you may do that or if somebody is upset you may do that,
but just walking down the street side by side, arm and arm or arms wrapped around shoulders is very unusual. It was a freaky thing to have a man sit down next to you or have someone who is very high status sit down next to you and put their hands on your legs and rub your legs and you go oh jeez (Dean).

Dean continued,

You see women arm and arm, women holding hands in the U.S., it means they are gay. In Southeast Asia and in Thailand that's just very common. So, there's a lot more touching between the same sex in Thailand than in the U.S., much, much more. We just don't touch very much over here and in Asia they touch a lot between the same sex (Dean).

The gender interaction in Thailand is such that it is appropriate for people of the same sex to touch or show a physical connection, as opposed to a physical connection with the opposite (especially in public place). This cultural norm, thus, results in a view toward public display of affection (PDA) as being inappropriate and is often frowned upon by most Thais, especially among older generations. Dean and Larry provided some useful information on this issue.

The public display of affection in Thailand has different forms. A little bit different from what we see in the U.S. The PDA is much more of that in the U.S. between boyfriends and girlfriends and couples and stuff cause I'm told, I've seen, and I've read we rarely see anybody [in Thailand], but it does seem to change a little bit that couples nowadays hold hands more in public in Thailand more than they used to. But, we don't see the older generation ever holding hands really rarely, rarely you will see that (Dean).

One time I put my hand and rest on my wife's back and her mom said people are looking. We were in very non-foreign context, we were in at a little market and she complained about that (Larry).

*Time Orientation*

Another non-verbal clue that appeared to cause great frustration among many of the American teachers in this study was the different cultural orientation towards time. Dean, for example, showed great frustration when talking about the way Thai people handle their time.

And time is a big problem. That's a big big big problem to me...very frustrating. The time over there, it's much more loose and it's kind of an approximation. In the U.S. if we say I'll meet you at noon. 12:00 for lunch, they really mean noon. If you say I'll meet you at 12:15, at 12:10 we're looking for people. At 12:15 we're wondering where are they, or they're going to be here in a minute...literally, they will be here in a minute or two minutes. If they show up 15 minutes late we expect them to say I'm sorry I'm sorry I got caught in the traffic. But sometimes in Thailand, they won't say that they are sorry and would say hello and get on and they may not give you any explanation (Dean).

Sam also expressed frustration when having to deal with some Thai students who did not keep their time in class.
The biggest problem I have. [Students] kind of walk in late and on the phones and that's a big, big problem (Sam). I would have a classroom of about 25 and the time I start the class I got 4 students. This is very unacceptable and they come drifting in the first 20 minutes or half an hour. So I can't start teaching with 4 students, right? So, I got this problem. I confronted the kids and say look, what's the deal here? I said put yourselves in my shoes. How am I supposed to do?. Tell me what I’m supposed to do...sit and wait? (Sam).

Likewise, Lisa shared some of her thoughts regarding the Thai time orientation.

Thai time, right? [laughs]. Things are happening later and later maybe that's something about cultural differences [laughs]. The time, uhm, the concept of time…quite different [laughs] (Lisa).

However, it was interesting to learn from the interview conversation that Dean and Lisa did not have serious problems regarding different time orientation with the Thai students. Their frustrated situation of dealing with different time orientation occurred outside the classroom. Lisa, for example expressed that “…in the classroom it was fine, but everything else outside” (Lisa). Dean also mentioned that his Thai students had “acceptable” time orientation, but outside the classroom, his cross-cultural experience appeared to be the opposite.

Students are usually on time like in the U.S. It's more of just occasionally when somebody is quite late it's just OK. I guess when they are outside of the classroom setting, the time is much more fluid. I experienced that a lot with some [Thai] friends we say...pick me up at the gas station at 9:00 in the morning and we'll go do this. We'll go to the next town and they may get there at 9:00 and then say we have to do this or they stop at three different places on the way to get where you are going and you have no idea that you're going to stop there and it's like why are we doing this. I thought we're going to go from point A to point B, but we go from point A to point L to C to J to 1 and back to A to get coffee, and then we go. It's very frustrating (Dean).

**Theme 3: Cultural “Speed Bumps”**

The experiences of the American teachers in this study appeared to be traceable to culture. All of the nine American teachers reported experiencing some difficulties and misunderstandings, inside and outside the classroom, which seems to be linked to cultural differences of the two countries. Using Hall’s cultural description, Hofstede’s cultural model, and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner cultural description as the primary theoretical frameworks, a list of various cultural speed bumps reported by the American teachers is presented below.
**Power Distance (Egalitarian versus Hierarchy)**

One of the most noticeable cultural differences between Thailand and the U.S. seems to stem from the way people in each country perceive individuals with social status. Based on historical and socio-cultural background of the two countries, Americans are more likely to perceive others as equal regardless of their social status. Thais, on the other hand, may be more susceptible to social hierarchy and inequality. In Thailand, educators are often viewed and treated with great respect as knowledgeable and influential figures, not only by students, but by the entire society. Ken, for example, expressed the importance of social status in the Thai society.

…the social status…it's an important thing [in Thailand]. Who you are, what family you come from, what your last name is, are you the member of the Royal Family, and so on and so forth, are you a distinguished professor, a president, or a dean. Your status in the society...this is true in part in the United States as well, but in Thailand it, in part, defines your credibility and if you have high credibility, then you have openness to receive whatever you want to deliver, in this case English, as American [teachers] (Ken).

Based on the interview data, this special social position generated both positive and negative situations for the American teachers. Ken explained a positive aspect of being an educator in Thailand.

In America, we are kind of egalitarian - all people are all people, kind of thing. Americans and co-equals...like everyone is equal and that's kind of the bedrock of our society. So, it's not uncommon to have students, you know, kind of have the "I don't care" attitude about you as a teacher and not to think anything more of you than they do the bus drivers or the plumber, or the person who bagged your groceries. You know, I mean it's not a big deal. [In Thailand] I would say excessive, excessive respect and reverence for the teachers. How awestruck I was by the fact that my students almost revere me. They show respect that I never experience in America (Ken).

Lance also recognized the positive outcome stems from having a high social status as an educator in Thailand.

One thing in Thailand is that Thailand is a financially poor country…but at least one thing that they do have is respect for people who have positions. You know, that makes a difference. In a way, sometimes it's almost an unconditional respect regardless of whether it's an old person, they may be a bad old person, but they'll still at least be acknowledged, but then it can also be a young person too. There’s a good younger person and they're acknowledged also. Not only is it unconditional, but it’s also like...I don't know how to put it...it's a reciprocal type of emotion and that's important for me (Lance).
They still have a respect that's due not just conditioning to other people, but it's a...they show their appreciation and that doesn't cost money to do, but it still valuable. It's a valuable experience. It's not a currency but it's an emotional currency (Lance).

From the interview data, the American teachers also reported that the high respect and reverence toward the teachers also extended to other aspects related to education, such as the school facility and books. Some of the American teachers found the extension of respect to other objects as astonishing. Sam, for example, observed,

If you go to a university in the U.S., either in the university or right next to the university, you have a lot of bars where kids go and drink a lot (Sam).

If you go to a typical university [in the U.S], the kids are drinking all the time and partying and that’s because it's their first time away from the family. So, the kids kind of go crazy, but that’s a part of growing up a lot of time. For the first time they can have sex or have the relationship, freedom, all do these kinds of things. They got drunk, I mean a lot of them so they [inaudible] this experience. And I think in Asia they can't have, you know, all this at the university. It seems that the Thai perception is that a university is a lot more of a spiritual experience and in America is a drunken experience, so that's a little bit different. Here you see the monks. You see them around here in the morning. In America you never see priests or anybody walking around at the university (Sam).

However, the large power distance between the educators and the Thai students seemed to create various negative outcomes. For example, the extension of respect to school facilities and objects that are linked to education such as books, created some cross-cultural confusions to some of the American teachers unfamiliar with this cultural complexity. Ken, for example, provided an example of one of his cross-cultural mistakes towards an academic object, in this case Thai text books.

I would take my students out to the green area and you might be tempted to sit down on newspapers or sit down on a book and all of the sudden you've lost your students. Bear in mind that the temple in ancient Thailand and the monks who live in the temple who are the nucleus of any community, they were the seed of learning. They were the seed of holiness and books! Books have their origin, which originally were holy scriptures and that association, though it was not very conscious in the mind of Thai students, has legacy and evolution that has evolved to the point where they still revere books as something very very...if not sacred, at least so high and so so precious that you don’t stand on them and you don't sit on them, even if you want to keep the grass strain off your white pants. You don't sit on books. You don't sit on tables. It's very common for Americans to sit on a desk, right? It could be a picture of the newspaper on the desk with the front page of the paper with the picture of the King (Ken).

Ken continued that when a teacher fails to recognize significant cultural values of the
students, in his case, the importance of text books or objects with picture of the Thai King, there can be negative consequences that get in a way of teaching and learning, even when done unintentionally.

They'll [Thai students] just turn off and feel this person is an idiot and I don't care what the teacher has to say. I mean I don't respect this individual or they're outright hurt or offended that you could ever treat books, which are an object of great reverence (Ken).

I learned later on that in order to get my message across, whatever I was teaching, if I wanted whatever that I wanted to be heard, I needed to not step over the cultural boundaries. Cultural boundaries became the focus of the thinking. All of the mind spinning stuff that goes on rather than what I'm saying, you know. I found that if I'm respecting in [inaudible] to those behaviors then they were listening to what I have to say and not attend to my rudeness or my offensive behaviors (Ken).

If you draw student's attention to something that's so egregious and so offensive that they can't stop thinking about it, they'll automatically turn off, or if they haven't turned off, they'll just discredit you to the degree where you're not looked at as effective teaching (Ken).

Further, the Thai large power distance that lead to extreme respect toward educators can develop into other cultural difficulties among the American teachers from an egalitarian society. Ken, for example, pointed out that excessive respect towards teachers can create the distance between the teachers and the students and prevent them from developing a meaningful relationship.

I must say that I, with rare exception, I couldn't get most of my students to that point where they would feel comfortable being informal. It was always a distance. I never knew whether it was mistrust, whether that they didn't like me…but the distance can communicate a lot of things. Social distance can communicate a lot of things and can be misunderstood. And I never was sure they were connecting, they didn't like me, or why they didn't want to be informal (Ken).

The high level of respect towards education is also linked to the lack of a formal class or teacher’s evaluation. Dean, for example, shared his frustration and his concern when he did not receive feedback from his students.

I don't get feedback, as much feedback, in Thailand like I do in the United States...like the place that I've been teaching for many years. They do instructor evaluations. When I get these evaluations back I always get this glowing [review] like the teacher is awesome, or it has changed my life, or I would take more courses...you know what you're doing with the students in the U.S. and I get that in Vietnam. But, I don't get that in Thailand. They have no formal evaluation and they don't really come up afterward and say I really enjoy your class, and they don't come up and say I really hate your class. They don't tell you anything, so when the class is over with, there is no chit chat, no little talking (Dean).

According to Dean, the lack of an instructor evaluation, even out of respect, makes it
difficult and challenging for Dean to make improvements or accurately assess a student’s needs and progress.

The student’s evaluation is important otherwise it'll become a one-way street. Information only goes that way. Of course you get the information back in the exam, but if the student is scoring poorly, you don't know why they're scoring poorly. They're not going to tell you, they're not going to say, like why you get 40 on your exam, oh because I couldn't understand what you were saying. That's not going to happen. They're going to be...what are you stupid? You got only 40 on your exam and they would say...what were you saying? The teaching method may be wrong (Dean).

According to the interview, Dean appeared to link the lack of evaluation with respect towards teachers in Thailand. For that reason, he suggested,

The system can be improved. Every system can be improved. It can be anonymous and it is anonymous even in the U.S. is anonymous. The students don't put their names on the instructor's evaluation form (Dean).

In addition, some of the American teachers also reported that the large power distance to place an educator in extremely high social status, created an extra burden and responsibilities for them. Some expressed losing their private life and missing the opportunity to pursue their personal interest. Ken, for example, expressed,

…the flip side of that because they think of you as nearly a holy person or at least very close to the order of respect they would give monks. You're expected to behave like that, which means even though you want to be a bit clownish and kind of goofy if that's your nature, you're gonna stifle some of that you know, because if you're out there in the courtyard acting like a dufus and everybody knows you as one of the faculty people at the university, all of the sudden it becomes a disconnect because the casual laissez-faire clownish out of the classroom behaviors that you are conducting yourself as...it doesn't score any respect, in fact you'll begin to lose respect. How one carries themselves in the classroom and how one can carry themself professionally in the classroom and also carry over in the society at large. It wasn't okay at the time for me to be cheerfully walking down the hallway at Bangkok university* whistling. I mean in America, you're happy and stuff you can whistle, but don't whistle as a professor (Ken).

And oddly enough, a person who's a teacher at a university is also revered and respected outside the classroom. So, it's not just the respect you get inside of the ivory tower. You're expected to carry yourself in a very respectful manner and to act the role of teacher even when you're there at the market buying these apples; you want bananas, you want papaya whatever, you're expected to be a profassor when you're out in the open market, even if you dress casually people will still call you Ajarn [teacher]. Even if they're not your students you're expected to carry yourself in a dignify way, at all times. And it's very unlike here in America. I go to the university, I do my teaching, I go home and I become Ken, the private person. Ken the private citizen. You know, that's not true in Thailand (Ken).

If I wasn't looking the role they wouldn't respect the role that I was trying to fill. I was a teacher, but didn't look like a teacher! Believe it or not that would get into the way of teaching (Ken).
Drawing upon the Thai educational history and cultural norms, it also seems reasonable to associate the large power distance and the high level of respect toward teachers with the passivity of the Thai students. With respect to the teachers, Thai students may view obedience, compliance, and passive learning as appropriate behavior, while their American teachers perceived these behaviors from the opposite viewpoint. Although passivity results from respect for the teachers, it can unfortunately contribute to various cross-cultural misunderstandings between the educators and the students. Ken stated,

I try to excite some interaction because from my cultural perspective a way in which a student shows interest in the subject matter, a way in which a student shows that he or she likes the subject matter, is engaged, is stimulated, is enjoying the class, is connecting or that I, you know, connecting as the teacher I'm connecting and pushing the right button as opposed to not connecting at all, is through that demeanor of a student sitting there and of whether she or he is engaged. So, if there's a lack of engagement, just passive listening, it's really difficult for me, with my own cultural bias, to gauge and to assess whether or not I'm being effective (Ken).

I look for visual cues, you know you study visual and communication studies and you know that 90% of what's conveyed is through our eyes and seeing. And when you see a student that is sitting there and very passive and very disconnected, this passive way, you might think that what, you don't like English or you don't like me, or they don't understand? I have no way of answering these questions (Ken).

But, from the Thai perspective I came to learn that they weren't being rude or discourteous or disinterested. What was told to me was that this is the way they show utmost respect for teachers and that for anyone to step forward in the way that American students would step forward in the classroom would be rude, might even raise the issue or a question that could threaten or cause the teachers to loose face. And imagine this, imagine the audacity of a student challenging the credentials, the authority, the life-long learning, the doctor so and so, challenging them on a point in Thailand that would just...you would go to any length to avoid that embarrassment. So, why even risk it, I mean even if you were solicited by your teacher to come on, come on out, you know laugh, joke, be more laid back, practice speaking, don't worry about it, but they do. It's almost impossible for me to get them to lighten up (Ken).

In this study, Nathan and Dean also experienced similar misunderstanding and difficulties that stemmed from passive learning approach among Thai students.

To me it was very important for them [Thai students] to answer questions when I asked them. Most questions aren’t. I was almost never rhetorical. I’m hoping that they’ll tell me what they know. The only way that I can know what to teach them was to find out what they know and if they don’t understand...to me that’s no problem. I find that when they don’t understand it, I’m OK. But, I want to know that they know cause I can teach them again in another way. To me it’s not a challenge or an embarrassment or an insult. The way that I presented it maybe it wasn’t clear (Nathan).

They’re quiet. They may be well mannered, but it doesn’t mean they’re learning anything. Just because I’m looking off or looking like I’m taking notes doesn’t mean I’m necessarily learning anything – I could be thinking about something completely different (Nathan).
You don't know what they know and you don't know what they don't know because they don't express themselves verbally very well. They're shy, they're quiet and they're timid. I don't know what the right word is. They're not just going to speak out very much in the class. No matter what you do (Dean).

Based on Ken, Nathan, and Dean, social distance between the teachers and the students can create challenging teaching and learning situations. In addition, the different viewpoint toward social status also brings about other obstacles. Larry, who taught at one of the most prestigious universities in Thailand where many Thai “high society” students attend, for example described one of his Thai students and the experience he had with her while she was completing her dissertation under Larry’s supervision.

She is a Mom Luang [a Royal position] who is used to getting her way and other people do things for her and she is quite eccentric and spoiled. And she wanted me to be her supervisor. But, she seemed to think that it would make it easier that she wouldn't have to do anything (Larry).

Then she gave it [draft of her dissertation] to me she thanks every Mom [a Royal position] and Na Ayutthaya [one of the most prestigious Thai last names given by the Royal Family] she knew. But didn't even thank me and I said no I won't accept this. I helped create this thing for many* years. I'm not going to accept that you don't put my name in the Acknowledgement. I said that's just not right (Larry).

Larry also mentioned his experience with other high social class Thais and witnessed that social status can be the main reason one acquires other social positions in Thai society.

The Mom [a Royal position] recently…we kind of hired him to be a part-time at the university, but we didn't really give him any money yet. Just to try to bring in money and kind of a figure head (Larry).

His kids go to the same school as my kids and they [the school] immediately made him the head of the PTA, the parent teacher association cause he's a Mom (Larry).

Sam and Lance also felt that social hierarchy can have a negative impact on students’ motivation. Growing up in the U.S., Sam believes in the “American dream” where people can move up the social ladder if they work hard regardless of their social status. He expressed his concern that in a large power distance society such as Thailand, the chance for social mobility may not be easily realized among his Thai students and that may lead some Thai students to give up or lack of aspiration to reach their dream.

In America you almost…accept you're very poor…everybody expects that if you do well in school or university you could get a good job and always good things will come from that, and in that case it’s pretty true. Here, you know...not just Thais but other places too, there are relatively small numbers of very
affluent families. People or kids from those families will be very well off. There are walls of upward mobility and people do march there, you know. But, if I grew up in Thailand and I had my father sold fruit by the side of the road, I can't imagine they would send me to a university and get a job as an accountant or something. It doesn't happen (Sam).

I think the idea that the university supposes to be teaching kids to learn something and getting a good job. For the kids, I don't think they see that. The Thai educational system is not structured to do that (Sam).

For Lance, social status can deter some of the Thai students to work hard in school.

The Thai students that are in the university right now I think they come from more secure families and they have never really had to put forth a lot of effort. They're kind of coming here for fun… (Lance).

The interview with Lance also brought about the potential link between the lack of critical thinking skills and the maintenance of social hierarchical status in the Thai society.

I think to me one of the most difficult factors about Thai students is that…and hmm the Thai people in general… is the idea that they have not really developed methods for critical thinking and I believe there's a reason for that and more or less there's political reason, in that when you become a critical thinker, you can think critically about this and not think critically about that. You cannot put a blind eye. So, when you become a critical thinker, you can incorporate the method of thought in everything you do. You're critically thinking about what you watch on TV, you're critically thinking about what you read in the newspaper. You're critically thinking about what’s happening where you live on your street. So, because critical thinking can cause political problems, I believe that the power that, beside may be in their own way, that's better if you can control critical thinking. Don't encourage it. Don't teach it. That way you don't have to worry about it (Lance).

Lance, continued that the maintenance of social status by controlling people’s critical thinking skills can also lead to some disadvantages in global competition.

But, then the people are coming in just screw and you try to get them up to speed with countries like the European and the American countries where we encourage and welcome critical thinking. Then they're at a definite disadvantage right from the beginning…those students are (Lance).

The large power distance in Thailand where social inequality is common and accepted also seems to influence another Thai cultural norm that many of the American teachers viewed as objectionable. In this study, some of the American teachers observed that Thai people, in general, do not question authority. This cultural norm created a lot of disappointment among many of the American teachers. For example, Sam responded to the issue of Thai students not questioning people in power.

Americans, we tend to question the boss and that kind of stuff, so that’s the big cultural difference. I think that's true in business and in academics. I think that's the obstacle for Western teachers cause we expect students, that if they have questions, to ask and that's part of the learning process. We don't consider that
disrespectful for these students to ask questions. We don't want them to sit like zombies and that's pretty different... I said I'm doing this [teaching], but I don't want you to think that this is true because I told that is true. I want you to see it and that's important to me. I don't want the kids to think that because I'm the Ajarn [a teacher] and what I tell them it's true (Sam).

Lance also expressed his frustration and provided an example when encountering with some Thais who do not question authority.

It's more of the socioeconomic situation in Thailand authority of some sort, when you're in the classroom, the teacher is the authority. When you're outside, there're other types of authorities. But it's like if the authority says something, that's the way it is. Don't question it (Lance).

I had a problem with my internet one day and one of my Thai co-workers called up and I asked them that I wanted to change my password because I forgot what my password was. Well they said you can't change the password, and he just hanged up and he said, well sorry, but you can't change the password. Now immediately, I'm thinking that's not right. Now come on, you know. Immediately, I'm trying to think over, under, around how can I, you know, I wanted to solve this problem. I wanted to change my password, it's my account I'm paying for it. But that was good enough for him that they just said no, you can't...so OK and that's over (Lance).

Unquestioned authority, according to Lance, can be an obstacle toward progress in Thai society as he expressed,

It's not crippling, but it's hampering the Thai students, that carries over from the idea of absolute authority and they can't work. Like if they said no, that's it. No question. And they may say no because they don't want to mess with you (Lance).

**Individualistic vs. Collectivistic**

In the present study, many of the American teachers reported experiencing a certain level of cross-cultural misunderstandings due to the differences in social orientation toward the self and the group. For example, a society that values individualism such as in the U.S. where the individual’s interest and achievement may be placed as a priority over the group interest, as opposed to a collective society such as in Thailand where the interest of a group may come before individual needs. This difference in social orientation seems to be the basis of various cross-cultural disagreements among the teachers and students. Ken, for example, eloquently described his overall classroom misunderstandings.

The fact that I came from a very open, very liberal, very creative, and very less structured society in the United States. The whole educational system revolves around individualities, less around group performance, less around compliance and conformity and more about the rewards of being the individual,
and to be more spontaneous and free form and free flowing and so on and so forth. Then it carries over in many things that we do in the teaching of English. We even have the term free writing or free flow or free form where the very term connotes just write what you're feeling, you know. Don't worry about structure, don't worry about grammar just write what you're feeling and we call that free form, right? It is very uncomfortable with the fact that classroom was so tight and so rigid and so stiff and so formal, so traditional. And I have to say despite all my efforts, it was difficult to break through that ice (Ken).

Based on Ken’s response, the differences in cultural norms toward the group and the self lead to some uncertainties which seem to make teaching more challenging in his cross-cultural classroom.

The different emphasis toward the group and the self was also the source of cross-cultural confusion to other American teachers in this study. For example, Nathan and Lisa reported to feel frustrated with the “cheering” activity.

The cheering is a spirit thing that they do when each faculty competes against each other faculty in showing [school] spirit. They go to the main auditorium and they sit in their rows and they do basically not cheering, not like cheer leading, but a movement in unison to call for response kind of thing (Nathan).

In general, the “cheering” activity is an event to welcome freshmen and newcomers to a university. The “cheering” activity in lower Northeastern Thailand as described by Nathan and Lisa is quite common in most Thai colleges and universities. The “cheering” activity is one of many activities for the purpose of welcoming new freshmen and other new students. According to the Thai Ministry of Education, the welcoming ceremony and the “cheering” activity serves the purpose of increasing group cohesion and harmony, increases group pride (i.e. different college departments), and introduces new students to one another, especially for newcomers to learn and network with other students, especially with the seniors.

The “cheering” activity usually has the main purpose of increasing group cohesion and harmony, helping new students to network with others, and increasing school and departmental pride. As a collectivist society where people feel that belonging to a certain group and protecting the interest of the group is essential, the “cheering” activity is considered important. The American teachers, however, may view this activity as unnecessary and as disrupting to learning, as the
activity often takes a lot of time and energy from students who participate in it. Lisa, for example, explained,

It takes so much of their time and I know that it's part of their culture, especially for freshmen, but it takes so much of their time and energy. It was during the whole two months. We started teaching in the summer, but that's the beginning of their school year and it kept going. It didn't finish. So basically the longer we were in the program, the more tired they got because they just practiced and competition (Lisa).

They have cheering practice all the way [after finishing classes] into the evening like sometimes 10 o'clock, 12 o'clock midnight and then they come home and stay up and do their homework till one or two o'clock. Sometimes they stay up till 3:00 and they’d say "teacher I'm very tired 3 AM I sleep" and then I said "really" [raising voice] and the next morning they were so sleepy we can't make them read because they didn't have the energy (Lisa).

I think it's like a social pressure, so if they don't do it, they are not part of the community (Lisa).

Both Lisa and Nathan showed some frustration when having to manage tired students after the long “cheering” practice. Nathan, in particular, seemed to be even more frustrated and disappointed as he expressed not seeing any good justification for this group-oriented activity.

The thing is it they were wasting a tremendous amount of time cheering…I can’t get my students to do their homework because they spent 6 hours the night before cheering…they commit, I would say approaching 100s of hours on this cheering things that had no function other than building kind of groupness idea. I agree with those things accept the cheering interfere with education. It was really an unfortunate event…We try to teach students English, but they were trying to cheer which has no function at all (Nathan).

In addition to the “cheering” activity, the strong emphasis toward group harmony in Thai society also seemed to be the basis for other cross-cultural confusion. To maintain group cohesion, many Thais often choose to maintain a pleasant environment and avoid confrontation, conflict, criticism, and outward hostility toward others. Larry, for example, pointed out.

To give the high point on Thai people, they have a nice time in the simplest ways and that's something I like. When I see my professional colleague or when we have lunch we have lots of jokes and lots of jokes about people, but not mean. They don't use mean jokes and I like that (Larry).

Although suppressing or concealing one’s true feelings may be considered an appropriate and pleasant behavior among Thais, this behavior can create great confusion for others unfamiliar with this delicate social norm. Norm, for example, expressed,
You know, it's not good to yell in a Thai system when you're frustrated (Norm).

Norm described the Thai people he worked with.

Most Thais don't like confrontation. In the U.S. you have arguments and you have fights...since you have arguments you'll have fights. Here...you don't have outward conflicts, so a lot of time you can't tell if something is right or wrong or what's going on, on the outside, but there are a lot going on behind there. So it is difficult sometimes to understand the actual stories or what's going on. It's a different environment. In the U.S. you have fights, you have arguments. People yell and throw a fit and yell at each other and fight publicly. Here you don't. So it's quite different (Norm).

Norm also pointed out to the problems of other Westerners have when dealing with different conflict resolution styles of the Thais and the Westerners.

Most people they fight with each others, you know the farangs [Thai word used for white individual or a Westerner not for other foreigners such as Asian] teachers...it's not easy to have them [American teachers] as a part of the system because it's different [inaudible] thinking and different the way they view things. So sometime is just dis service sometime to become too Western sometime (Norm).

Larry also shared his experience working and living with some Thais.

It took me a long time cause Thai people are so nice. You don't realize it first, but they not always so nice, chai mai [right]? And sometime they can be not completely nice behind your back and then there is rivalry too, you don't pick up that right away (Larry).

Larry also continued that the effort to avoid confrontation in the Thai society is not only shown in their behavior, but also in the choice of words they use as well. Larry provided some examples.

You know Thai people when they translate...I don't even know what they say in English, but in Thai they often whenever they say something very strong they often say "or something like that" afterward it like they take the strength out of the argument when they do it in English. I don't know what they say in Thai, but in English they'll say like "some people like to go to the movies or something like that." or "I was busy going to or I didn't really agree with them or something like that," to make it softer. I guess in Thai they never say anything so direct maybe (Larry).

My wife [Thai] would say "something like that" I suppose in Thai. She'll never say like that's absolutely true. Like "maybe they are jealous or something like that." So everybody is conscious about that in Thai (Larry).

Many of the American teachers reported to recognize the difference of this delicate cultural norm and tried to adapt or adjust their approach to fit the Thai cultural practice. Below are some comments and suggestions they provided on how to manage conflict in the Thai society.
You don't get up and throw a fit and you don't argue. You got to know when to go and argue and you got to know when to argue and you got to pick your fight and how to do it right. If you're just argumentative like an American, you'll get thrown out and you won't last long (Norm).

You can go thru life being rude and crude or mean or invasive or aggressive, but I try to put people at ease and it really works (Dean).

I try to be mellow here too. In Thai I have less strong opinion (Larry).

…I think some confrontation is good. Those kinds of thing I'm aware of and I try to work around it in my class (Norm).

I have to modify the way I did that because those are not working, not effective here, because that really the idea that, they will get the idea that I try to embarrass them. In the U.S. you know we think differently about that. I have to modify my approach to that and try to correct the behaviors in a different way, especially not in public and not in classroom situations because that escalates out of control real fast and that's not productive. If it's not productive, I'm not going to use it and do something more productive (Lance).

**Rules versus Relationship**

In this study, Norm and Nathan were the only two American teachers who also served as program coordinators. They, therefore, had to encounter with other cross-cultural issues outside of the classroom, including working with the administrators and directors or staff of other departments, more than other American teachers in this study. When asked about the Thai system, Norm appeared frustrated when he described the Thai system.

Confusing…Thai systems are chaotic. It's not a set way to do anything. Even for most universities that are pretty well developed even when they have a system, a lot of them are not clear about where to go or how to go and what room to go or how or who to go to and to who is in charge (Norm).

Lots lots lots [of confusion and misunderstanding]…like which room you're going to go to who you can go to. How do you get paid or…there are too many ways too many [frustrating laughter] (Norm).

Norm continued,

Many systems in Thailand in school systems even if they do have it on paper, there really is not a set way of doing things in most universities even Chula or Thammasart [the two most prestigious and oldest universities in Thailand] or.. If you go farther down the scale it gets more chaotic (Norm).

In Thailand, in general, if something’s simple they make it very complex. Even with simple small things, they will put like 20 different rules (Norm).

When I first got here, there was really no system for doing things, everything was like last second or an exception. If you have students apply you have exception for this student and that student. Now, we have system that we have in place. We have method to accept things and follow the system, more systematic. That's how I think overall. But, it's still hard. You think it's in the system, but you still get one day crisis more than the other day...always...always. But, we're getting better (Norm).
Nathan also encountered some unpredictable situations in the Thai system where things can be disrupted, amended, and adjusted based on different circumstances. Nathan described his experience coordinating the teaching practicum program.

This program had been going on for three years and things should be all worked out wonderfully. And everything that we said works would work. Simply, this was not how it works in Thailand it’s just not, it’s how it’s going to happen ever. I think you could run this program for 10 years and still have things come up every year...like this is how we run the program for 9 years and the 10th year this is not how it’s going be done. Just kind of how it is. I don’t mean it in a critical and negative way but this is something that Thai administrators and teachers would say...sorry this class has been cancelled. And this is a holiday or this is the cheering time (Nathan).

However, at certain levels, a flexible and less structured rule can create some positive outcome. Although Norm expressed some frustrations when dealing with confusing and unstructured system, he found in some circumstances that the Thai system can be flexible for change.

The system here is quite dynamic. So there are a lot of room...in the U.S. most systems are [inaudible] slow. Adding one class, it takes maybe a year and you have to negotiate, you have to go to committee meetings. Here academia changes quickly. You can have a new program up. We usually do it in 3 or 4 months, but right now it'll probably take a year to put new classes in. So, that part is quite enjoyable for me because I like the place that stays dynamic and changes. That's why I like it here (Norm).

**Achievement Oriented versus Relationship Oriented**

Another cultural “speed bump” seemed to be contingent on the different cultural values toward assertiveness and competition as opposed to nurturing and concern for relationships. The common saying that Americans “live to work” while people from other cultures such as some Thais may simply “work to live” also seemed to manifest in this study. The concept of hard work to many Thais may not be the same as that held by Americans. In addition, in Thailand “getting along” may be viewed as more important than “getting ahead.” For this reason, the Thai students (and the Thai people in general) may possess certain personalities and behaviors that are deemed unsatisfactory for people from a performance oriented society such as the U.S. Drawn
Upon the interview data, many of the American teachers viewed the “lack” of assertiveness, diligence, and industrious nature of Thai people with frustration and sometimes, disappointment.

I can say that all farang instructors, myself included, are disappointed with the level of academic interest and excellence exhibited in the students. They don't like to read, they are not good at coming to class and they are not highly critical thinkers (Kevin).

I mean most farangs have the idea that the Thai [inaudible] do things that’s inefficient, not very intelligent (Kevin).

The Thai students that are in the university right now I think they come from more secure families and they have never really had to put forth a lot of effort. They're kind of coming here for fun, which is, it doesn't mean, you know I've been in school for a long time and I went to school for some fun too, but you can't have fun all the time. You have got to do the work, or you're not going to make it (Lance).

The “lack” of conscientious and productivity among some Thais also leak into situations outside the classroom. Lance, for example, reported to feel frustrated and dissatisfied with Thai store workers on their lack of ambition to serve the customers.

If you go to a store to buy something and, first of all, they're always talking on the phone. Workers, you know, they don't want to sell anything. They're just there to get their paycheck...they don't want to sell anything. If you're a customer, well you're annoying them and now they have to hang up or something. First thing you ask do you have something, and if it's not convenient, no mod laew, mai mee, mod laew. [it's gone, we don't have it anymore]. Now, Americans, if we're out, wait a minute let me go look and they go in the back look around, well I don't have it, but can I take your name and number and we'll get it in tomorrow...No way, these people don't want to. What I'm saying is Thailand needs to get up to speed in international business of doing business (Lance).

Quality of job makes no difference to them because they're going to get paid one way or the other anyway (Lance).

Norm also experienced some frustration working with some Thai people.

My job is to talk to other departments or other deans or assistant deans or department directors, they are not on Fridays. I’m sure they're doing very important business on Fridays [sarcastic comment]. I'm sure they working, but there is almost impossible to get anything done on Fridays in Thailand. Every time on Fridays, I get quite angry. I just sit here and nobody answers phone or picking things up you can't contact them (Norm).

If I try to do anything on Fridays, no one is in the office. There is nobody to pick up the phone...nobody that is doing anything and there is no way to do anything. So if I try to arrange a project or to get something done on Fridays it will be an absolute waste of time (Norm).

Being from a masculine, achievement oriented society where conscientious, motivation, and determination to progress or “get ahead” are common cultural norms, many of the American teachers reported to feel satisfied and rewarded when they see the Thai students start to develop
assertiveness, independence, being more ambitious and more forceful in the classroom. Kevin, for example, talked about what he considered the most rewarding experience teaching in Thailand.

When discussing a very hot and difficult issue where they're many different viewpoints. I have a class on foreign affairs* and it was a difficult issue to discuss as an American leading the discussion, because of America is always seen as the evil big power the ruler of the world. So, it quite...it was very fun I think to have different views coming from the international students. I could see some anti-American and independent thought and arguing very vividly and strongly and I encouraged them to take their position strongly and argue with their position strongly and to hear all sides of the issues. So, that was some good classroom discussion (Kevin).

In the classroom, seeing the student responses when given a project and not giving them much direction and making them think by themselves and coming up with their own solutions. It's quite rewarding to see when they do well. Not having to tell them what to do and actually have them do it on their own initiative. And I tell them you go think about it and only come to me when you think you have no idea and then I'll give them something to help them and go do the rest of the work themselves (Kevin).

Seeing some development to see students develop and become confident. I'm really a bit in leadership training. I really want them to learn how to be leaders. It's rewarding to watch them grow and become confident (Kevin).

Other American teachers also considered seeing ambition, independence, and productivity in their students as the most rewarding teaching experience in Thailand. Larry and Sam, for example, stated,

I think the main thing is to try to raise a question of research problems, ideas. And to somehow realize that we try to answer something, not just fulfill a requirement. I would say...no, try to think harder. Try to get them to think it through what they are trying to find out (Larry).

I really like when I see the kids learn like you know when they get something in their heads and you could see them all of a sudden they pay attention to something and that you know they said it gets the flip side of the motivation thing you can finally get to them when they relate and can get things going on and they enjoy the fact that they are doing something and that they are learning and that's great (Sam).

The diverse cultural values and expectation such as striving to “get ahead” in one culture, as opposed to trying to “get along” in another culture, can easily lead to misinterpretation of each other’s behavior and cultural conduct. Drawn upon the interview data, the different value orientation between relationship-oriented in Thai culture and achievement-oriented in American culture appeared to be one of the factors that created a cultural “bump” in the present study.
Theme 4: Adjusting to Thai Culture

Based on the interview data, most of the American teachers reported to gradually adjust to Thai culture and considered Thailand as a friendly and hospitable place for Americans and other foreigners. The friendly environment made their living and teaching in Thailand more pleasant and manageable. The following comments were given by many of the American teachers.

For me, not in the sense of culture shock that Thailand was an awkward place for me. I don't think Thailand posed anything particularly challenging (Nathan).

I actually feel at home here (Sam).

It's easier to make friends here and it's easier to have friendships here. You just go talk, you chat, you go talk to people and it's easy to meet people and be friendly (Norm).

Norm, for example, added that there are a lot of similarities between the Thai culture and the local culture of the Western states in the U.S. The culture distance between his native land and Thailand were surprisingly very narrow despite being thousands of miles apart.

I'm from one of the Western states* in the U.S. I now think that the culture...although it is different, but in many ways it's not that different than Western culture. Westerners are very friendly people, very open, everything is a little bit messed up and everything is a little bit screwed up. So a lot of things about Thai is the same from where I come from. I used to...I joke, but I'm not joking about that I have more problems when I went to New York than when I'm in Thailand. New York is wayyyyy different. A lot more aggressive and a lot more obnoxious. Thai people tend to be like people in Texas*...native Southwest* My wife went with me for a year and she gets along quite well cause it's the same things. American people in that area are quite friendly (Norm).

Other teachers commented that they simply love Thailand and felt that each individual has different reasons why they like Thailand.

I think I'm supposed to be here. I mean I have that feeling that I'm supposed to be here in Thailand and I don't know why and it's not like a fatalistic concept it’s just the feeling that I have studied and prepared myself for so many years that I might be here to do some good. You know, something different for me, and I think it's very rewarding (Lance).

I mean why would you come here? People come here because they like Thailand. You're going to hear that over and over again. If you like the research you stay in America cause that's where all the research is, and in England maybe. If you like teaching you still get a teaching job there, you come here because of Thailand. From there, I guess everybody has a different story. But, I bet everybody you'd talked to gives you some kind of a version for that (Sam).
I don’t know….I don’t have to [adjust to Thailand]...I mean I lived in many different places and there wasn’t really coping things for me. It was exciting. I guess there is some people who when they move to a new country they’re homesick. I never have that problem here. I’m very happy to be here. When I go back to America everyday I think of Thailand, but I never think of America when I’m here. I’m very happy here (Sam).

Ecological and Environmental Issues

Teaching abroad required the American teachers to encounter various issues that may not necessarily be directly linked to cultural differences. In this study, several American teachers reported to experience some adjustment due to differences in living arrangements and living conditions in Thailand. For example, Lisa mentioned.

I got, my stomach hurt. Just the water and sometimes the food were not reacting well (Lisa).

However, of all of the American teachers in this study, Ken was the only one who extensively mentioned about the challenge adjusting to Thai living conditions. Below are some of the physical and living challenges Ken experienced while living in Thailand during the 1970s.

A difference between a squat toilet and regular westernized toilet...I wasn't all together comfortable with the fact that most of the restrooms that I went to in the 1970s didn't have toilet paper and I was wondering as to what do I do now? [laughs]. That takes a lot of getting used to. To handle myself in the place that I never wanted to handle before [laughs] (Ken).

My bed was always made of these thick, compacted, materials. It did take me a lot to get use to sleeping on brick or something that feels like brick (Ken).

I had to get used to eating Thai and Asian food. Thais don't eat rice the way you eat it in America. My mother would make Rice Aroni and it will be just a little scoop as a small portion of carbohydrate. A substitute for potatoes. But literally in Thailand, the staple is rice and the food that you eat with rich is called gub kao or with rice (Ken).

One explanation may be that Ken lived and taught in Thailand in the 1970s at a time when Thailand was still developing and improving its infrastructure to accommodate Western living lifestyles. The living conditions in Thailand at that period, therefore, may be quite different than the living conditions Ken was used to in the U.S. Other American teachers who taught in Thailand more recently did not seem to report great difficulties living in Thailand.

In addition, the majority of the participants (6 of 9) are teaching in the rural areas in the Northeastern part of Thailand. It was initially assumed that their cross-cultural experiences
would be vastly different from other participants who are teaching or taught in the metropolitan capital city of Bangkok or the outskirts of Bangkok. However, after all the interviews were completed, it did not seem that teaching locations played a significant role in their cross-cultural teaching experiences. For example, among the six participants teaching in the Northeastern part of Thailand, only Nathan and Lisa mentioned some issues of being in rural areas. Nathan, for example, mentioned about his first trip teaching at a Northeastern university.

The students were excited to study English cause they were in an international program. But, the first week the students were in shock because they had never seen so many foreign teachers because this was in the rural area in Isaan [Northeastern Thailand]. You know, Isaan is not Bangkok. Bangkok, the students see foreigners all the time (Nathan).

There was quite a bit of culture shock because of the language barrier. So, um, well of course we were living in Thailand and more than anything, and if this were in Bangkok it would have been ok, but this wasn’t Bangkok …this is in Isaan. We had to learn how to say different foods, learn how to order things, how to count things, of course living on campus is simple, but as soon as you go off campus things are more complicated. (Nathan).

Lisa also talked about her cross-cultural experiences outside of the classroom in the Northeastern university.

I think in general it's hard to communicate because we didn't speak Thai, so our language barrier makes it very difficult for us to live every day. So ordering food, hmm because in Isaan* all menus are in Thai… We look at the menu and think oh I have no idea what it said (Lisa).

They don't have American food. There was a restaurant that served American food, but you have to ride your moped there. It was just kind of inconvenient. Where we were located there's not much around the area unless you ride a moped. My friend and I, mmm we were just starting to learn, so we didn't go very far (Lisa).

Lisa and Nathan appeared to face some difficulties getting around and had limited access to other facilities. Four other teachers, who taught in the rural parts of Thailand, however, did not mention any significant cross-cultural difficulties due directly to the teaching location. Some possible explanations for this could be that, based on their personal backgrounds, the other four teachers were more established both professionally and financially. For example, Sam, Kevin, and Lance are full-time professors with access to housing and transportation while teaching in this rural university. Dean, in particular, is a full-time scientist with a large government
organization in the U.S. and who earns an executive level salary and extra living allowance and often stays at five star hotels while teaching as a visiting professor at an upper Northeastern university. The cross-cultural living conditions of both Nathan and Lisa, therefore, appeared to be more limited in comparison to other American professors in rural areas.

Nathan and Lisa also talked about facing language difficulties in areas of Isaan. These difficulties may not necessarily be limited to rural areas such as Isaan, but can be experienced elsewhere in Thailand, including the capital city Bangkok. Further, the teaching locations as being in rural areas did not seem to yield significant cross-cultural burdens to the other four teachers because although the two northeastern universities are located in rural provinces and up-country areas far from metropolitan Bangkok, they were situated in a relatively well developed, urbanized section of the town. In these rural towns, access to modern facilities is often sufficient and adequate. For this reason, these teaching locations may not be much different as institutions in Bangkok or the outskirts of Bangkok.

Beside some differences in some physical living conditions, several of the American teachers mentioned that they felt they were discriminated against or taken advantage of by some Thais. Lance, for example, expressed his frustration when describing his experience living in Thailand.

One thing is Thailand is actually prejudice country against farangs. There are two prices for things even at wats [temples] and things like that. They have one Thai price and two is a farang's price. You know, I turn that around and think about that in the U.S. You know, Thailand has the way to go, has something to improve because we couldn't just say like to go to the movie, OK you're Black is 5 dollars, if you're White is 2 dollars. If you are a Jew you can't come in...U.S. has something like that, but I've never seen it, you know. They probably do those kinds of things. If they don't want me to be there, I don't want to be some places where I’m...they don't want me to be. It's fine, you know (Lance).

It's the principle that Thailand still has a lot of things to work out. The thing about it is that the Thai people never think about that they're being discriminating or being prejudice. It's just the idea that well, farangs have more money. Now, that's not necessarily so. There are a lot of rich Thai people. So, don't tell me that the farangs that come over here have more money than those people. No, they don't. It's just another way of making money. So, that's one thing kind of hacked me off about the outside (Lance).

Kevin also reported a similar experience when encountering some Thais.
Farangs complain about the same things. Many farangs complain about Thais that they are two-faced to them, don't respect them (Kevin).

Dean also faced some differences in services and fees, but appeared to take it with less frustration.

Taking a taxi and I tell them I wanted to go to this place and once they figure it out and understand where you want to go they'll go there sometime we think that they're trying to rip us off. For example the traffic is very bad in Bangkok and we want to pay what's on the meter and they'd say I'll take you but you have to pay 100 baht extra and we'd say oh, you're ripped off. In reality, they may say it to local people to Thai 100 bath more to take you to the stadium because the traffic was very bad out there for us we think as a ripped off and we'll try to go somewhere else and we think they're trying to take our money because we are foreigners. We have more money and they take us for a ride literally (Dean).

And I can understand that, but it still strike you as fundamentally wrong because you think that's not fair and in the U.S. what we think what's fair is fair. I pay the same as you, but that doesn't always happen. We get frustrated in Southeast Asia when a hotel has two or three different rates and we say oh you can't do that, that's illegal what a rip off and that's not how we do it in the U.S., but in reality in a lot of places in the U.S. there are two charges. There's a local and there's a visitor and a legal. It’s endorsed by the city or state. So, we sometimes take offense of things that we have to do ourselves in the United States (Dean).

Further, based on the comments about living in Thailand, the factors that helped with their cross-cultural adjustment varied from person to person. Some gave credit to the friendliness of the host country - Thailand, another pointed to the similarity between his native home culture and Thailand. Others seemed to adjust and enjoy their time in Thailand based their own personal reasons. Another factor that greatly helped with their cross-cultural experiences reported by most of the American teachers was their effort to learn about the Thai culture and the local language.

**Learning the Culture and the Language**

Based on the interview data, most of the American teachers suggested that learning the local Thai language helped with their cross-cultural adjustment. Larry, for example, considered learning Thai language was his main resource for cultural adjustment. Norm and Kevin added.

I got frustrated before I could speak Thai, but when I can speak Thai, I like to go down to the market and chat with the people at the market and that's the fun part of my life. To talk to people and get along with people. In the market you can chat a little bit. They are very talkative. They'd tell you stories and gossip and what's going on (Norm).
Farangs complain about the same things. Many farangs complain about Thais that they are two-faced to them, don't respect them. I never had that feeling. I think if you learned the language and you understand the culture, you don't have that feeling. I've never had that feeling. I've always been treated with respect because I've always been a successful business man and maybe that [be able to speak Thai]. And that's true in any country in the world and in every culture. Once you learn the language, it opens up the whole door to you (Kevin).

Several of the American teachers even recognized the strong connection between culture and language, as they see that learning the language can’t be separated from learning the local culture. Ken, for example, described,

It's just one of the trapping manifestations of the assimilation of the culture and the language. You want your language learners to not parrot; rote freezes what they memorize. You want them, as a part of acquisition you want them to assimilate those structures, so A. there is not all these metacognition that's going on about the rules and subject consistent, followed by verb, and object, whatever. You want them to have this metacognition of something and then they begin to assimilate the language structure through communicative approach (Ken).

It's impossible to learn any language, Thai or English, without understanding the culture and that it took me a long time and that maybe ultimately trickles in the wholeness that came together. When I began to embrace the culture, when I began to think like a Thai, when I began to dream in Thai...when I began to embrace the culture, it was at that point that my language development took off (Ken).

The notion of “the trapping manifestations of the culture and the language” in the process of cultural assimilation and adjustment was elaborated more by Ken, Larry, and Dean.

Assimilating the culture, it's something like it just through emersion of it. Think of it as sliding into the bathtub, it may be a bit too hot at first and a little bit uncomfortable, but as you immerse yourself in this, there is a gradual getting used to the culture and assimilate that culture such that now I have to say that when I speak Thai, there is almost like I begin channeling a different person. My whole demeanor and many of my mannerisms change. The volume and the loudness of my voice drop. There is a whole persona that comes as a part of the cultural presentation of language and communication (Ken).

In America, linguistically, the gloves are off. If I sit here with your professor right now I can be as probing, as assertive and intellectual as I want to be, and he or she is not gonna bristle that. And yet, in Thailand, if somebody is in a higher status in the society, I’m going to muzzle it. I'm not going to necessarily take the risk of confronting what I know or dominating the conversation (Ken).

I think I smile more when I speak Thai because if you ever look at Thai people they smile a lot (Ken).

When I was in Italy, when I tried to learn to speak Italian and adjust to the culture. I kind of almost like an actor kind of change your body language and your feelings about yourself. In Italy I always thought of myself like a person selling fruits and vegetables in a cart...so you’d go 'hey what're you doing [using Italian accent and moved his body in ways that typical Italian would do]. I think that the same with Thais. So, in Thai I don't move around a lot. I don't do a lot of body motion. In Thailand I really picked up that you don't touch people much and you try to keep things smooth and not too jerky right? That's important right (Larry)?

I think I have a less strong opinion [when I speak] in Thai (Dean).
Another factor that seemed to benefit from their cross-cultural teaching and living in Thailand was the awareness and knowledge of the local culture. Dean provided some suggestion.

What helps me get by was trying to understand how Thai people think. I have to try to understand the culture more because how am I going to fit in, how am I going to exist in the culture if I don't what its norms are. If I don't understand what's good, what's bad, what's right, or what's wrong. If you don't understand the culture, then you're going to have a problem. So, I try to understand it more. I talk to people a lot. I've always been known as a person who talks to anybody (Dean).

The knowledge and familiarity of Thai culture was important as it becomes one of the conditions that many Thai educational institutions consider when hiring new foreign teachers, as expressed by Norm.

Most of the faculty right now has lived in the country for a while before we hire them. We used to hire, like, directly from the U.S. or U.K and some of them would not work out that well. Right now, we either try them part-time or hire someone who lives in the country for awhile before we hire them. So, most of them are pros and most of them can speak a little bit of Thai or get along with the Thai system or understand a little bit of it (Norm).

Other teachers such as Ken and Dean also found that learning the Thai language not only helped them to function more effectively in Thailand, but learning Thai could increase a positive attitude, respect and appreciation from the local Thai people.

Thais were very pleased if you made an effort to try to even learn simple things like "hello" "How are you?" "Where are you going?" or "delicious" things like that. They were pleased and they will bend over backward to try to help you if you show a degree of earnestness and try to learn the language. They will try to help and I found it encouraging and it was fun (Ken).

During the lecture or things like that every time I can throw some of a few words that I know in Thai, I'll do that like chai mai [right]? or jing jing [it's true!, it's true!] or whatever like set laew [it’s done] and when I say that they always laugh. I think they find it interesting that I'm trying to speak the language that it's not native to me and I made a lot of mistakes and they made a lot of mistakes (Dean).

I talk to everybody using Thai. I would do that even with only a few words I know. They told me that they think it's na laak [lovely, nice] and they appreciate me trying that (Dean).

They really appreciate when you, even when I'm in remote places or villages, they don't see many foreigners and when I speak their language even one or two words everybody laughs and everybody was very happy about that and you become a center of attention (Dean).

Being conscious and being aware of appropriate non-verbal codes also help with one’s cross-cultural journey to Thailand. Dean, for example, shared his belief.
I always have this thing that...and I've told other people as I travel around the world that to look at somebody can be threatening. To look at somebody can be aggressive. But to smile at somebody is interactive and it's interactive in a positive way. So, I smile at people and I wave at them. Everywhere I go I'm always the person in the group that waves to the kids, that takes balloons to them, takes cookies to them and I'm trying to be the one, the person that will make a difference and a positive way in their lives. That one farang they met or that one white person, whatever I may be for them, that they've met in their lives was giving them cookies or balloons or waving to them or made them laugh or made them smile (Dean).

Respect and Appreciation

Many of the American teachers reported to have respect and appreciation toward Thailand and the Thai people.

I'm such a believer that if you think you're so smart and you're so educated and you're so worldly and when you go in and you talk to the students and you talk down to them or you talk to them as though you're God’s gift to teaching and school, not only is that a crappy thing to do, but it doesn't inspire confidence in the students. It doesn't inspire them to be like you because you're being a jerk. Very subtle things that people can do. You only have to say one bad word to somebody and they understand that you're saying a bad word to them. You only have to be rude to the students once and you're probably going to lose them as someone who admires you because you've embarrassed them. You make them feel uncomfortable and you've lost them. So, it's a struggle sometimes...you really have to really calm down and realize that this information flows and teaching is going two directions. It's not just going from the teacher...the instructor to the students...but it's also from the students back. There is not learning that it's not a two way street. The students can't learn without you and you can't teach without them. Education is always a two-way street (Dean).

Being empathetic can also help create some mutual understanding and respect.

I can tell you now, that I could never go...I admire the student in one hand that learns English as a second language, and I cannot give a talk in another language in the world. I couldn't do it. I can only speak in English and for somebody who can get up in front of the class and speak in technical terms in a second language is very remarkable. I mean that says a lot about them. That's a hard thing to do (Dean).

They can speak very well in two languages and I can speak very well in one, that's it. So, we shouldn't be too harsh with them unless you can speak their language as well as they can speak your language. I don't think you should be on your high horse. It's a lot harder than we think...a lot harder than we know (Dean).

Prior Cross-Cultural Experiences

In this study, many of the American teachers expressed that their prior cross-cultural experiences either in Thailand or other foreign countries helped them adjust to the Thai culture.

Keep in mind though that I've been working and living in Asia my whole life, and also I'm used to be around Asian people, culture, food and everything like that. Even if I didn't go to Phuket, I think you can still drop me in the Northeastern* Thailand I'd still be fine. I've been so long in Thailand. I really understand Thai culture very well both in good and bad points and there have been very few instances of Thai culture that haven't come across. If you consider that I only speak Thai with my wife and her family and I've been living in Thailand for many years...there is really nothing that surprised me (Kevin).
I've been here for a long time…the people who travel abroad a long time, I don't think there is [feeling homesick or wanting to go back home] (Sam).

I had been coming to Thailand for five or six years before moving here, so I knew what I was getting into. I knew the politics. I guess, my first year here was during the coup, you know in 2006. I kind of prepared myself to coming over here (Lance).

Not Thailand specifically, but I had lived in Vietnam by this time because I…was living for the teaching training* trip and I ultimately living in Vietnam for a year. This was my third trip to Thailand, not a whole lot of shocking was going on for me, especially the last three summers now that I’ve been at the University in the Northeastern Thailand.* I know the people on and off campus (Nathan).

Social Support from Thais or other Americans

The American teachers from this study reported that having a social network and social support, especially during the initial stage of one cross-cultural journey, tremendously helped.

Kevin, for example, described his first trip to Thailand.

My first start living in Thailand…it was a place where there were many many farang and English. You don't need to speak Thai. So I spent the first few years like that in a foreigner-kind of environment. Then I gradually...you know I also got a place in Bangkok. I bought a condominium there so, well I spent my time more and more in Bangkok speaking more Thai gradually and of course marrying a Thai woman and sort of moving gradually into the culture. Rather than being thrown bang into the culture...like culture shock (Kevin).

Further, the social supports can be in the form of providing cultural knowledge and useful guidance to someone who they can complain or vent their frustration to.

…because there are a lot of foreigners over there [AUA]. I go there everyday… a lot of times. I chat with people and talk to Thai people and complain about what stupid things...like why they do this way and they have Thai teachers who say yes, that how they do this way. It helps a lot (Norm).

I actually feel at home here. So I don't feel like I have to cope…it just comes naturally; you try to stay with the flow you don't stay too much with your own people from your own country and try to get involved in the local community and trying to spend time with foreigners (Sam).

It was very comfortable [when teaching in Thailand]. You've got to remember that I was surrounded by a bunch of classmates and Dr. Richards* [his professor and advisor] was there for something that I missed (Nathan).

I enjoy joking about it and I enjoy complaining about it with other farangs. We enjoy complaining about the Thais. It's very fun (Kevin).

Maybe to have other foreigners to sort of...complain to [laughs] (Kevin).

A couple of ways foreigners do that in Thailand one of them is through on-line forums. These forums, you know Thaivisa .com is one of them, another one is Teak Door and they all like to complain and talk about Thai people and talk and chat and then they have parties and you meet other farangs or go to bar with other farangs (Kevin).
I chat with people and talk to Thai people and complain about what stupid things...like why they do this way and they have Thai teachers to say yes, that how they do this way. It's help a lot (Norm).

**Theme 5: Teaching Methodology**

The interviews indicated that all of the American teachers used the teaching approaches that were common in Western classrooms, such as using group discussion and debate, active interaction, informal style, and student-centered approaches. For example, Nathan described his teaching approach when teaching in Thailand as,

…active, content based, based on things that they produced (Nathan).

I ask questions. I'm not static in the classroom. I don't just sit and teach. I move around. I might stand at the back of a classroom while I'm talking to keep the students from the certain areas of the room from feeling like they can mess with their telephones (Nathan).

Using a Western methodology was something that I anticipated and expected to hear from the participants, as it reflects the common assumption that educators often teach the way they were taught, as Nathan revealed.

I tend to do my teaching based on my learning (Nathan). Even though I’ve spent time studying second language acquisition and now can support what I like and what I don’t like based on theory. But I kind of teach the way that my teacher taught me. Fortunately for my students, I studied a lot of language and I’ve had many, many teachers and I hope that’s mean I’ve chosen the good things that these teachers taught me…I often argue now, using theory from second language studies, that I’m probably based more on my personal learning experience or habits than probably from a theory (Nathan).

**The Socratic Method**

Of all of the Western teaching approaches, more than half of the American teachers mentioned that they use Socratic teaching with their Thai students, at some levels. The testimony of their teaching approach was listed below:

I kind of use American...if I have to put the label on it my teaching method is like Socratic Method. It's asking questions and answers. My teaching method is not straight lecture like the American way. And a Thai way, I think it's a lot of memorization and rote learning. I try to help them just think in smaller units by the questions, but then try to get them to speak also because the more the opportunity that they have to speak, then the more confident they're going to have (Lance).

So the way I'm teaching right now it's kind of...what do you call? The Socratic Method. The Socratic Method, it's not quite Western Western. It's hopefully, more student-focused learning. Less on me giving a talk and more about students talking and more about students doing things to teach themselves (Norm).
I encourage them to think for themselves, more American style and the Socratic Method…a lot of them hadn't had that kind of teaching before as you know the differences between Thai teaching and American teaching. Rather than just lecturing. The American method of teaching, particularly in studying law, is more of Socratic teaching where there are a lot of pondering and questions and answers, like why you think the way you think, so it's been an adjustment for some, but some students respond to it very well. There're different levels, some quite bright ones, most of them are not particularly outstanding (Kevin).

We're taught that, especially for those of us who have some training, for example in law. We're taught to debate to argue all sides of the issues to, uhm to take one side of the issue, to listen and look into the other side of the issue and try to understand and change their own…what we think is the right thing to do. And I like to see students doing it that way. More of the Socratic Method. I enjoy seeing a Socratic methodology emerging in the students learning styles (Kevin).

Dean didn’t directly say that he used the Socratic Method, but his approach reflects this method nonetheless, as he described his teaching approach.

I like to ask people, what do you think? I give them a lot of easy questions because I want them to speak up. I want to them to get used to that (Dean).

Some of the American teachers, such as Norm and Lance, felt that using the Socratic approach helped their students be better prepared and more alert, which helped them improve their learning.

Basically, I will actually talk to one student and I have a conversation with one student. I'll call them by name and I’d ask them questions and I go through my whole class like that. I talk to one student and have a discussion. Even though they don't want to have a conversation, it doesn't matter. I still make them talk to me. And that, I think it helps better cause they are more prepared cause otherwise they, as you know in the Thai system, they don't really pay attention in class unless it's midterm or finals, so they think they can just mess around in class and then they clamp at that time, but the way I taught they have to pay attention cause I'll...I'll keep it random. I, maybe, call the people by list and I jump back this way or that way. If they're not listening and I call on them and they weren't listening of what is going on and I ask them questions and then they'll be in trouble. So they have to stay engaged with the class and pay attention with the class (Norm).

It's almost a one-on-one type of thing and I try to have to make sure that everyone gets the question. I don't gang up on certain people or just the one in the front row or whatever. That's why if I walk around it gives me a chance to have more of a one-on-one type of thing and that everyone, well for one thing I think.

Another thing is to encourage students to study because they know that's how I am it's going to be questions and so that I think it encourage them to study and it helps them to think quickly on their feet, if someone ask them a question of something the material that they were to study, so I think there are some benefits from that (Lance).

**Informal and Casual Teaching Styles**

Another common teaching style reported by the American teachers is that they tried to make teaching and learning more relaxed and casual. Many of them stated that they tried to
create a relaxing atmosphere in order to engage students and to encourage class participation.

Ken, for example, described his teaching style.

…the laissez-faireness of being an American leaked into my classroom too. My class was not as stiff or rigid as my students would have found Thai professors to be in terms of… I mean I was light and lively. I was happy, I was smiling and I was telling jokes (Ken). You know, joke around kind of a joking class being light and lively and encourage the same degree of informality (Ken).

Dean also described his teaching style in a similar fashion.

I try to have a relaxed atmosphere when I'm teaching or instructing. I try not to be professorial and I try not to jam things on them or force concepts on them (Dean).

By smiling a lot with them and by showing them that I understand and telling them that you may not understand everything I was saying, but if you have any questions you can ask me, I'll be happy to answer your questions and I'll show you. So, I try to let them know that I expect them not to know everything and they feel a little more relaxed. They're still very shy and they're very embarrassed sometimes to speak English (Dean).

Other American teachers such as Nathan and Sam even tried in incorporate humor and other fun and entertaining activities in their classroom in order to increase students’ attention and classroom engagement. Nathan, for example, reported,

I'm very happy to make jokes. I think if I'm joking with my students and they understand the jokes. They laugh and I know that they understood what I said (Nathan).

For my classes, trying to get the students engaged uh using humor, I try to use jokes a lot and make a fool of myself. So, I don’t care. If the students are laughing at my jokes that means they’re understanding what I’m saying (Nathan).

…and any kind of interaction like that helps make the class go by, it helps the students have fun as long as they feel happy they want to come to class, they don’t feel like it’s such a burden (Nathan).

During the interview, Nathan described one of the teaching techniques - the free writing approach - as he often used in his writing class, which he felt to be less stressful and less demanding, which can help encourage his Thai students to participate in this class assignment.

I like it. Free writing is fun. Like the free writing, it’s more like doing. Cause in free writing, I fell into not worrying about grammar, not worrying about vocabulary, or spelling and just tried to get the idea…and they get better. Over the eight weeks (Nathan).

Sam, also reported using entertaining activities that helped engage his students in learning, as he expressed,
I try to make my classroom a lot more entertaining. I use modern technology to try to bring [inaudible] and interest into the classroom. People call themselves an edu-tainer. It's kind of trying to entertain with education and make things more interesting…I consider myself that (Sam).

I don't want to use the word entertain them, but you have to make the subject interesting for them and part of that is making it apply and part of it is to make it fun (Sam).

You know I teach accounting so it's very difficult to make it interesting and dynamic because accounting, you just write things down and it's very kind of static that way. I mean nothing moves and nothing happening, nothing interesting, just very tedious repetitious stuff. It doesn't seem the nature of Thai people to do that sort of things. So, I try to work with Power Point. I do a lot of animation in Power Point. You make things pop and you make things move around and I try to make it much more visually stimulating processes, as much as possible. I also rely a lot more on my “Youtube” videos just to change the pace. I even sometime, just to keep my kids involved by putting some 3 minutes of goofy video, nothing to do with the classroom, but kind of you know, wake or shock them. The big difference is using the technology in a way that makes the class a lot more interesting and try to engage students rather than sitting down listening to the lecture (Sam).

**Adaptive and Flexible Approaches**

Although most of the American teachers used familiar methodology that they were accustomed to, such as the Socratic approach and active participation, they also tried to adjust the method to fit their students’ needs. They also modified the teaching approach to be appropriate and relevant to the field of studies, the lecturer’s personal experience and expertise, subject matter, and class objectives. For example, Lance explained,

> I used to be a very good lecturer, but I decided long time ago that if you just talk to the students and they just listen, no matter how well you do it. If they don't go to the brain they won't learn anything (Lance).

> I don't stand at the front of the class. I walk around usually… I think it sort of help keeps them alert. I know what it's like to sit in a boring class too. So, semi-lecturing is a better than go to sleep. I try to do kinds of different things (Lance).

When asked if he adjusted his teaching methodology according to the students’ needs and abilities, Nathan quickly responded,

> Always. If I see that they make a lot of mistakes on, I will again teach them…what works for this group may not work for the next (Nathan).

Kevin, Lisa, and Ken also reported to modify their teaching approaches and class materials that they believed to fit the students’ levels, be more relevant, and to benefit and improve his students’ learning outcome.
I do less of lecturing because that's what they're [Thai students] used to their whole life and the, uhm, and they don't learn something new. What I prefer to do is an interactive project when they learn how to actually do the things that they are working in on specific projects and group discussions (Kevin).

In class we did several activities that involves pair or groups a lot of interaction and very little lecture, because they really don't understand us anyway. So, there was no point to do the lecture. So, I guess student-centered teaching (Lisa).

I had to spend so much time preparing materials because of the reading class, we wrote the reading materials. We had to type the text so that can fit their levels. We always had to make new materials for each week and there were four days so we had to have time to think of new activities, new texts, new materials. We stayed up late and that was very challenging because of their levels (Lisa).

From your language learner perspective, you as a teacher need to be attuned to when they reach that exaggeration and change what you're doing. If you're constantly on drills, and you're doing grammar drills or any kind of drills or doing things that's quite repetitive, then you'll see the look of that exaggeration. That ought to signal to you that you need to shift gear and do some other activity so that your students don't turn off and that' just common sense (Ken).

Other American teachers selected the teaching methodology that they deem to fit the subject matters. Nathan, Lisa, Larry, and Dean for example, explained,

I can see where teacher-fronted lecture style is the only way if there is knowledge out there and there's something, but not language classes. I think if it's history we're talking about not a skill, but we're talking about just knowledge may be no problem, but for a language, certainly I need to have them writing in a writing class so I can know what they can and can't do (Nathan).

The main thing is to try to engage students and lecture don't help especially with language. Students need to use the language to get better, so for us we had a reading class, so they spend a lot of time to actually reading in the class and that’s the goal (Lisa).

I usually stand in front of the class or sit in front of the class and I usually do Power Point. But, uhm, depends on the class. I teach one class on social statistics* and it's pretty much lecture, but I teach International Social Relations* and that's more interactive. The statistics class* has more information and they [the students] don't have anything to begin with. If they don't have any exposure, they wouldn't know much. It's not really about opinion, like what is the frequency?? It's not really an opinion (Larry).

Dean also combined different types of teaching methodologies and used a variety of ways to assess students’ learning outcome.

I use a lot of Power Point. I use a lot of hands on. I use a lot of examples. I ask for responses in class. I'm much more interactive. I like to ask people what do you think? I give them a lot of easy questions because I want them to speak up. I want them to get used to that. I use quizzes, I use multiple choice, I always use a combination of tests. I may do a hands’ on practical test. I would give them a written exam when they have to identify things through drawings that I have on there. Fill-in the blanks, multiple choice, short answer, short essay and things like that because I don't want them to, like if they have a problem with language, I don't want to have to try to write the words out because they will struggle with that and it may take them forever if they have to do that. But, if they can match words or they can match pictures then they're going to express the same thing. I'm going to find out did they learn what I want them to learn, or not. I don't do a test to test them. I give tests to find out are they learning…what I'm giving them and can they give it back to me (Dean).
Attitudes Toward Thai Teaching Methodology

Based on the interviews, many of the American teachers also seemed to view Thai teaching methods as formal, steeped in tradition, and less interactive, and less productive in comparison to the Western teaching approaches. Ken, for example, described the Thai teaching approach.

When I went to Thailand, I was really quite amazed, to some degree uncomfortable, with the fact that the classroom was so tight and so rigid and so stiff and so formal.... so traditional. And I have to say, despite all my efforts, it was difficult to break through that ice (Ken).

Many associated traditional learning approaches such as passive learning, rote memorization, and structured curriculum with Thai learning styles.

To some extent, the views toward the Thai teaching methods used by some teachers seemed to be much less desirable than the Western approaches. Kevin and Larry, for example, criticized the Thai teaching methodology.

The Thai method of teaching does not produce critical thinkers, in my opinion, and that reflects on students that I’ve seen (Kevin).

I always joke with the Thai students that the traditional Thai teaching is so boring that they all learn to look like they’re awake even when, hmm they [Thai students] do have the talent of sitting there quietly and looking (Larry).

Ken also voiced his opinion toward Thai teaching method.

I would be interested to see how contemporary ESL teachers or EFL teachers are employing that tact. I would hazard to guess that the Thai legacy of formal and traditional roles is still pretty much in effect. And it would be very difficult to get students to engage in hands on tasks based learning activities that break down, filter, that lower the inhibition and that lent themselves to language that is authentic (Ken).

Ken also described his experience when he went back to teach in Thailand again in 2003 and was surprised to find the Thai teaching and learning approach unchanged, even after what he had witnessed almost three decades ago in the 1970s.

There was still a very strong expectation and reliance on give me a book, give me some rules, give me some structures and I’ll just follow the book. And my message to them was quite surprising and quite different, I said no. I can give you a lot of books and I’m not going to leave you with those references. I can give you a bibliographic sheet and send it off to you... I’m not going to do that. Instead, I’m going to suggest that you generate authentic materials that fit your local needs. I think most of the [Thai] teachers
[that he went back to train] felt that, that was a little bit like being in outer space, tethered to a space umbilical cord drifting and floating around without any form or structure...and they don't like that (Ken).

Sam also viewed Thai students as not as familiar or equipped with Western approaches in comparison to other international students.

We have other than Thais we have Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodians and some other nationalities. But the Thai students particularly, very few of them have a western approach to education, sort of an American approach, conscience approach in education. It could be the school or just the students that are here (Kevin).

**Theme 6: The American Identity**

The interview data revealed that the American teachers had different viewpoints regarding their identity. The majority of the American teachers perceived their own American identity as positive and beneficial to their cross-cultural teaching and living in Thailand, but several other American teachers saw the role of their identity as either neutral or even negative.

**Positive Views**

The majority of the teachers mentioned being an American as beneficial. Dean, for example, reported to have a very pleasant experience as being an American when living in Thailand.

When you're an American, in particular, and you travel in Asia or Southeast Asia a lot of countries, but Southeast Asia in particular, I call it's the Elvis Syndrome cause they really admire you and you become the center of attention and you're not the center of attention back in the United States. And I think your looks, they think you're attractive, or they think you're nice, you're polite…and all these things. So, they really make you feel like you're a movie star and that's maybe the first time in peoples’ lives that they feel like a movie star is when they travel to Southeast Asia (Dean).

For me being over there, they treat me very nicely and very politely. I get along with them. I don't have any problems. But for them they're in their own territory in their own country, so they are all equal. Here, I come in and they put me on a pedestal, oh, you're a *farang*, and you're an American, and you're a teacher. And for us, they elevate us way up high. Higher than they typically do in the U.S. So, it was a very interesting thing. It makes you feel proud to be an American and proud to be who you are (Dean).

According to Dean, the respect and admiration toward Americans also extended in the classroom as well.

I think that they respect and they admire Americans. They like having American teachers. It seems that American teachers, at least my take on it, in my field, they look at Americans as the gold standard, as the people they want to study under and I think they look at American methods and they admire and they've
read and they've heard about how...all their lives, how American people do. America is one of the world leaders. I think they respect us. They admire us as Americans and they're just kind of very interested in us because they want to know more about you and know more about the United States, things like that. So, I think it does have an impact…a very positive impact (Dean).

Ken also had similar positive experienced being an American in Thailand especially in 1970s.

At the time there was mystique about America and there was considerable respect for the country and the people. So, people were genuinely be curious about me and what was my values and how did I live my life, so there would be those informal exchanges where I broke with the traditions of being the sage on the stage and there were times when I expected them to be more engaged (Ken) (Ken).

Other American teachers also experienced similar positive situations when teaching and living in Thailand.

Being an American there, I felt foreign in that country, but I also felt very welcome (Lisa).

I'm very comfortable here and I think in general Thais are very respectful to foreigners (Sam). Because I'm an American, I’ve got it made because Thai people, for whatever reason, they got a lot of respect for the U.S. Other nationalities, they tend to be a bit more biased against and have a negative feeling about. For Americans, they are quite open and they think the systems are quite good and stuff (Norm).

Mostly Thais think of America as a good country and respected (Kevin).

Most of it good, I would say. Especially in Thailand cause Thai people love and respect and admire wealthy people and successful people, things like that (Kevin).

These teachers such as Lisa, Larry, and Kevin felt that their identity was developed by being an American, as well as their own unique personal identity. They also viewed some of their characteristics such as being confident, informal, easy going, and risk takers as beneficial to their cross-cultural endeavor.

I don’t know if it's being American or my personality, but I'm more outgoing and I take more risk and I think as a teacher, especially in a foreign country, you have to do those things to learn to try and to see if it would work. So, if I were more conservative and tried to be traditional, I don't think it will be very helpful (Lisa).

I think Americans think of themselves as more informal and more approachable. Maybe that’s the part when I think of myself as more of an American (Larry).

I have probably an attitude that I come from the world’s richest and the most powerful country and that probably has a lot to do with the way that I perceive myself and probably the way that people perceive me (Kevin).
Second, my identity comes from the fact that I’ve accomplished many many things in life and I feel confident of myself. Maybe that comes across as arrogant. American arrogant, or something like that, but I don't worry about that (Kevin).

Sam, provided an interesting viewpoint toward being an American in Thailand in that it provided more freedom to be himself without the any social pressure or confinement.

When you live in a different country and I've lived in many countries, you can get away with a lot of things because, you know, I could wear crazy cloths and walk through town and they'd say oh that's crazy farang. You know what I mean. They can dismiss the fact that you're a foreigner and you can actually get away with a lot of things that you couldn't otherwise if you were Thai. And when I'm in America I can't get away with much as I can here cause you know you have an expectation from family and friends and even the society around you. But, they [Thai people] identify you as being a foreigner. You know, you have a lot more freedom to do what you want to do (Sam).

In this present study, Ken was the only American teachers who taught in Thailand during the 1970s and did not go back to teach until 2003. He described receiving a warm welcome from the Thai people when he was working in Thailand during that era.

In the mid 70s, this was at the tail end of the Vietnam War, this was in the mind of my mother’s and father's generation, the generation that won WWII, it had liberated Southeast Asia from the clutches of Japan…Americans were held in high regards and because we were very well respected, we were seen as liberators (Ken).

We were seen as very wealthy and influential people and they didn't differentiate one American from another. They generalized as I have done myself with Thai people. They didn't look at me as Ken, the son of a farmer. They saw Ken, the American. They didn't see Ken the poor guy who came from the farm. They saw Ken, the rich guy from America. So, there were these trappings and mystique and a lot of half-truth wrapped around my persona of who they thought I was and so on and so forth. So, that helps. It helps immeasurably. It added to my credibility and credentials, even though I didn't have teaching credentials. They didn't care about that. I was a native speaker and I was an American speaker, not just a native speaker (Ken).

Ken also described that being a native speaker, especially from the U.S., was more important than other credentials in the eye of Thai people, especially during the 1970s when he started teaching in Thailand. Ken expressed his point of view toward being an American in Thailand.

I was struck by the fact that my students and Thai people in general were far more interested in the fact that I was a native speaker over my academic credentials and qualifications, because the point of fact at that point I simply had a bachelor’s in science from an Ivy League university and had zero teaching experience and zero understanding of methodology and they didn't seem to care. What mattered to them was that I was a native speaker and that they were learning from somebody who didn't have an accent. That seemed to be paramount to them. (Ken).
Although most of the American teachers viewed being an American in Thailand as an advantage, as most Thais view Americans with admiration and mostly positively, some of the American teachers appeared to be uncertain regarding the perception toward American identity. Sam, Kevin, and Larry, for example, described their perceptions.

When I'm walking on the street and they see a white face and not that I'm an American. They don't know. I'm a farang right? I'm sure that there are some Thais who like farangs and some don't like, not especially American (Sam).

Being American, I think, has some advantages, like the perception of strength or intelligent or conscientious hard work. All the values that Americans value we sort of bring with us. But the bad things are probably be a dictator, arrogant, but you also work hard, make a lot of money and do good things, blah, blah, blah. I think you get a lot with your American image (Kevin).

It's so hard to know, because people are always going to be flattering and nice, right. So, they always said I like American and not many people would say no I don't like Americans (Larry).

Larry, who has been teaching in Thailand for many years, was not certain whether Thai people showing admiration and treating him nicely were based on his American identity or simply because direct criticism or disagreement are not commonly displayed or expressed in the Thai culture. In addition, the idea that being a native speaker is more desirable in Thailand was not a consensus or agreed upon by all of the American teachers. Nathan, for example, reported to be uncertain whether being an American played a significant role in his teaching and living in Thailand.

I have no idea. I'm an American. I can't be anything else, so I only have my perspective. I hope that I was good and that would reflect positively of Americans. In fact, there are bad Americans, so I don't know (Nathan).

Of course, there is a perception of native speakers’ superiority. I can only guess how they perceive me (Nathan).

I can't be anybody but me…if they are treating me better than I had expected or treating someone less good because they were from another county. I didn't get that kind of feeling (Nathan).

I expected them to treat me with...to respect the teachers and they get that for all the teachers (Nathan).

Many of the American teachers also see themselves as not a typical American.

Kevin, Nathan, and Sam for example noted,
I'm not a typical American. I'm really a world traveler expat for many years, so I don't really come with a lot of cultural baggage. I lived in many many countries, and I speak many many languages (Kevin).

I am actually kind of not so typical American (Nathan).

I came from America and I don't deny that. I mean I lived away [from America] for so many years as soon as I got my PhD. If you ask me to define myself, American will not be the first thing I said (Sam).

I'm an American but that doesn't define me very much, I don't think. I don't think I fit the bullets of most Americans (Sam).

**Negative Views**

However, other American teachers such as Kevin and Sam provided different viewpoints regarding their American identity.

Americans are highly critiqued. Lots and lots and lots of criticism of America, outside America, a lot of people hate America and by proxy hate Americans as well. But, mostly we don't see that with the Thais. Mostly Thais think of America as a good country and respected. Others farangs [in Thailand], I would say are probably the most critical of Americans (Kevin).

I think there's a perception by many people, particularly many expats that Americans don't have the habit of learning other languages and don't have the habit of caring about other cultures and try to be the boss everywhere they go (Kevin).

From the interview data, Sam also pointed out unexpected perspectives towards being an American in Thailand. According to Sam, being an American indicated certain aspects which may not necessarily be flattering or complimentary. For this reason, in some circumstances, Sam did not want to identified as an American.

What happened was that the U.S. they [Americans] don't come here [Thailand] to teach… professional teachers like me they don't come here to teach cause the salary is crap (Sam).

Most Americans or any farangs that come here are not coming here for professional [reasons] but they’re coming here because they are retiring or because they’re here for a holiday or travel around, that kind of thing (Sam).

I see in some international newspapers sometimes of a job application that sounds interesting. I bet you get some of that where people apply because they can't get jobs in their own countries, but I don't think that doesn't mean they come here to teach. They're coming here because they can't get a job at home and that’s kind of a different fact. So, I can't imagine anybody that would quit a teaching job that they have in America to come here to teach instead. They might take a leave of absence and take their wife for one year and that's about it (Sam).

In addition, the fact that Western, international education using English as a medium of
instruction in Thailand has been rapidly growing and, as a result, the number of native English
speakers taking teaching jobs in Thailand is also moving at the same pace. Unfortunately, many
of these teachers have no teaching credentials or are untrained and unqualified to teach. These
“teachers” are known as backpacking teachers who teach only to earn enough money for their
travel in Thailand. This seems to be one of the reasons why Sam felt uncomfortable to be called
or be associated with being an American teacher in Thailand.

I don't like that they assume that I was teaching English cause I could have been teaching English when I
was a backpacker, 21 years old. It wasn't being an American, but being just an English teacher, not a
university lecturer (Sam).

I not only had a PhD, but I also got an MBA and I'm very well educated. I'm working with professionals
and then they see a foreigner and I had to wear a tie and they said oh you're a teacher. To me, calling me
an English teacher is like calling a doctor a nurse (Sam).

Beside the potential stereotypical viewpoint toward Americans as backpacking teachers,
some Thais may also cast Americans, especially American males, as tourists in red light districts
with Thai bar girls. Kevin and Sam, for example, expressed their concerns.

Bangkok higher class people… they [Americans with Thai bar girls] may be looked down on. So a lot of
time Thai people, maybe upper class or professional class Thais, have the opinion that farangs like to go
with these bar girls… and they think why they like these kind of…umm, well, they think of it as low class
(Kevin).

The one thing that I didn't like, and it's more true in Thailand than in other countries. When I first worked
in Bangkok I, especially I worked in Silom Road near Patpong [one of Thailand’s red light districts] right.
They get a lot of tourists there and a lot of guys go to the bars. So the first thing I didn't want, like to be
associated with tourists and the girls would always think that I'm a tourist there. I'd like to be identified as
a professional working there (Sam).

All, almost all expats have a Thai wife or girlfriends so there're some of the same issues. You know some
of the strange issues in Thailand, many farangs, many American men end up with women that they
never…the kind of women that they never think about being with them back home in America. By that I
mean, they meet them in a bar, working at a bar. OK, Thailand is very famous for that (Kevin).

For many tourists unfamiliar with Thailand and the culture, the country may be known
for night life and prostitution. However, for Thais and many other tourists and foreign
professionals who have been to Thailand and have actually learned about the country and its
culture, such as Sam, Kevin, Dean, and many of these American teachers, they will gradually
realize some of the unfortunate misconceptions about Thailand. The unexamined perception of
Thailand can cause some professional Americans to not want to be associated with or be
identified as an American in Thailand.

**Changing Viewpoint Towards American Identity**

Some of the American teachers also felt some gradual changes of their viewpoints
toward the U.S. and their American identity. Norm and Lisa, also pointed out that their
American identities have gradually changed to accommodate living and teaching in Thailand.

I'm kind of a mix right now. I'm kind of mixed up cause I'm more of a Thai teacher right now more than
American teachers. Because I've always taught here, so, when I get American groups here they
misunderstand me because they think I'm American but don't act American right now (Norm).

I guess your identity changes when and wherever you go. Like when I was in Thailand, if I stay their long
enough I feel like I may become Thai [laugh] cause in Japan I felt like I was more Japanese (Lisa).

Lance, on the other hand, expressed that positive views toward Americans have shifted.

I think that Thai people have a revere for American, for the United States. Maybe even so a reverence that
may not quite [inaudible] especially today, not in the past. I think the U.S. has been a very strong country
and I think the Thai people see the U.S. especially as being the... well the superpower that it was 20 years
ago. I think that today America of today is not the America when I was a kid. The credibility of America I
think has suffered…I think just a lot of this ideal the American dream has been attacked fast from the inside
from these greedy politicians and selfishness. But I think the Thai people still have the revere because they
don't understand the current stage of it. And maybe I don't neither (Lance).

Some other American teachers also witnessed the gradual changes of perception and
attitudes toward the U.S. and the American people in Thailand from positive and admiration to
criticism and disagreement, especially during the Bush’s Administration.

I think the Iraq War change some (Larry).

Right after the 9/11 people all like Americans, but after the Iraq war began people feel uncomfortable with
Americans. Some of that is myself perception (Larry).

That was not the case during the Bush years. Now, I didn’t teach during the Bush years, but I did travel
extensively in Thailand during the Bush years. I saw criticisms, not necessarily to me personally, but about
America and about Americans (Ken).

During the Bush years, there was a lot of people that I’ve heard the stories of them say oh no I'm a
Canadian. You didn't want to say you're an American. It wasn't cool. In some circles not all circles...I'm
generalizing. There was considerable damage done to the image of America and Americans traveling
abroad (Ken).
During the Bush years. I saw criticisms, not necessary to me personally, but about America and about Americans. That's really, in my estimation, was so atypical and not Thai-like for them to even voice criticism (Ken).

**Theme 7: Views Toward Globalization**

In the present study, the American teachers had diverse viewpoints toward globalization in Thailand as a blessing, as well as a curse. Some consider globalization in Thailand as providing knowledge and advancement to help the Thais compete in the global environment. Ken, for example, pointed out a positive consequence of globalization.

There are certainly things about globalization like sharing medicine and the science, has been invaluable (Ken).

At the same time, many of the American teachers also pointed out some negative consequences that spring from the expansion of globalization in Thailand.

**Globalization and Technology**

The rapid advancement in technology brought a lot of positive as well as negative outcomes to all part of the world, including Thailand. In this study, the American teachers also recognized various benefits as well as pitfalls of the advanced technology such as the use of the internet. Dean, for example, commented on the pros and cons of technology.

Technology has a big impact not only in Thailand, but in the United States...everywhere in the world. Russia and Japan…everywhere in the world. Internet is allowing people to connect around the world and connect in a good way and a bad way. Connect with people you don't know and you never see them before and that can be good and it can be bad. It allows people to take education, One computer screen can teach a hundred students and you can do it from long distance you don't have to be there. So, you can take the best technology and the best teachers in the world and you can pipe them in to the countries that can't afford to pay for those kind of education and teachers, but they can at least get the knowledge...So, there're all different avenues where you can learn from the internet. It opens up the world, really. It really has revolutionized how people teach, how people interact with each other in good and bad ways (Dean).

I see some good things too like a doctor can do a surgery through the internet and you can tell a doctor in Mozambique how to do heart surgery on the internet. You can show them how to do it. That's incredible. That's technology at work. That's technology used for the right reason...But to give a child, a ten year old boy or girl a Blackberry with unlimited used to me is terrible because they're not getting any guidance anymore and if they can do this every minute of the day, everywhere they walk and whenever they want. The convenience of them turning to that Blackberry is a lot easier to text somebody than to go find somebody. I think it's going to have a negative impact (Dean).
We're going from a very interactive society where it's people oriented and face to face meetings and hanging out, to where it's one person or one-on-one at a distance. I think that's causing the separation. I think we're going to end up with people with mental problems, with interaction problems, with social problems, psychological problems, and being in the room by themselves all the time texting (Dean).

Dean concluded his viewpoint toward technology.

They're so into technology of using their thumbs. It's kind of funny you know…humans are distinguished because of having opposable thumbs and here we are using our thumbs to make ourselves distant from everybody else. The one thing that has made us human and it allows us to build all these things that we are experiencing…it's the thing that is enabling us to get further apart, the thumbs. Isn't that crazy? (Dean).

Lance also expressed a strong concern toward the expansion of globalization in the form of advanced technology in Thai society.

You walk down the street and everyone is on the cell phone and they're playing the video games and they are not communicating, especially verbally, and definitely not in writing, other than in SMS and e-mail. So, they're not writing letters and that's one of the biggest problems that I notice in Thai students of their writing ability (Lance).

The technology is forcing the globalization issues on these kids and it’s forcing these kids to be loners and I think it’s damaging the family, the nuclear family. I think technology and globalization is destroying the ability for bonding not only in the family, but also among friends. It’s almost making everyone alone, you know. That they’re looping within themselves, that they’re either on the cell phone or video games, or they’re on the computer by themselves (Lance).

...communication is a skill. You have to practice this skill. If you begin not to, you know, if technology is reinforcing you to modify that skill, even telling your mom you love her, these kids are not. I mean they're becoming isolated and technology does that…technology will make them into a copy machine or something with no feelings, a device, a living device, but it's a device all the same (Lance).

Ken also shared a similar opinion toward the benefit and the potential drawbacks of advanced technology.

I'm not against technology and gaming and all of that. They have their rightful place. But, when that glitz began to overshadow what any indigenous people would feel as a great sense of pride, I don’t like that (Ken).

I think there's something beneficial of globalization on education. People are looking on the internet, looking at Youtube, people are reading the newspapers and the magazines and more and more women are having access to education and they’re empowering themselves to be free and independent of oppression and the tyranny of men. So, the familiarization and the liberation of society it seems changes and those changes I think are good and can be the catalyst of free and open election...So, I'm hoping that those kinds of democratic principles will prevail. I do see more and more people voicing, expressing democratic ideas which I think it's an influence from globalization. I think we're seeing and I'm pleased to hear people talking about "I'm fed up” “I had enough with corruption” (Ken).

**Globalization and Cultural Erosion**

However, Ken concerned that an imbalanced used of technology can be detrimental to
cultural preservation.

I walk down the street in Thailand and I see the impact of globalization and I see what they call internet cafes are loaded with, what I would think to be 6 years old, 8 years old, 10, 12, maybe even 14, 16 years old filling these places. All sitting there not for half an hour, not for 2 hours, they’re sitting there all day long playing westernized video games…or whatever, and that’s their source of entertainment. Now, it’s fine if you play a video game for half an hour or an hour or something like that and then go learn how to play an Ungaloong or a Saw or Lanaad [Thai traditional music instruments] or learn how to dance, classical dancing. Go learn how to weave silk, go learn something that’s Thai. Learn the Thai culture and preserve what is left, because in another 50 years, if you go to Thailand, you may be shaking hands, and see a lot of fat people that look like Americans and not know anything about Apsara and Thai classical dancing or Thai arts and music (Ken).

Based on the interview data, many of the American teachers also raised their concern of cultural erosion in all aspects due to the globalization surge in Thai society. Ken, for example, expressed,

I lament, I do lament the fact that nowadays I see fewer and fewer Thai people waiing and more reaching their hands to shake hands. Now, there's nothing wrong with shaking hands. I like shaking hands, but there's something beautiful, very Thai, very traditional and it's time honored going back centuries...centuries of showing respect and acknowledging differences (Ken).

I don't want that to be...to totally wash out any remnant of existing style of singing and musicology that have been enjoyed hundreds of years (Ken).

The worst of globalization is the face of the fast food industry like McDonalds, and Burger King, and KFC and what not. It has infiltrated the fabric of society. People are more and more indulging in those and I begin to see the health effect. So, that's a rather sad thing (Ken).

Especially economic globalization which brings about the concept of materialism and capitalism which many of the American teachers see as a contradiction to the traditional Thai way of life. Larry, for example, shared his observation of some Thais and he felt that the Thais seem to move away from the traditions and move toward capitalism and modernization that globalization brings.

Thai people aren't quite so interested in ancient monuments, they are more interested in Siam Paragon [one of the most modern and luxurious department stores in Bangkok, Thailand], resorts, and just travel (Larry).

Ken, for example, witnessed a social situation which raised great concern for him.

I saw this monk standing in line with this ATM card waiting to get to the ATM machine. I was mortified. The centerpiece of Thai society is the temple and the values of Buddhism. People don’t want to become monks anymore because there's no way to eat. Because going out [to receive offerings of food for donors] means walking to dark house, to dark house, to dark house and back to the temple with nothing to eat because people are not making "tamboon" [make merit] because that's not a value, that's not important (Ken).
Ken continued with his concern of a more serious ramification of economic globalization.

What comes in its place? The law of replacement, you know. If you remove something, what is the global community going to offer Thai people when the functionality of their own Buddhist temples begins to deteriorate and fall apart? I don't know. Those are concerns I have. If you don’t have the culture intact that inculcates these kind of values then what comes in its place? If you don't have the importance of these structures, these institutions in your society, and you have this kind of diffuse, vague, amorphous, influence of globalization that comes from we don’t know where and what it is we don't know either, then what is the teaching? What is the basis of society for values and things that you want to define your people? I don’t know (Ken).

Ken commented that erosion of the Thai traditional culture may be based on the lack of assertiveness and engagement of Thai educators and Thai people in general.

Educators are not doing that. They’re being a little bit apprehensive...I think they’re giving in maybe their lack of engagement or their lack of assertion or their lack of commitment to their own culture and they are silent... complacent. They comply and they're allowing the globalization to take the center stage because they are not on the stage at all. (Ken).

So, that you meant to feel inferior or you meant to be dwarfed...that is a sad state of affairs because Thai people are letting this to happen. It takes two partners. It may be nefarious part of global power brokers England, United States, China whoever they may be. Certainly, they have their interest and they're trying to assert those interests, but your passivity of students and teachers and the ones who make decisions about education in your country (Ken).

Education as Commodity

Another concern of increasing globalization seemed to be the change of education trend toward commercialization of higher education in Thailand. The responses of several of the American teachers in this study reflected the current global educational trend toward internationalization of higher education, especially in the areas related to profit driven institutions and the view of education as a commodity. From the interview conversations, several of the American teachers expressed concern that many Thai universities, especially the newly developed or privately owned institutions that offer international programs, are becoming more money making businesses rather than academic institutions. Several of them viewed this trend as dishonest and unacceptable, which drove two of the American teachers in this present study to resign from teaching with what called “diploma mill institutions.” Lance, for example, expressed his disappointment when teaching at one of the Thai universities.
At the Eastern University* I had to leave because the idea down there was more of...in my opinion, more of a money making thing. The last class I taught was in Organizational Management.* The concept of this topic is difficult enough even if you understand the host language, you know. Those kids didn't need management class*, they need English. And here I'm and I'm supposed to stamp their tickets on a class in management* when they have not a clue what I was talking about, and I'm not going to do that. I'm not gonna cheat. I haven't cheated yet and I'm not going to (Lance).

Lance continued to describe his students from the university he resigned from and expressed his frustration.

They have the money and their parents are gonna pay to buy [their degrees]. I don't like that. Especially when I have to get involved, I don't like that. You know, I have to work for everything I got and I am not going to be part of. And the teachers that I was working with, they don't care. I mean, the pay is good out there, better than here, but you've got to live with yourself, right? (Lance).

Sam also left his previous teaching job at a newly developed private university due to a conflict in values toward education as a money making, profit-driven institution.

...I left because it's a private school and he [the owner] is kind of Thai of ethnic Chinese and they have a way of doing business that is different from the West. You know, you have a recruiting department and [inaudible] and all that, and he wouldn't hire recruiting [people] so the student numbers weren't very big. So he has the meeting with all these Chinese and OK now each of you go find five students and we were just….like this is not our job (Sam).

With a profit driven orientation, some Thai universities with international programs are forced to lower their admission requirements to bring in more students, which is often their main source of revenue. For this reason, there have been increasing numbers of unqualified students who have low English language proficiency attending international programs. Lance, Sam, and Kevin expressed,

The university or the department was not selecting qualified students, they were just letting anybody who has the money come in. You can't do that. Those students...those students have got to be prepared if they are in an international program that being taught in English especially in the business management program.* They're going to have to know English first then learn management program* in English. So, I just...like I said I'm in teaching, for me, to do some good, you know. I'm not into teaching just to take a paycheck or to do something that make me feel like I'm cheating, well I'm not...I don't want that. You know what I mean (Lance).

Maybe it was just the programs I taught in [Thailand], they're kind of either a new program or university. The big objective is to increase their student's enrollment. And they also take in under-qualified students, students who can't speak English well enough (Sam).

I was working at the university. We have a lot of rich kids. I mean kids from wealthy families cause otherwise they can't afford to go to that school. And these programs, at least right now we have to deal with candidates...to bring students some more, so they are a lot more tolerant of things that they do that I wouldn't be otherwise. In the United States or at the European College * that I taught we have like eight
applicants for every one seat or availability we have. So, we can just say like hey check out. And we’re not going to put up with this nonsense. We select the best students. If they don’t perform we just say get out of here. We've got a lot more people waiting to come here (Sam).

This university is not known to be particularly academic and that’s reflected in the student body (Kevin).

The Role of American Teachers on the Thai Globalization Process

The mixed viewpoints toward globalization in Thailand as both pros and cons among the American teachers also reflected on the diverse perceptions of their role in the Thai globalization process. For example, some of the teachers see themselves as having a significant role and as facilitators in the progression of the Thai globalization, while others were not certain of their roles or did not see their role as significant. From the interview conversations, Lance and Dean considered their role as helpful and as a positive facilitator. Dean especially saw himself as playing a big part in helping Thailand compete in the international arena.

I see my role as a facilitator (Lance).

Well I see us having a very big impact. I’m bringing a technology and skill and a discipline that they don't really have in Thailand…the experience and the training I got in the U.S. and gained around the world and I was able to pass it on to the Thais (Dean).

I think it's also helping because if Thailand doesn't have this particular discipline that I'm teaching, then they're going be at a disadvantage because they need to have this discipline and they need whatever that I'm teaching. And without folks like us coming in, they're going to learn on the internet which they probably not going to do or they're not going to learn it at all. So, I think that me going over there teaching them and training them has a positive impact on globalization because it may make them more international. It can allow them to go to international meetings. It opens them up to hear the discipline that they didn't know it's existed and the area of study. It just will get them more mainstream with the less of the world. If they don't have something that other countries or nations are doing, they are missing something. I'm not sure if that's good or bad, but they are missing something there (Dean).

However, some teachers did not see their roles as significant.

I don’t think I have a very big role. I think those students who come here already know that they want international education and they already have an interest in looking out (Kevin).

I don't really see myself playing such a big role, but I know that we made an impact (Lisa).

Especially Larry, one of the American teachers, expressed that his role as an American educator was not significant, as Thailand has already long been globalized and heavily influenced from outside the country, especially the influences from the Western world.
Urban Thailand has been globalized for so long...it seems to me. It's hard to even think of a non-globalized Thailand (Larry).

Some see their roles in the expansion of globalization simply as a part of their teaching job, which is often requested and asked for from the Thai educators and officials.

This is my job. The international college is the key for this university. This university is very focused on internationalization (Norm).

The people who come to this college already wanted international education...for these people I will, I'll help them (Kevin).

[I was] teaching at a faculty of Business* in their (inaudible) program for international business, so they were already looking for more international quality (Nathan).

Especially, when asked about his role on the Thai’s globalization process Nathan pointed out a sensitive and controversial issue regarding the expansion of globalization and Western influences. Nathan stressed that his teaching in Thailand was one more of cooperation rather than of colonization.

This project [teacher training] was initiated from Thailand’s side. This is not the American university impinging upon a Thai university and dictating how long this language project is supposed to be done and what they should know. It was actually asked for. This is not a Western colonizer coming in and dictating how things are being done. This is a Thai university recognizing that we have a gap. We need to have this English gap filled. We want this gap to be filled, so let's see what we can do. This is not globalization in the sense that we're gonna come destroy what you've got. It's globalization in the sense that we recognize that we need something, can you come bring this for us? It's not always perceived as what really is that it's being a pull or a push. Like Thailand is pulling it to them and another is being pushed upon them (Nathan).

Some teachers also felt uncertain of their roles and even seemed to be aware that their roles can possibly create both positive, as well as negative impacts on Thai society.

I don't know if it's for good or bad. But the way I see [my role] is to empower students through language. To give them skills, so they can pursue their own goals. Like, one student's goal is to become a businessman, so he can travel the world and he needs English to do that. Right now whether English continues to be the lingual franca, or maybe another language will come over time, but right now it’s English and he feels that he needs to learn it to fulfill his dream. And I want to help him fulfill his dream. If English is a barrier, then that's something I wanted to address (Lisa).

I don't know how big of a role a teacher plays. I think it's up to each individual to evaluate why they are teaching English. For me, language is fun and it's a way to express yourself and to develop relationships with other people. So, that's why I'm doing it. For globalization, I'm sure we play a role in a small way...in a long term, I hope that's not a bad thing, but some people might think it is (Lisa).

You bring a lot of good things to them and we're bringing some bad things. You know, Americans are very aggressive and outspoken and we say and speak our minds and, and we also bring in [long pause]...well, we go in with a strong opinion, opinionated Americans that can be very good cause we would want the
Thais to be aggressive, to be more outspoken, to be less shy, less inhibited, less quiet and more interactive. But, by doing that we encourage them to do that in the classroom, but they have to go back and live in their real world. The Thai world, like their moms’ and dads’ would want them to be less aggressive; they want them to fit in. So, it really can cause them to not only question, but it can cause them to act differently in their own culture, which may make them stand out in a bad way, or it may give them an expectation that they're learning like Americans can do it why can’t we do this in Thailand and if it doesn't happen like that in Thailand they may get frustrated (Dean).

Globalization and the Future Trend

The expansion of globalization was viewed and reported by the American teachers as being both beneficial, as well as having tremendous risks for the Thai society, especially toward cultural erosion. However, the interview conversations showed some indication that the Thai people, in general, were also aware of these threats and began to shift, adjust, and search for alternative ways to cope with the rapid growth of globalization. Sam, for example, commented that Thailand is currently going in reverse toward globalization, especially after the Asia economic crisis in 1997.

I don't think Thailand is going through the process of globalization. Maybe over the larger…if you look at the last 50 years, sure. If you look at the last 10 years no (Sam).

Dealing with trying to get a driver's license, a visa, and those kinds of things. You’re going to the immigration that’s the worst thing in Thailand. I got here in 1996 and that was very easy. Ever since the economy crashed, I don't know why. I think there's a lot of uniformity in Thailand and the government started to cracking down on visas and restrictions, and it's getting worse and worse and worse all the time (Sam).

We have somebody from the New York Trade Commission and he said Thailand is turning inward ...and I believe it's true. I don't know if Thailand is going through the globalization process, I think it's going in reverse. Ever since then [economic crisis in 1997], uhm, the visa thing is just one thing. I don't think Thailand is necessarily turning global, because I think they see a lot of problems originated from outside (Sam).

Other American teachers also witnessed that the foreign influence in Thai society has gradually shifted from the traditional Western influence to Eastern countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China. Sam, for example, described the current situation in Thailand.

Thailand is more open toward China and it’s kind of turning away, I don't know why from the West and us, America and turning toward China (Sam).

Norm also witnessed the shift of the policy at his Thai university where the international
connection seems to be changing from traditionally towards the U.S. to other Asian countries for economic, as well as cultural and regional suitability.

Instead of sending them all the way to the U.S. where it's so expensive, have more of them go to like Hong Kong or Singapore, Cambodia and then do more projects together locally cause it's so much cheaper and it's better in the long term cause they make better friends and they all have businesses together where they grow up and stuff like that. So we really try to focus on building ASEAN connections throughout these whole regions with Singapore, Hong Kong, China, the Philippines, Vietnam plus the western connections (Norm).

Larry also provided additional evidence from his professional experiences as well as his personal experiences living and teaching in Thailand.

A lot of my students now are getting higher education in Japan [instead of the U.S.](Larry).

I become aware of that when I'm there I almost feel like Thai people now or youngsters were saying that hey we don't look to America anymore we look at other places too. So, I think you not one voice or ideas like maybe felt 20 years ago. My daughter seems to take certain pride that she is learning Chinese too. She is really aware that China is going to be important and I think Thai people feel maybe racially as greater kinship to China, maybe (Larry).

Although Larry still thinks that Western influence is still powerful in Thai society, the Western influence seems to come from different sources as he commented,

Western, but via other Asian countries. I think via particularly through Japan and now Korea. I think globalization comes through Korea…My kids like Korean stuff and everyway Korean (Larry).

The changing attitude and the attempt for modification concerning globalization, especially toward the Western influence, seems to be the new movement among many Thais, especially the younger generation. Lance, and Ken, for example, offered some promising suggestions.

I think Thai people are in a unique situation in that they should be able to choose those influences that they would like to acquire (Lance).

You have to think globally, but act locally. We need to be aware of and borrow from best practices as they express in globalization and…and global larger community, but at the same time you just need to be discrete enough to apply what works and what not in our community, you know locally and what will connect to the learner and his or her lived experience and lived life...whatever that is (Ken).
Summary

The cross-cultural teaching experiences of the nine American teachers in this study were ascertained using a phenomenological in-depth interview research methodology. The data derived from the interviews provided important demographical and unique personality traits of each teacher, which serves as an essential foundation for understanding their teaching experiences in Thailand. The majority of the participants in the study were older, experienced White American male teachers. All had acquired an advanced level of education, and all taught in Thai universities, mostly in the Northeastern part of the country. Most of the participants can speak at least one foreign language and had prior cross-cultural exposure before teaching in Thailand. The majority of the teachers also have Thai spouses or Thai significant others. All of these personality traits reflect the unique outcome of this research. The data derived from the interviews revealed seven recurring themes consisting of the issues related to the personalities of the Thai students, language issues both verbally and non-verbally, issues related to cultural differences between Thailand and the U.S., how the teachers adjusted to Thai culture, their teaching approaches when in Thailand, their perceptions toward their own American identity, and their views toward the process of globalization in Thailand. The major themes that emerged in this study will be used to address the four main research questions, which will be the core of analysis and discussion in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter focuses on analyzing and discussing the interview data for the purpose of addressing the four main research questions. This chapter also provides explanation and analysis of the significant issues that emerged from the interviews and discusses the themes in relation to the literature. In the present study, the research questions focused on 1) the overall cross-cultural teaching experiences both inside and outside Thai classrooms, 2) what teaching methods did the American teachers use in Thai classrooms, 3) how the American teachers view their identity in Thai classrooms, and 4) how the American teachers view their role in Thailand’s process of globalization. The analysis was based on the information derived from the face-to-face interviews with the nine American teachers.

Question 1: What were the overall cross-cultural teaching experiences in and outside Thai classrooms?

In order to capture as much information as possible to understand the general cross-cultural teaching experiences, in and outside classrooms of the American teachers, a variety of sub-questions was used. In the process of formulating and developing the research questions, I followed Bouma’s (2000) suggestion that it is better to ask several related sub-questions, than to leave the main research question unanswered (p.13). To ascertain the overall cross-cultural teaching experiences, series of semi-structured, open-ended questions were used (see Appendix B). In general, the sub-questions asked the participants to describe and provide examples of what it was like to be an American teacher in Thailand, their typical work day, their perceptions toward their Thai students, their cross-cultural misunderstandings and challenging experiences they faced while teaching and living in Thailand, rewarding experiences that they had while teaching and living in Thailand, and how they adjusted to the Thai culture.
**Question 1.1: What it was like to be an American teacher in Thailand?**

The American teachers responded to this question in various ways which appeared to reflect the diversity in ideology, individual history, personal context interest and concerns. For this reason, there was no clear common theme or unifying response to describe what it was like to be an American teacher in Thailand. For example, Ken responded to this question with a focus on his American identity as a native English speaking teacher from the U.S. and his amazement of how Thai people considered his American identity and a native English speaking condition as more desirable over his academic credentials. Kevin, on the other hand, focused on his international work experiences which helped prepare him to manage culture shock when teaching in Thailand. Nathan responded to this question based on his experience as a pre-service teacher, while Norm concentrated on the Thai system as the international program coordinator. Larry described his teaching experience in terms of his relationship with his Thai students, while Sam deliberated on his teaching methodology and teaching approaches. Lisa, Lance, and Dean gave attention to the rewarding experiences and the pleasant times they had while teaching in Thailand. The array of responses reflected the reality that one’s cross-cultural teaching experience is often diverse, complex, and individually specific. A number of variables such as personal traits and individual life interests and concerns are among many factors that affect one’s cross-cultural experiences and reflections.

**Question 1.2: Can you describe your Thai students in the classroom?**

The American teachers in this dissertation study described their Thai students in both positive and negative ways. The positive attributes of the students include being polite, respectful, cooperative, considerate, friendly, and fun loving. These characteristics were viewed by the teachers as pleasant and desirable which made teaching in Thailand rewarding and
enjoyable. However, there were some classroom behaviors that most Americans viewed as undesirable and disadvantages to their learning. The characteristics frequently mentioned by the American teachers included students being passive, “lacking” academic motivation and critical thinking skills. These classroom personalities were viewed by most of the teachers as obstacles to teaching and learning.

The Passive Learner

The characteristics of the Thai students reported by the American teachers as being passive, obedient, dependent, and non-confrontational appeared to be similar to other Asian students in a number of studies (Hofstede, 1989; Ballard, 1995; Littlewood, 2000; Stefani, 1997; Wright, 2006, Eldridge & Cranston, 2009). Researchers often theorize that a student’s passive nature may be the result of cultural norms. Hofstede (1986), for example, explains various cultural traits such as collective quality, as well as the large power distance between the teachers and the students that make classroom behavior s of Asians and, especially Thai students prone to passivity, dependency, and obedience rather than being interactive, independent, or assertive. Eldridge & Cranston (2009) also state that passivity may be what students considered as culturally appropriate and as such students in this society will value and opt for collaboration over independent learning.

In addition to cultural traits, common characteristics of the Thai students described by the nine American teachers could also be linked to the unique Thai cultural concepts, as well as the Thai educational system and history. The unique Thai cultural concept, which has its roots in the deep conscious of social status and is the concept of kreang jai, which translates roughly as being extremely considerate towards others, especially one with higher social status such as teachers (Foley, 2005; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000; Knee, 1999). Feeling kreang jai for the teachers likely causes students to be reluctant to speak up or actively participate in class, even if
they are eager to. For Thai students, the urge to be silent is stronger than the urge to speak out. Further, drawn upon the country’s historical background, Thailand has long been heavily influenced by Buddhism, which emphasizes the importance of being non-expressive and reserved. In Thai society, a well-mannered person is judged based on the ability to control or conceal his or her emotions and, in the classroom environment, this cultural behavior is even more accentuated. The role of Buddhism on education is also evident where monks traditionally took the role of educators. Most Thais consider monks as one of the most respected figures in society and this respect and admiration extends to others who take the role of educators in Thai society as well.

The influence of cultural traits such as the collective nature and large power distance between students and educators, combined with the unique Thai historical background, may be one factor that explains the passivity of the Thai students in this study. Several of the American teachers such as Ken, for example, recognized that the behavior of the Thai students as passive, dependent, and obedient may be the result of cultural traits such as the large degree of power distance between learners and educators and the unique historical background (high regard toward teachers) of the country.

But, from the Thai perspective I come to learn that they weren’t being rude or discourteous or disinterested. What was told to me was that this is the way they show utmost respect for teachers and that for anyone to step forward in the way that American students would step forward in the classroom would be rude….might even raise the issue or a question that could threaten or cause the teachers to lose face. And imagine this...imagine the audacity of a student challenging the credentials, the authority, the life-long learning, of doctor so and so, challenging them on a point in Thailand that would just...you would go to any length to avoid that embarrassment. So, why even risk it, I mean even if you were solicited by your teacher to come on, come on out, you know laugh, joke, be more laid back, practice speaking, don't worry about it, but they do. It's almost impossible for me to get them to lighten up (Ken).

In general, the passivity, dependence, and obedience expressed among many Thai students were viewed by most American teachers who are more familiar with active class participation as a hindrance or obstacle to learning. The passive behavior among Thai students,
for example, was considered as problematic to classroom interactions and classroom evaluation, as Ken described the concerns he had toward passivity.

…from my cultural perspective, a way in which a student shows interest in the subject matter, a way in which a student shows that he or she likes the subject matter, is engaged, is stimulated, is enjoying the class, is connecting or that I, you know, connecting…as the teacher I'm connecting and pushing the right button as opposed to not connecting at all, is through the demeanor of a student sitting there and of whether she or he is engaged. So, if there's a lack of engagement, just passive listening, it's really difficult for me, with my own cultural bias, to gauge and to assess whether or not I'm being effective (Ken).

It is interesting to find that although the passive behavior was often viewed as a burden to teaching and learning and most American teachers preferred that Thai students be more active and energetic in class, one American teacher appeared to find assertiveness and opinionated behavior in some Thai students as unpleasant and even rude. Larry, for example, voiced his opinion toward some Thai students with a strong political stand as “a new wrinkle on Thailand” and continued,

I do find sometimes, Thai people who have worked or studied abroad actually become more direct than English speakers and then back in a Thai context it can sound quite rude because your expectation changed. So, I have a few times when Thai students who have studied abroad and then they have too many opinions about everything. One big opinion, you know (Larry).

Larry’s comment reflects the complexity of cross-cultural teaching and learning. For example, some behaviors such as being passive may be deemed undesirable. Ironically, being outspoken and opinionated, atypical Thai behavior, can also be viewed as unexpected, confusing, and even irritating to some teachers.

In addition to the influence of cultural traits and historical background, the characteristics of Thai students as being passive can, in part, be explained by linguistic limitations. For example, the lack of language proficiency in English can result in students being unable or unwilling to communicate, express their ideas, or actively participate in class – unfortunately, this language limitation results in limitations outside the classroom. Further, such characteristics as being passive and dependent among the Thai students described by the American teachers in
this study may also be influenced by a student’s own individual traits, such as their age and gender. In this study, the majority of Thai students are among the younger group of freshmen and sophomores. The American teachers also reported that their students were mostly women. Kevin, for example, described his students’ passive behavior as “Thais are very reluctant to speak out mostly, especially Thai ladies” (Kevin). The age of these Thai students, especially young female students who just graduated from high school, may contribute to their passive personality. For example, Thai ladies, in general, often acted or behaved in a less assertive manner, especially in a classroom environment, than Thai men. Further, these young, recent high school students may have less confidence in their English language abilities, as well as less exposure or learning experience with foreign Western teachers. These limited life skills and familiarity with a new group of teachers, a new language used as the medium of instruction, and a new learning environment and approach may cause them to be even less confident to perform actively in the classrooms.

Diverse individual traits and personalities have also been shown to influence a student’s classroom behavior. According to interviews with several of the American teachers, especially those teaching at the graduate level of older and more mature and experienced Thai students, perceived that their students were active, assertive, and participatory. Dean and Larry, who taught graduate masters’ and doctoral students, for example, described their students.

The young students are very quiet and very shy, but the adults in some of those classes, if they’re in their 30s or 40s and 50s and they’re established folks, they’re not shy at all of asking questions. Sometimes the folks that I’m teaching and training are teachers and professors and they’re not at all shy about asking questions and they will ask a lot of questions. I think it’s their maturity. Some of them realize that...some are experienced. They are in front of the class so much that they know that oh, I can ask those questions, why not? If they’ve got those questions, they are very good about asking a lot of questions (Dean).

The older ones talk a lot. So they are not so used to listening anymore. So, once they've been teachers they like to talk and it's actually, it’s kind of interrupting. I finally got annoyed at one student last term and I had to tell her that she has to stop cause she was just talking…the whole class talking to her neighbor, completely loud just talking about everything I said. It was like ahhhhh I said, I cannot think [laughs]. It’s more of that’s going on now. More of the distracting talking (Larry).
Other individual contexts such as students in certain fields of studies (i.e. Political Sciences) appeared to have a certain personality that may not fit into a classification as a typical Thai passive learner. Larry, for example, described some of his Thai students in political science and students with strong political opinions as aggressive and opinionated.

People who get political, a little like the people [students] from the Political Science. The Red Shirt kind of thinking [one of Thailand large political activist groups] they're angry and then when you talk to them they have such strong opinions on everything. That seems to be a new wrinkle for me (inaudible) on Thailand (Larry).

Some students also have personalities that may not be typical of Thais. Dean, for example, described the behavior of some of his students.

Most students were quiet, but in each class, usually there's at least one student that will not be shy and will kind of reinforce yes, they understand it and understand what I am saying. Almost every class that I taught, there's at least one student that, to me, I call them more Westernized and they are more outgoing and they're more interactive and sometimes they even joke with you (Dean).

Besides individual personality, the passive personality among Thai students may not necessarily be their true nature, but rather one based on social-cultural conditioning. In other words, their passivity may simply be controlled by social circumstances such as the large power distance between teachers and learners. This conclusion is based on the information provided by many of the American teachers that their Thai students are very active, talkative, and outgoing between themselves and individuals in the same social status, but not when they interact with the teachers who they view with high respect. Lisa and Larry, for example, described their Thai students.

It's kind of difficult to control them sometimes. They get distracted and they were having too much fun talking too much among themselves (Lisa).

They tend to talk [among themselves]. A lot...way too much. That's one problem about Thai students. They chat too much during class. They won't be quiet (Norm).

The development of relationships between teachers and students, familiarity, and a more relaxing classroom environment between the teachers and the Thai learners also seemed to be
one of the factors that allows or enables some Thai students to be more expressive and interactive in class. Dean, for example, explained his teaching situation.

There are some in the class who once they get to know you a little bit better they're more comfortable with you and they're more inclined to speak out (Dean).

Ken also shared a similar experience and pointed out that passive behaviors among some Thai students may be based on fear and anxiety or the lack of confidence in their own ability in the new or unfamiliar learning environment. When these burdens have been reduced or eliminated, some Thai students may be ready to actively participate in class activities and assignments.

Some acquire understanding of the rules, but they are at a quiet period and they are just not ready to articulate or for oral production. And then there is this quantum leap, where they have internalized the rules to a point where they're confident. They're comfortable. The fear, the anxiety, and the discomfort (sic) have been lowered and they're ready for more production (Ken).

Ken used the theory of the Affective Filter by Steven Krashen, a well-known researcher in the field of bilingual education and second language acquisition to describe the passive behavior of his Thai students. According to Krashen’s theory, there is a filter that can prevent students from learning. The high affective filter often stems from stress, anxiety, or the lack of self-confidence. When the filter has been reduced by having a more comfortable learning environment or promoting self-confidence in the classroom, it can enhance the learning outcome, as described by Ken.

When you have anxiety as a learner, it’s an affective filter that prevents you from acquiring the language and the way in which we try to lower that affective filter by putting students in natural situations, try not to contrive the classroom situations, but putting them in natural situations where they don’t feel threatened and they can acquire the language at the stages that they are ready to acquire (Ken).

The impact of culture on Thai students can also be associated with the motivation of students.
The Unmotivated Learner

Another classroom behavior perceived by many American teachers as unproductive was the “lack” of academic motivation among Thai students. In the present study, the “lack” of academic motivation of Thai students can be rooted in cultural factors, as well as their limited language proficiency. It is reasonable to link that limited English proficiency among Thai students can lead to low motivation. If a student is unable to comprehend what the teacher is saying or they always feel “lost” during class, they will have difficulty maintaining their motivation to learn. Lacking English language skills can also lead to students having a negative attitude toward learning. Struass (2003) believes that motivation and attitude are strongly related. In the situation where the students may not have a positive attitude toward their learning ability, they may not feel motivated to learn.

Beside the “lack” of language ability to maintain learning motivation, Stefani (1997) found that culture also plays a significant role in how a student is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. According to Stefani, Americans generally acquire education for intrinsic reasons such as selecting the field of study to fit their personal interest and goal rather than their parents’ following their parents’ wishes or guidance. In comparison, students from different cultural backgrounds, such as Asian or Thai students, may be motivated more by extrinsic reasons such as to please their parents or to impress others. Based on the conversations with the American teachers, the motivation or the “lack” of motivation among Thai students seemed to be deeply rooted in extrinsic reasons. For example, strong parental influence in Thai society was possibly one of the reasons why some of the students enrolled in college. In a large power distance society such as Thailand, the respect by a child toward his or her parents and seniority is heavily emphasized. The strong parental influence, therefore, is to be expected. The “lack” of
motivation among many students, therefore, may be the result of being pushed to fulfilling their parents’ wishes rather than their own. When they are not personally interested in what they learn, they may not be able to maintain their attention or to be motivated for a long period of time.

Low motivation among many Thai students may also be caused by the students lacking clear academic and professional goals. Some students also have limited “real life” working experiences which gives them little direction of the necessary skills and knowledge they need to pursue. In the present study, some of the teachers reported that their students came from affluent families, and, as a result, were sometimes ill equipped or unmotivated to deal with the rigors of academia. Immaturity was also another possible factor that caused some Thai students to be unmotivated. It is worth pointing out that the teachers who reported feeling frustrated were among the teachers who taught freshmen and sophomores. Teachers who taught graduate level students, such as those in Dean’s classes, did not express strong frustration regarding the lack of motivation of his students.

Based on the interviews, motivation (or the lack thereof) is a complex concept, as it is determined by a variety of diverse factors (Strauss, 2008). To understand the students’ motivation a number of variables must be considered. In the past, individual factors were the main focus when it comes to motivation. However, in recent studies, environment factors are also being considered (Strauss, 2008). For example, classroom atmosphere and the personality of the teachers also influence a student’s motivation. It is reasonable to say that in a cross-cultural classroom, where the language diversity and cultural gap between the teachers and the students is wide, an environmental factor might result that hinders a student’s motivation. Maslow (1987 in Strauss, 2008), for example, introduced the hierarchy of human needs. In a
cross-cultural classroom where anxiety is often already elevated, differences in language and personality might decrease the level of motivation to learn among many students. In this situation, creating a classroom environment where understanding, empathy, and a sense of belongingness are developed, the motivation to learn may then be promoted.

**The Uncritical Thinker**

Yes, you may well doubt, you may well be uncertain... Do not accept anything because it is the authoritative tradition, because it is often said, because of rumor or hearsay, because it is found in the scriptures, because it agrees with a theory of which one is already convinced, because of the reputation of an individual, or because of teacher said it is thus and thus... But experience it for yourself.

(The Lord Buddha, Kalama, Sutta, cited from Gerald W. Fry, 2002)

In the present study, many of the American teachers perceived their Thai students as having limited critical thinking skills. The “lack” of this desirable ability among Thai students created great frustration for many American educators and is deserving of further discussion and research. Drawing upon the interviews and a review of the literature, the “lack” of critical thinking skills may be caused by different variables, including cultural and linguistic factors.

Generally speaking, critical thinking skills are believed to be the virtue of Western practice and ideology, as it is founded in the Socratic teaching tradition. However, when considering the messages and teachings passed on by Buddha and Confucius, the concept of critical thinking through a process of question and answer, may not be uniquely or conclusively a Western philosophy (Ryan & Louie, 2007). Nonetheless, the ability to think critically is still commonly believed to represent a Western teaching approach, especially in a more contemporary classroom. Egege & Kutieleh (2004) expressed concern that critical thinking, especially in “Western style” is often viewed as universally valued and as the epitome of all good thinking. Based on this perception, educators may not recognize that the particular Western style may not be emphasized or practiced in other cultures. It is important to remember that reasoning skills (i.e., a generic cognitive capacity) is a universal, as all humans have it in order to survive.
However, not all cultures value or express this capacity in the same way. In other words, what is considered good reasoning is not universal (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004). The approach that Western educators use to assess or evaluate students’ critical thinking capacity, especially those from different cultural background, is often cultural rather than universal (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004, p. 79). Ryan and Louie (2007), for example, state that critical thinking is still not a clear concept, as there is still no common understanding of what entails critical thinking skills and people usually “knew it when they saw it.” (p.412). For this reason, it would be more challenging in a cross-cultural classroom where the teacher and the students may not share the same concept of what is considered critical thinking ability. For example, in a collective and large power distance society based on group harmony, is face conscious, and respect for seniority are emphasized, such as in the Thai society, students may view the critical thinking performance through the perspective that to argue and debate are inappropriate and even rude. Several of the American teachers expressed the same viewpoints.

Thai culture is a hierarchical culture and we respect seniority when people reach that level of seniority, their critical thinking skills can be expressed more readily. It's like it's time for them to be able to express their ideas. Young people may already have critical thinking skills, but it's not the place or the time for them to show it with others. Unless you're pushing them to interact with you, you're not going know that they can think critically (Dean).

Thais are not lacking critical thinking skills. They just don’t voice it (Ken).

Not that Thais don't have a critique on things or don't see things critically. They generally don't voice them, again for fear of embarrassment and having them loose face (Ken).

In some cultures where the reflective learning approach is the norm, students may actually view a quick verbal expression or other outward instantaneous behavior as a sign of “lacking” critical or reflective thought, rather than as a desirable attribute. It is, therefore, reasonable to think of critical thinking skill as more of a social or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) rather than a demonstration of one’s learning ability ((Ryan & Louie, 2007, p.414).
The “lack” of critical thinking skills may also be associated with limited English language abilities. In a Western oriented or a more contemporary classroom, the way to assess the student’s critical thinking skills is often through verbal expression rather than other channels. In the case of Thai students in the present study, before they can quickly or effectively debate and defend their ideas or express their critical thinking ability, they will first need to acquire adequate English language skills, especially in listening and speaking. Without this tool, the critical thinking ability may not be freely or effectively expressed.

Immaturity and limited academic experiences could also be the explanation for the “lack” of critical thinking skills in Thai students. Egege & Kutieleh (2004), for example, state that critical thinking ability is considered the most important attribute that separates university learning from secondary or high schools. Ryan & Louie (2007) also speculate that in the actual Western classroom practice, critical thinking ability may exist more in rhetoric than reality. Especially among freshmen and sophomores, critical thinking ability may not be a common attribute possessed by this group. In the present research study, the American teachers who complained most about their students “lacking” critical thinking skills were among those teaching freshmen and sophomore students. Other teachers who taught graduate level or more serious and experienced students such as those by Dean and Ken, did not view their students as “lacking” this cultural attribute.

Acquiring “Western style” critical thinking skills in may be challenging for Thai students and could cause some frustration for some American teachers. Nonetheless, gaining critical thinking skills, or at least being familiar with this concept, is crucial, useful, and necessary for Thai students in this increasingly globalized world. The challenge, however, rests on how best to get the students to become familiar with this “foreign” concept without them feeling deficient or
compromised (Macdonal & Gun, 1997). Some approaches to overcome this obstacle might be for teachers to provide students with the historic background and legacy and to provide information on the benefits, expectation, and cultural assumption of the concept. Perhaps by having a clear guideline of expected behavior and performance in the course outline, syllabus, or rubric, would be useful for students to be better prepared to meet the expectations of their teachers (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004). Teachers may also consider allowing students who lack verbal expression skills (due to limited English language proficiency or being shy) to express their critical reflections through different channels, such as in writing, or in a small group discussion.

It is worth pointing out that the perception of Thai students as being passive, unmotivated and having limited critical thinking skills may not be uniquely Thai. Many freshmen and sophomore class students elsewhere (even in the U.S.) consisting of young, inexperienced, or immature students also tend to possess similar characteristics. This observation was supported by conversations with several of the American teachers including Lance, Ken, and Dean.

I think by and large the students are very much like any college students that age, you know. You have some that are serious and you got some that are not (Lance).

I do see and I hear her [his Thai friend who is also a college instructor] complains about how lazy the boogers are and that the stories you would hear in the United States too that the students aren't motivated. It's not just Thai. It's a generation...and some immaturity too. These are 17, 18 years old, I'm guessing and they're just dizzy. They're dizzy with hormones and they're just dizzy with life and inexperience. They don't see the necessity of taking their study seriously because they don't yet realize that their, hmm, their bread and butter and whether they don't eat or eat is depending on their job. They don't get serious...the kids here too, you know. It's partly maturity, partly culture, partly globalization, and partly hormones (Ken).

Besides being respectful, polite, and very interested in what I'm teaching, occasionally you'll see somebody falling asleep a little bit, but students all over the world do that (Dean).

**Question 1.3: What were the cross-cultural misunderstandings in the classroom?**

The American teachers reported experiencing a variety of cross-cultural misunderstandings inside the Thai classrooms due to different individual traits and different circumstances. The common misunderstandings inside the classrooms were impacted by both
language and culture differences. Drawing upon the interviews, the limitation of English proficiency of the Thai students and the limited Thai local language skills of the Americans were the significant reasons for various cross-cultural misunderstandings, especially in the classroom where the exchange of language and communication between teachers and students is frequent and essential. For example, many American teachers could not communicate with their students or the Thai staff which made teaching in Thailand challenging. They also reported having to modify their words or slow down their speed when communicating with students. Some got frustrated when they could not get their point across in class and when they did not get feedback from students whether or not they understood the lesson. Some perceived the lack of English proficiency of their students with the “lack” of learning interest and intellectual abilities.

Overall, the limited English language proficiency among the students played a part in various different problems such as forcing them to become passive, inactive, low motivated, lacking appropriate skills for reading, unable to express critical thinking ability, and unable to perform. These behaviors were often perceived their American teachers as undesirable or a burden to learning.

Besides the language differences that could lead to misunderstanding in the classrooms, culture aspects also significantly contributed to misunderstanding when teaching in Thailand. The major cultural difference between Thailand and the U.S. is the way people in each country treat and perceive others based on one’s social status. The U.S. was founded with the ideology that “all men are created equal” while Thailand was instituted on the basis of a deep hierarchical social orientation. Based on the unique Thai cultural concepts and the historical background, Thailand has long been influenced by Buddhism, where respect to seniors and seniority are emphasized. The country has also long been constituted by a Royal monarchy together with the
historical system of using the *sakdina* - the power deriving from landholding or the “dignity mark” - used to rank individual political power and wealth (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). These cultural and historical factors appeared to deeply influence how Thais recognize and accept differences in social status of each individual.

The large **power distance** in the Thai society inevitably spills over to the education arena. The large power distance between educators and students also creates a social condition in which respect and admiration to educators is extremely high in comparison to egalitarian societies such as the U.S. The high respect and admiration toward educators can be flattering and gratifying to many teachers. Perhaps surprisingly, this special treatment, however, can create various misunderstandings which lead to classroom difficulties. For example, extreme respect of teachers has sometimes led to students to seeking to please the teachers. This behavior was perceived by Larry as uncomfortable and a burden to learning. In some serious circumstances, the students’ trying to please their teachers may also lead to some unacceptable behaviors such as plagiarism and cheating, as reported by another teacher. Ironically, with “respect,” the students may try to impress their teachers at all cost by submitting or copying work that will make their teachers “proud,” even if it’s not their own work.

Additionally, the respect also created some distance between teachers and students which lead to students feeling reluctant to be informal or to “be themselves” in class and prevented them from developing a meaningful academic relationship with their teachers. With such high esteem toward teachers, there is usually no formal classroom or teacher’s evaluation in the Thai classrooms. Several of the American teachers viewed the lack of a teacher or instructor evaluation and student feedback as unfortunate, as they miss an opportunity to make necessary improvements to make their teaching more effective. One American teacher also pointed out
that the strong hierarchical and class bound society in Thailand can create a mindset where the chance for social mobility is limited or static. For example, students from a low social status may give up their own aspiration to try to move up the social ladder, while students from a high social status may lack ambition to work hard as they are not likely to move down the social ladder.

Other misunderstandings that the American teachers experienced in this heavily class bound Thai society were the unexpected expectation and obligation for educators. In Thailand teaching is not simply a job, but a highly respected social position in the society (Prpic & Kanjanapanyakom, 2004). With this condition, American teachers must maintain appropriate social behaviors to all people and at all times. Several of the American teachers reported feeling surprised and unexpected about these social obligations, as Ken expressed his teaching experience at the Thai university.

And oddly enough, a person who's a teacher at a university is also revered and respected outside the classroom. So, it's not just the respect you get inside of the ivory tower. You're expected to carry yourself in a very respectful manner and to act the role of teacher even when you're there at the market buying these apples, you want bananas, you want papaya whatever, you're expected to be a professor when you're out in the open market, even if you dress casually people will still call you Ajarn [teacher]. Even if they're not your students you're expected to carry yourself in a dignified way, at all times. And it's very unlike here in America. I go to the university, I do my teaching, I go home and I become Ken, the private person. Ken the private citizen. You know, that's not true in Thailand (Ken).

The large power distance between the teachers and the students also lead to classroom situations where students depended more on the teachers. In a large power distance society, the quality of learning is based heavily on teachers, as opposed to a low power distance society where the quality of learning rests on a student’s own effort and capability (Hofstede et al., 2010). In the present study, several American teachers reported having to take extra roles as advisors or guardians to their Thai students.

Your role is a lot more, uhm, I don't want to say parenting, because it's too strong. But, you kind of look at them and you treat them more like your own children (Sam).
Overall, the interviews of the nine American teachers revealed that social hierarchy influenced various behaviors including being passive, compliant, avoiding confrontation, and even reluctance to perform or express their critical thinking skills among the Thai students.

Another cultural orientation that seemed to lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding was the perception of collective, as opposed to individualistic mindset. One obvious example of the misunderstanding stemmed from this group versus individual cultural orientation was the “cheering” activity, where students get together for a certain period of time to support the department they belong to when competing with other departments. This activity has the main objective to increase group cohesion and harmony and increase school or department pride. It also aims at helping new students to network with others. This activity is considered important to the Thai collective society. However, the American teachers they may perceive this activity with a different viewpoint. In the study, the two American teachers who were teaching freshmen during the time of the “cheering” activity felt frustrated as they viewed this activity as unnecessary and as disruptive to learning. To them, the students spent a tremendous amount of time and energy devoted to this activity rather than putting their effort toward learning.

The consequence of having a different mindset toward the group and the individual also creates misunderstanding in the classroom. In this study, some teachers reported feeling disappointed when witnessing classroom behaviors that they deemed unproductive. For example, the behavior of Thai students of having low motivation or “lacking” learning initiative may be influenced by culture. The mindset toward the group as opposed to the individual, for instance, may create a classroom environment where cooperative learning is emphasized as opposed to a competitive learning approach (Stefani, 1997). Strauss (2008) also pointed out that a collective society is where belongingness and group cohesion are emphasized. Students under
this cultural norm may avoid being viewed as “outstanding” or at the top of the class with the fear of rejection by their classmates. The different cultural orientation, for this reason, is likely to be a factor for various cross-cultural classroom misunderstanding in the present study.

**Question 1.4: What were the cross-cultural misunderstandings outside the classroom?**

As predicted, one’s professional life cannot be dichotomously separated from one’s personal life as experiences of difficulty adjusting to new living conditions will likely impact one’s teaching performance in a variety of ways. In other words, one cannot examine or study cross-cultural classroom experiences in isolation from the experiences outside the classroom, as all of these experiences are interrelated and impact one another. This notion is reflected in what Ken described as his experiences teaching in Thailand.

Sometime it's difficult to separate, because the values that are held to outside of the classroom are also held inside of the classroom (Ken).

Common misunderstandings outside of the classroom, therefore, were similar to those misunderstandings faced inside the classroom. Cross-cultural misunderstandings outside the classroom also stemmed from differences in cultural practices and language diversity between Thailand and the U.S. In addition, with the question focusing on cross-cultural misunderstandings outside the classroom, the issues of differences in overall ecological conditions between Thailand and the U.S, and the degree of similarity and differences between the home and the host cultures inevitably emerged in the conversations. Surprisingly, most American teachers did not seem to express great difficulty with the living arrangements and ecological conditions when working in Thailand. Based on the interviews, only a few of the American teachers experienced difficulties due to differences in ecology. Nathan and Lisa were among a few who reported experiencing some difficulties while working in lower Northern Thailand. Some possible explanations could be that they both were pre-service teachers
traveling to Thailand with limited budgets and lived in dormitories without easy access to transportation and other facilities, in comparison to the majority of the American teachers who were more established financially and professionally. Ken was another American teacher who spoke extensively of the challenges of living in Thailand. One possible explanation for this was that Ken taught in the 1970s when Thailand was still developing its infrastructure to meet with Western standards. At the present time, however, most of the facilities such as toilets and transportation in the larger cities such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Khon Kaen, are pretty much up to the standards of developed countries. American teachers working in some of the larger cities, therefore, may not find the living conditions in Thailand a significant issue during their cross-cultural journey.

**Question 1.5: What were the most challenging aspects of teaching and living in Thailand?**

The most challenging aspects of teaching and living in Thailand, again, seemed to be impacted by two major factors - the differences in language and the differences in culture orientations. First, many researchers emphasize that language differences play a major role in cross-cultural classrooms (e.g., Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Hall, 1997; Kim, 1997; Walker, Bridges & Chan, 1996). Walker et al., (1996), for example, report that difficulties facing cross-cultural classrooms are often magnified with language differences (p.14). The important reason rests on the fact that acquiring a new language is challenging because the nature of language is symbolic, rule governed, subjective, and dynamic (Chen & Starosta, 1998). Acquiring a second language, therefore, is not simply knowing the definitions, phonetics, and syntax, but involves many levels of learning including cognitive, affective, and operational skills (Kim, 1997). In other words, the process of acquiring a second language involves knowing the parameters of the culture and possessing the skills and knowledge of that culture to be socially “fluent” to connect with the local people.
In this study, one of the most challenging aspects of teaching in Thailand commonly reported by the teachers was their limited Thai language skills. This language limitation caused a lot of difficulties in all aspects both inside and outside the Thai classrooms. The difficulties included being unable to verbally communicate with students and other Thais, limited knowledge to “decode” the “true” messages in a Thai high-context society, the limited awareness of appropriate way to greet or address people, and the misuse or misinterpretation of gestures and other nonverbal cues. These various language limitations, therefore, made cross-cultural teaching a daunting and frustrating task.

Another challenging aspect of teaching in Thailand was the insufficient English skills of Thai students in all areas including speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Especially in this present study, many of the American teachers reported having a hard time getting their students to read. The comments from the American teachers on the Thai reading ability reflect what has been a matter of concern among other Thai educators and has also been reported in one of the Thai newspapers. For example, an editorial article from the Nation, one of the most trusted and reliable English newspapers in Thailand, reported the following message:

To say that a reading culture is not one of Thailand’s strongest suits is a gross understatement. Reading, either as a means of self-improvement or just pleasurable escapism, has never been associated with the idea of fun in the Thai social context. Indeed most Thais, if pressed, would admit that reading, a solitary activity, is the direct opposite of having a good time. People who read books are widely frowned upon as introverted, too serious, unsociable or lacking in social skills. Most Thais would rather engage in gregarious group activities like eating, drinking, watching television or movies, or just talking, all of which they find more enjoyable and which, usually, makes little demand on their intellect. This pattern of behavior cuts across socio-economic classes. (The Nation, October 9, 2007).

Considering the significance of reading as the language and comprehensive development, the lack of reading skills among many Thai students needs to be addressed and reconciled (Strauss, 2008). It is reasonable to say that the “lack” of interest in reading, especially in classes taught in English, such as those in the present study, may, in part, be linked to the limited English language proficiency.
In general, developing a proficient reading skill is often “fraught with difficulties” (Strauss, 2008, p.16). Even among native speakers, reading requires a reader to use numerous skills including “…decoding of words, the development of phonological skills, syntactic parsing, knowledge of text structure, the development of automatic processing and use of metacognitive skills.” (p.19) For these reasons, reading is considered a difficult and demanding skill to obtain, even among native speakers of a language.

For the non-native speaker such as Thai students, acquiring sufficient reading skills is even more challenging. Strauss (2008), for example, points out that in the situation of English reading in Thailand, there are numerous obstacles that require the Thai students to overcome. For example, the decoding of meaning in the Roman alphabet can be challenging as the Thai language is rooted in a totally different alphabetical system. Further, reading ability often coincides with oral language proficiency. For instance, Thai students may be able to sound out words, but they do not recognize the sound and cannot link the sounds to the meaning. One example would be when a native English speaking child sounds out the word “cat” he or she can quickly link the sound to a specific type of animal. Whereas Thai students may not know what “cat” means from the sound they pronounce and, thus, may not be able to develop reading comprehension. The majority of Thai students also learn English from native Thai speaking teachers, many of whom are also limited in oral English proficiency themselves. Covey (2007), explains that in the situation where teachers “don’t speak English the students cannot hear English” (cited in Strauss, 2008, p.20). In addition, the grammar and sentence structure are also vastly different between the two languages. Lacking or limited oral language skills and syntax make it harder for Thai students to decode or comprehend the meaning of words from the reading. These linguistic factors, make reading challenging for many Thais. Strauss also reports
that reading enjoyment can develop only when reading is “…reasonably fluent and effortless” (p.19). The struggle that Thai students experience while reading English due to their limited language proficiency may cause them to get bored and become unmotivated or even resistant to continue reading.

Besides linguistic challenges, Thai students are also faced with some cultural challenges that may hinder their English reading development. Based on Hofstede’s cultural dimension, Thailand is considered a collective culture where the emphasis goes toward group harmony, togetherness, and relationship building rather than individual accomplishment. With these cultural traits, Thai students may put more effort to socializing rather than reading (The Nation, 2007). Many may view reading as an activity that separates them from the group and some may even view it as an anti-social activity. In addition, the Thai socio cultural norm to view education and things related to education as formal and serious may create the perception toward books as such. For example, Ken described how Thai students perceived and treated books as,

> Books have their origin which originally were holy scriptures…has legacy and evolution that has evolved to the point where they still revered books as something very very if not sacred, at least so high and so, so precious that you don’t stand on them and you don't sit on them (Ken).

When students perceived books and book reading as formal and serious activity, the desire and motivation to read may be reduced, especially among the young group of students such as the freshmen and sophomores in the present study.

Another possible factor that causes low motivation to read could be that some books, especially the Western oriented books, may not be relevant or applicable to the Thai context. Sam, for example, recognized that some of text books in his class may not be relevant to the lives of his students, which led him to modify his lesson plan to be more suitable to the Thai framework.
Most of the English books and academic books are from America. The experiences that they are from America if you’re from America and you read American book you know what they’re talking about. Like Boeing Corporation, in my class there are only two kids that have ever flown. So, most of them don't know what Boeing is. You can talk about phone companies, or maybe certain TV shows, like Mr. Bean or something like that. Like you have a business book that talks about companies like CBS or General Motors, Thai students didn't know what these companies are (Sam).

A lot of the examples here are not really appropriate and they are expensive. You know American kids they have the advantage of being in the same environment with the people that write the text books. They have a little bit more exposure to these experiences [business related experiences]. A lot of them work in high schools, so they understand that kinds of things (Sam).

The “lack” of desire to read may be because the levels of the text books and the stories presented in the books may not be age appropriate for some Thai college students in this study. Lisa, for example, described the books she used in her college reading classes.

They're Western [books]. They're graded readers and the authors are through Oxford through Longman and Penguin. Different Western publishers and the stories are like, uh, some of them are classic stories from American literature and Western literature, but they were written easier for foreign students. So, they are written in a much shorter way like Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations, is written in like this much [showing her right index and thumb almost touching indicating a thin book] instead of usual thick books (Lisa).

In his study, Strauss (2008) points out that graded reader books designed for young students that are considered “easy” may actually pose unexpected comprehension difficulties for adult second language learners such as the Thai college students in this study. According to Strauss, simplified readers may be appealing at first. However, easy and short sentences may also be monotonous and even confusing because the details and imagery words have often been removed. Koda (2004) also described easy and short sentences in graded readers as lacking “…the explicit connectives of complex sentences (cited in Strauss, 2008, p. 39). For older non-native speakers such as the Thai college students, graded readers may not be age-appropriate as they may not hold student’s attention and motivation to continue reading.

Based on the interviews, there were various factors to explain the “lack” of reading ability and motivation to read among Thai students. The mismatch of Western textbooks with the Thai context, the unique Thai cultural orientation, and the limited English language skills were among possible explanations. However, it is worth pointing out that the teachers reported
having students with limited English language skills were among the teachers who taught relatively new and young college students in their freshmen and sophomore years. For this reason, when assessing English language ability, other factors such as age, maturity, English language exposure, and educational level need to also be considered. As mentioned by some of the American teachers as the following:

…freshmen and sophomore students they have problems with their language (Norm).

I think they all are quite low for all of them, but the higher level class was capable of doing better speaking better writing and reading. They lower level was improving but they were still quite low (Lisa).

They’re freshmen, they’re eighteen years old, they’re coming straight out of high school, a little earlier there’s no foreigner teaching in high school (Nathan).

**Question 1.6: What was the most rewarding experience of teaching and living in Thailand?**

The interviews revealed that the majority of the American teachers interviewed considered the respect and admiration that they received from their Thai students as the most rewarding aspect of teaching in Thailand. They also view Thailand and the Thai people as having unique cultural traits such as being fun loving, easy-going, cooperative, and considerate as the positive attributes that make their cross-cultural teaching in Thailand pleasant and worthwhile. The femininity cultural orientation in the Thai society also creates an atmosphere that allows relationships to easily develop. One important aspect of Thai social norms is to be sanook (sometimes spelled as sanuk) translated roughly to mean the feeling of fun and enjoyment in work, play, and other activities. This cultural concept created the environment that make the cross-cultural teaching assignment more enjoyable for some of the American teachers.

Ironically, the rewarding experiences of receiving special treatments as educators created some challenging situations in the classroom. For example, students wanting to please the teachers resulted in student reluctance to participate or voice their opinion in the classrooms, especially the opinions that were deemed as being in conflict with the teachers. With respect
towards teachers, it develops into the society where formal classroom evaluation is not commonly practiced. The lack of educational feedback and evaluations makes it difficult for the teachers to gauge their performance and make classroom improvements. This high respect and admiration also created a social distance that prevented the students and teachers from developing a more meaningful academic relationship.

One common rewarding experience reported by the American teachers was when they saw students making progress in their English language ability and in academic areas. In addition, the American teachers also reported feeling gratified when they witnessed Thai students beginning to develop assertiveness, independence, or become more interactive in the classroom. Kevin, for example, considered one of the most rewarding experiences for him “when discussing a very hot and difficult issue where they're many different viewpoints…” (Kevin). The rewarding experiences reported by the American teachers seemed to reflect the differences between cultural orientations toward masculinity or achievement-oriented values in the U.S. as opposed to femininity or relationship-oriented values in Thailand.

All and all, the American teachers perceived their rewarding experiences in various different ways depending on their individual backgrounds, personality traits, and individual situations. The findings reflect the complexity and intricacy of one’s cross-cultural journey.

**Question 1.7: How did you adjust to the Thai culture?**

The American teachers reported to adjust to the Thai culture in a variety of ways which, once again, reflects the complexity and multifaceted nature of cross-cultural studies such as this one. In other words, how well one can adjust to the new environment depends on a number of variables and factors. For example, individual personality and traits such as local language skills (in this case, Thai), open-mindedness, adaptability, preparedness, being adventurous, or having
positive views toward life are potential factors that play a significant role in one’s cross-cultural journey (Kim, 1997). Other factors are the environmental factors which can also influence the success or failure of one’s cross-cultural experience. According to Kim (1997), these environmental factors include host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength. All of these potential variables mentioned above (and more) need to be considered in order to accurately understand one’s cross-cultural experiences.

Generally speaking, most of the American teachers in the present study reported having a positive experience as they gradually adjusted to Thai culture. Some of the major factors that seemed to help many of the American teachers adjust to the Thai culture include individual personality and traits. For example, the American teachers who reported to have a willingness to migrate to Thailand to teach, willingness to learn the local language, and willingness to embrace the Thai culture seemed to also report having less difficulties adjusting to Thailand. Other individual circumstances such as having prior international exposure may play a role in helping them adjust to the Thai culture more readily. In the present study, the majority of American teachers had taken at least one international trip and some of them such as Kevin, Dean, and Larry were considered “world travelers,” as they reported to extensively travel in various countries throughout the world. Having some prior cross-cultural exposure may have helped some of the American teachers to be better prepared and equipped when encountering unpredictable situations on their Thai teaching assignments.

In addition to having some international exposure, other individual circumstances such as being a sojourner as opposed to being a long term resident, can also play a role in reducing the cross-cultural difficulties. In this study, Larry, Dean, Lisa, and Nathan were considered sojourners, not long term residents as they resided in Thailand only a short time (per visit) to
teach. This factor may help them to “deal” with their cross-cultural adjustment. Lisa, for example, described what helped her cope with the cross-cultural difficulties.

I think it's more of how we deal with the situation, so even though there were problems at that time we just say oh, we can't help it because we're not trained to adapt to the society, and we were just there to only a few months so we don't try to expect to understand everything (Lisa).

Another individual circumstance that could influence how one feels toward their cross-cultural adjustment was their current teaching situation. For example, the American teachers who reported having a positive experience adjusting to the Thai culture tended to be the teachers who had already gone back to the U.S. or were no longer teaching in Thailand. While the American teachers who expressed strong frustration toward Thai students and the Thai culture were teachers who are currently teaching in Thailand. In other words, one group is reporting how it was (nostalgic) and the other group is reporting how it is to teach in Thailand. It may be possible that teachers who are still “swimming” in the sea of Thai culture are freshly and vividly experiencing difficulties on an everyday basis, while the other group no longer has to deal with these frustrations as they are back in their familiar surroundings. All of the frustrations for one group are in the past and they may have had more time to reflect, heal, or appreciate their teaching experience in Thailand.

In addition to individual quality and traits, other factors that seemed to help many of the American teachers adjust to the Thai culture include environmental factors such as host receptivity. It seemed evident that the attitude toward Western newcomers, especially Americans in Thailand, was generally positive. The fact that Thailand has never been officially colonized by a Western power might actually provide a more positive view toward foreigners. In general, therefore, most Thais eagerly and enthusiastically welcome American visitors. The positive attitude toward Americans, for example, seemed to make the cross-cultural adjustments easier for many of the American teachers.
Further, the host conformity pressure is also relatively low in Thailand. In general, Thais do not put strong pressure on foreigners to change their way of life to accommodate to Thai norms. Unacceptable or rude behavior that is deemed offensive and inflammatory (i.e., showing disrespect to a monk or the elderly, making rude or obscene gestures towards the image of the Thai Royal Family), however, may result in foreigners being advised or admonished. The relatively low host conformity pressure allows foreigners to adjust to the Thai culture with less pressure.

**Question 2: What teaching methods did you use in Thailand?**

As I anticipated and expected, the American teachers reported using Western approaches such as individual and group discussion and debate, active class participation, student-centered, and informal teaching styles in their classes. This information was not surprising as most teachers teach the way they were taught and learned. Peacock (2001), for example, reports that the foundation of one’s learning and teaching style often stem from one’s educational experiences and cultural background. According to Peacock, educators will likely emulate teaching strategies from the teachers that they most admire or adopt a teaching style that they, themselves, learn best. However, these teaching strategies may or may not suit the learning styles of their students, especially in cross-cultural settings.

The challenges facing the American teachers, therefore, seem to be how they select the most suitable and effective teaching approaches to fit their Thai students. Biggs (1997), for example, suggests that a flexible and adaptive teaching approach is crucial for effective classroom. The complexity of what is a suitable teaching approach lays with the fact that, based on its educational history, Thailand actually has no specific learning or teaching styles for formal education, especially at the higher levels. The first formal education was patterned after England
in the 1860s, then after WWII, the American system began to dominate the Thai educational system (Chalapati, 2007). For this reason there was no clear delineation of what entails Western or Eastern (i.e., Thai) educational approaches. For example, one of the American teachers, Lisa actually was uncertain in her reply to the question “what teaching method did she use in the classroom?” Lisa replied “I don't know if I know the differences between Westernized or Easternized [teaching approaches].”

When there was no clear distinction of what is considered common or suitable for Western classrooms or the Eastern or Thai classrooms, it may be more challenging for the American teachers to either adopt or adapt their teaching approaches to match their Thai students. In the present study, although most of the American teachers reported using Western teaching styles, they used and incorporated a variety of approaches that they deemed suitable to their Thai students. They also modified the teaching approach to be appropriate and relevant to the field of study, the lecturer’s personal experience and expertise, subject matter, and class objectives. For example, many of the teachers mentioned using a casual and relaxing approach by incorporating humor and entertaining activities in the Thai classrooms. This approach proved to be effective especially in a strong femininity, relationship-oriented society such as Thailand where the concept of sanook is emphasized.

Although the American teachers in this study tried to incorporate a variety of teaching methods, many perceived their Thai students either as unfamiliar or ill equipped for Western learning. For example, most of the American teachers perceived their Thai students as being passive, dependent, non-confrontational, and “lacking” learning initiative. These characteristics were viewed by many of the teachers as obstacles to Western learning, especially when more than half of the American teachers reported using Socratic methodology in the Thai classrooms.
Generally speaking, the Socratic methodology is the Western philosophic tradition developed from the great Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004). The Socratic methodology is one of the learning approaches through the process of questioning of common knowledge. This learning approach allows each individual student to analyze, critically evaluate, and express their opinion or even argue and debate what they believe (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Egege & Kutieleh (2004) describe the Socratic method as the learning approach “…based on competitive discourse and dialogue using a rage of argumentation skills. Status was gained by destroying an opponent’s argument, through detailed critical analysis, and by constructing a convincing argument of one’s own as a rival point of view.” (80) Many Western educators who are educated through the Socratic method may view this approach as universally utilized. For them the Socratic method is one of most effective tools to help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities which are considered one of the most desirable learning outcomes, especially in Western classrooms (Greenholtz, 2003).

From a cross-cultural perspective, the Socratic method, in many aspects, is quite opposite to common cultural norms and the learning concept utilized in non-Western classrooms, such as Confucius learning where respect and cooperation are emphasized. Greenholtz (2003), for example, states that the Socratic learning approach is highly individualistic as it emphasizes the notion that truth should not be dictated by authority figures or social norms, but from one’s own individual prescription. This idea may sound possible and logical in individualistic or egalitarian societies such as in the U.S. However, in a collective society, the individual only exists in relation to others, or as Greenholtz puts it “…the self as individual has no reality in collectivist cultures.” (p.126), this idea approach may be difficult to implement. Further, in a high femininity, relationship-oriented society where debate and confrontation are not actively
encouraged (Eldridge & Cranston, 2009), and in a strong hierarchical society where “…the virtues of harmony and the maintenance of face reign supreme.” (Hofstede, 2001, p.235), the conscious of social class is deeply embedded and influenced how an individual thinks and behaves in Thailand. The concept of truth within one’s self, free from authority or social pressure, thus, may be difficult to achieve without sufficient training and preparation.

Further, Greenholtz (2003) cautions that using the Socratic method in a non-Western classroom can pose a challenge. First, in a cross-cultural classroom where students are unfamiliar with Socratic teaching approaches, they may not recognize that they are actually learning through the form of arguing and debate. Some may even find this approach inappropriate. Greenholtz (2003) describes that through the different cultural “lens,” Eastern students may see,

“…the fervor with which Western students are exhorted to question and to challenge, especially early on in the learning about a topic, is foolish. How can one challenge what one does not understand properly and how can understanding result from free-for-all questioning rooted in ignorance? (Greenholtz, 2003, p. 124)

Kelley (1963) also points out that learning often takes place when learners recognize or consider incoming information as knowledge. In the case of the Thai students, many of whom were recently graduated from Thai high schools where cooperation, respect to teachers, and maintaining harmony were the norm. Thai students may view Socratic approach as a foreign concept. They, therefore, may not be aware that “arguing” with their teachers or with their classmates is actually a knowledge producing process or a legitimate way of learning. Without the familiarity and knowledge of what to expect about the Socratic teaching approach, some Thai students may view the debate simply as a conflict between others and not intended for their involvement or participation (Kelly, 1963). Some may even view it as disruptive or rude and may not feel comfortable in this type of “lively” classroom environment. Particularly in
Thailand where collectivism and Buddhism are the basis for cultural and behavior orientation, maintaining harmony and avoiding confrontation is viewed as good behavior, and the Socratic approach may very well be in conflict with traditional Thai values.

Further, in some circumstances, utilizing the Socratic method in a non-Western classroom could lessen the importance of educational traditions of the students (Greenholtz, 2003), as the main purpose of education should be to prepare students to become a part of and a productive citizen of their own society. Greenholtz, therefore, cautions that when applying new teaching approaches, educators need to also consider the student's skills and expectation, as well as the expectations of the society where the students eventually have to return to.

In sum, the Socratic methodology may be a foreign concept for many Thai students and it may require a lot of practice and preparation from both learners and educators to make it work. It is, nonetheless, a useful and important learning approach that Thai students need to become familiar with, especially in this increasingly globalized world. Receiving and being exposed to this new learning approach from the Americans or other foreign educators is considered beneficial for the Thai students as it helps broaden their horizon and prepare them to be better equipped and more competitive in the global village. In order to effectively apply the Socratic method in Thai classrooms, Thai students may need much more knowledge, familiarity, and time to practice and prepare in order to “convert” into a new way of thinking and learning approach. Greenholtz, for example, suggests that “…mere exposure, even repeated exposure over a span of time, is not enough. The learning experience must be mediated and our goals and techniques made explicit and transparent” (Greenholtz, 2003. p.125).

**Question 3: How did you view your identity as an American teacher in Thai classrooms?**

The American teachers in this study perceived their own identity in a variety of ways.
The diverse viewpoints, again, reflect the differences in individual personality, context, and unique circumstances. For example, in this present study Lisa was the only non-White American female teacher. Her experience and the perception toward being an American was different in comparison to the other White/Caucasian American male teachers in this study. As a non-White American, there was a perception by some Thai local people to view her as another Asian or even as a Thai. Some did not think of her as someone from the U.S. and some did not expect her to be able to speak English and, thus, viewed her as non-native English speaker. For this reason, her identity as an Asian American female can create both positive and negative situations. On the one hand, as an Asian, Lisa could blend in as “one of them” more easily than the American White male teachers. Being a female, also made it easier for her to make a closer connection with Thai students especially in this present study where the majority of them were women. This is especially true in the Thai culture where the interaction with the opposite sex is, in most part, still quite restrictive and follows strong cultural traditional norms. Being a female teacher, therefore, seems to reduce the gender gap that the male teachers in this study experienced.

On the other hand, Lisa’s identity as an Asian American can be viewed as a double frustration for her as Thais neither viewed her as American or Japanese, and the expectation of her may have been different than the White male teachers. Lisa, for example, expressed that,

I think the expectation was that I don't speak English so you have to speak Thai or they don't even think about it. But, obviously, I look different and I can't speak it [Thai language]. So, I'd say “yee poon,” “yee poon” [Japanese] like we're Japanese that's why we can't speak Thai. And they said oh America, America? I just have to say I don't know how to communicate it (Lisa).

Some Thais did not view Lisa as an American native English speaker and, thus, may not expect her to be able to speak English. In a country where being a native English speaker is so important as it is considered a desirable quality, even over academic credentials, Lisa may have been viewed with doubt in her language or even her language teaching ability. Many students
may prefer having White Caucasian American teachers over Asian-looking teachers, such as Lisa, as they perceived her as a non-native English speaker.

As mentioned earlier, the American teachers in this study perceived their own identity in a variety of ways. Overall, most of the American teachers in this study viewed their identity in a positive way. Being Americans benefit one’s cross-cultural journey as Americans often have certain characteristics and personality traits such as being confident, outgoing, informal, and adventurous. In addition, being a native speaker of English, the world lingua franca, often adds to the admiration and respect from other non-native English speaking people such as the Thais who view English language skills as a highly desirable quality. Many of the teachers also viewed being an American in Thailand as beneficial, as they often received a warm welcome, admiration, respect, and special treatment from the Thai people. Holding a position as a teacher in Thai society also enhances the positive perception toward them, as most Thais view educators with extremely high esteem.

However, several of the American teachers were not certain whether receiving respect and admiration from Thais were the consequence of their own American identity or simply because of Thai cultural norms. For example, the strong femininity, collective mindset, and the influence of Buddhism created the society where direct criticism, disagreement, and confrontation are not commonly displayed or expressed. Without the outward negative expression, one cannot accurately gauge the real perception of the local people toward newcomers such as the American teachers in this present study. Further, the special treatment reported by several of the American teachers was not a consensus. Some reported receiving no special treatment and some even considered their American identity as a liability.
Being an American indicated certain aspects which may not necessarily be flattering or complimentary in some circumstances. For instance, being an American in the context of teaching in Thailand may be embarrassing for some people as there are many unqualified backpacker teachers in some Thai schools. Simply being a native speaker of English can land someone a teaching job. In addition, many Americans come to Thailand as tourists and for recreational reasons. Some, especially men, came to Thailand, in great part, for the nightlife. For this reason, many Thais have a stereotypical view towards farang males as tourists in red light districts with Thai bar girls, rather than as an educated and professional individual.

In sum, the teachers had different viewpoints and perceptions toward their American identity. Most viewed their identity in a positive light, some viewed it with uncertainty and as neutral, and several perceived their American identity in a negative way. All in all, most of the teachers recognized that their identity influenced their cross-cultural teaching experience in Thailand in one way or the other, as stated by Ken.

What a nation does defines its culture, defines its identity. If you are representing that country and that culture then it has a bearing in the classroom as to whether people take a lot of stock in confidence and belief what you're teaching and what you're saying or not. Like, I'm here because I have to take an English class and I frankly don't respect Americans. I don't like this guy. I don't like what he stands for, I don't like what this country stands for and that becomes, all of sudden, a cultural barrier to them to actually learning the language (Ken).

**Question 4: How did you view your role as a teacher in Thailand’s globalization process?**

Based on the interviews, American teachers viewed globalization in Thai society with mixed feelings. Most recognized that globalization can be a double-edged sword as it creates both positive as well as the negative impacts on the Thai society. The pros of Thailand’s globalization reported by the teachers included the expansion of technology that enables people to connect on a large scale, expanded knowledge and educational opportunities, increased access to medical care, spread of democracy, and giving a voice to the voiceless. The cons that
globalization created included cultural erosion and the loss of some significant aspects of traditional Thai culture. Some teachers also felt that the expansion of technology with the aim of connecting people is actually creating an environment for separation and isolation. According to several of the teachers, the advanced technology may help “connect” people constantly, immediately and on a large scale, but the connection is often less meaningful and more impersonal in comparison to the traditional face-to-face interaction.

However, it is important to note that some negative viewpoints reported by some of the American teachers may possibly reflect an age bias as the majority of the American teachers in this study consisted of older individuals (7 out of 9 are in their 50s and older). Generally speaking, some older individuals may not be comfortable with using or accepting change and new technology. The fact that the majority of the teachers in this study consist of older individuals may make some of them view new technology with more caution than the younger generation. For example, from interviews with Nathan and Lisa, the younger members of this group did not mention the negative consequences of technology. Ken, Dean, and Lance, the older group, however, talked in-depth about the bad consequences of technology and globalization. Ken, in particular, recognized that his age may influence how he views the changes in Thai culture due to the expansion of globalization.

I'm disheartened. My response is going to show my age. Maybe the older you get the more you begin to express traditional and conservative values and perspectives (Ken).

Dean was another teacher who recognized that different generations may have different viewpoints toward change, especially toward new technology.

But, older people, the older generation would always say the new technology is terrible. The Beatles came out, these mop-headed people, that's not music [his grandparents told him]. When Disco came out, that's not music, it's not going to last, but it did last and then another genre came out. Every new generation has something that they're doing that's different. It's avant garde that is different from their parents and their brothers and their sisters did. So, their grandparents and parents would disagree with them like that's trash (Dean).
However, he also realized that change is inevitable and that things will not stay static. The things are changing you can't stay stagnant and evolve and to go to the technology age. It's going to keep moving forward and with change comes uncertainty and people don't want their lives changed, because it's new to them (Dean).

Further, regarding their role in Thailand’s globalization process, the teachers reported having mixed feelings. Some perceived their role as significant as they see themselves as facilitators providing knowledge that is not yet available in Thailand. For this reason, many see their role as helping Thais to complete more effectively in the global market. Several others, however, see themselves as having a small role. For example, Larry felt that Thailand has already been influenced by globalization long before he started teaching in Thailand. With or without his role and involvement, Thailand is still moving toward globalization. Besides the mixed emotions toward their role in Thailand’s globalization process, some were uncertain whether their role created negative or positive influence in the Thai society. Most teachers in this study, however, hope that their roles were positive and beneficial to the Thai people.

One important aspect of the current situation is the realization of many negative consequences created by the expansion of globalization in Thailand. Based on the interviews, there was evidence suggesting that the Thai people have started to be aware of the many threats generated by globalization and have begun to shift, adjust, and search for alternative ways to deal with globalization. For example, Sam commented that Thailand is currently going in reverse toward globalization, especially after the Asia economic crisis in 1997. Sam, Norm, and Larry also recognize the gradual shift from a traditional Western to Eastern influence such as Japan, South Korea, and China in contemporary Thai society, especially, among the young generations in Thailand.

One important aspect of the Thai’s globalization toward academics and education was the internationalization of Thai higher education. Chalapati (2007), for example, states that Thailand
has been encouraged to meet the demand of the global economy which resulted in a significant reform and reorganization of the Thai higher education. One apparent educational reorientation is the view toward education as a commodity or a commercial good rather than a knowledge building institution. This trend is evident as it frequently surfaced in the conversations I had with many of the American teachers. Several teachers expressed concern as they witnessed some practices of some profit-driven institutions that they deemed unethical and unacceptable. The policy to admit unqualified students as long as they can pay the tuition and to pass students who do not achieve a passing grade or do not demonstrate an adequate academic ability were among unacceptable practices reported by some American teachers. The trend toward education as a commodity and profit making policies can have serious negative impacts on Thailand at the individual level, as well as on Thai society as a whole.

The negative impact on the individual who attends what some would call “diploma mill” institutions, for example, results in low quality students who may not have sufficient skills and knowledge to function or survive in work place or in the “real” world. The negative impact on the macro level includes changing the landscape of educational practices. The profit driven policy may jeopardize the traditional roles of Thai higher educational institutions from preserving and transmitting the national culture, values, and traditions to simply producing humans who can make money (Alderman, 2001; Walter, 2002). Chalapati (2007) cautions that “…there is a danger that the nation-building role of education will be lost and forgotten through the sole pursuit of economic objectives.” (p.6) With profit in mind, knowledge taught in universities may be reduced to only those subjects deemed profitable, such as business orientation classes. Other important and valuable subjects that may not be commercialized
including philosophy, religion, history and art, to name a few, may be decreased in this entrepreneurial driven environment.

In sum, the American teachers in the present study had mixed emotions toward globalization in Thailand. Most perceived globalization as a double-edged sword that could bring tremendous benefits, as well as significant threats to the Thai society. They also had mixed feelings toward their roles in the Thai globalization process. Some see themselves as facilitators while some were uncertain. The diverse viewpoints reflect the reality that individual unique personal traits and backgrounds can play a crucial role in one’s perception and reflection.

**Conclusions**

The four main research questions were analyzed and discussed based on the interview data. The information derived from face-to-face interviews of the nine American teachers regarding their cross-cultural experiences in Thailand revealed several important indications. First of all, the findings highlighted the complexity of conducting a cross-cultural research study. Because the concept of culture is highly complex, multi-layered, subjective, and dynamic, a study involving culture and individual experiences such as the present study, is hardly absolute or comprehensive. In other words, one’s cross-cultural teaching experience is individually specific and unique. Each individual responded to the open-ended questions in various different directions, depending on their unique individual life experiences, backgrounds, and personal contexts. In order to understand the individual cross-cultural experiences, we must take into consideration the diversity and complexity of social, cultural, and personal situations. Secondly, the findings reveal that the characteristics of Thai students also impacted their cross-cultural teaching experiences in the Thai classroom. Lastly, the findings suggest that one’s cross-cultural teaching experiences are impacted by one’s cultural orientation and the language used.
Differences in cultural practices and perceptions, for example, seemed to be the source of many cross-cultural misunderstandings. Language differences also play a significant and fundamental role. When both parties, teachers and students, share different native core languages, it compounded and increased the complexity and difficulties of their cross-cultural interactions.

**Research Limitations**

This study revealed several limitations that need to be considered and addressed. The most significant limitation was my role as a qualitative researcher. In a qualitative study, such as this one, a researcher is considered one of the most important research tools. For this reason, my individual subjectivity and personal bias may not have been perfectly maintained throughout this study, despite every effort to the contrary. In addition, my identity as a Thai female researcher may have played a significant role on the types of information being produced and generated during the interviews and during the analysis and interpretation phases. My identity as a Thai researcher also may have impacted how my participants perceived me as an insider and outsider. Positionality, for example, can greatly influence what type of information was generated and shared. Further, as non-native English speaker interviewing Americans, some issues related to cross-cultural interviewing such as the potential mismatch in cultural attitudes and perceptions, as well as some language barriers (e.g., mispronouncing, mishearing, and misinterpreting verbal and nonverbal messages) may have occurred throughout this study, despite my best effort.

Another possible limitation was the imbalance of the research sample. First, the participants consisted overwhelmingly of American older age white males. As a result, the findings of this study represent the cross-cultural experiences of a homogeneous White male, more established, and more experienced group of teachers. As a result, their experiences may not be reflective of the actual or broader composition of American teachers working in Thailand.
This older male gender bias also may not reflect the sentiments or experiences of younger male teachers or female teachers of all ages. However, it is important to note that although the participants consisted of a certain group of American teachers and may not be a balanced sample, the findings appear to be similar to other studies on cross-culture teaching.

Additionally, the nine American teachers were either teaching or had taught at the university level. Therefore, this study inclusively represents the cross-cultural experiences of American educators working in higher education in Thailand. The cross-cultural experiences may not be comparable with the teaching experiences of teachers at other levels of education such as the K-12. In the present study, the participants also taught in metropolitan Bangkok and other big cities in Thailand. Their teaching experiences, therefore, may not be comparable or applicable for educators teaching in small towns, villages or remote areas in Thailand. However, the majority of the participants in this study consisted of teachers working in Northeast Thailand, which represented certain regional cultural differences that might not be applicable to other regions such as the upper North or the deep South of Thailand. Additionally, the majority of the teachers in the present study taught in international and more English-oriented programs. The students attending these programs may not be typical Thai students, as they may have more interest in English and internationally oriented programs. Because international or English language programs are often more expensive in comparison to regular Thai public universities, the students who can afford to enroll in these programs represent more middle or upper class Thais who may be better off and more financially secure than many other Thai students. The description of their characteristics and personalities, therefore, may not reflect the typical Thai students attending public universities in Thailand. This study is, however, a potentially
significant contribution to cross cultural studies as it provides a “slice” of teaching history and practices, as well as lessons learned, by American teachers in Thailand.

**Research Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

The interviews of the nine American teachers in the present study provided valuable information that may be useful and applicable in practice for other teachers, including American educators and foreign teachers in Thailand, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere around the world. This information may also be applicable to teachers in their home country, but with international or multicultural groups of students. The information based on the real life experiences of these American teachers will hopefully serve as a cross-cultural preparation tool to help other educators be better prepared and more equipped in their cross-cultural teaching journey. The following are some recommendations and implications for practice derived from the present study.

1) Limitation in host language skills is often viewed as one of the most challenging aspects in one’s cross cultural experiences, as learning a new language is more than simply knowing the definitions, phonetics, and syntax, but also understanding and appreciating the overall cultural parameters. To avoid being a “fluent fool” (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994 p. 47), a newcomer should make efforts to gain some cultural knowledge along with learning the language.

2) Strong social hierarchy greatly influences language use and communication patterns in Thailand. When teaching or living in Thailand, it is useful to learn and be familiar with some basic appropriate social behaviors such as greetings, gestures, and ways of addressing people.

3) Teachers need to be aware of the communication patterns that are common in Thailand. Being from a low context society, where messages are often expressed or receive more directly,
American or Western teachers may need to be more vigilant of subtle clues when interacting with the Thais.

4) Teachers should be aware of differences in verbal and nonverbal behaviors of both their students and themselves. For example, interaction between the opposite and the same sex in Thailand is likely different from that in the U.S. When teaching in Thailand, one should avoid touching, hugging or getting too close to students, especially students of the opposite sex.

5) Limited English proficiency can influence some classroom behaviors. For example, a student’s passivity and “lack” of motivation and critical thinking may actually be due to their limited English language skills. Teachers, therefore, should avoid linking “lacking” language with “lacking” intelligent and avoid judging without considering many variables.

6) In the present study, American teachers expressed their frustration and concern over the reading skills of Thai students. However, the “lack” of reading interest and skills may not be due to laziness or unmotivated behavior, but to low English language proficiency. Because the “distance” between Thai and English languages is quite large, reading English textbooks may be extremely challenging for some students. Teachers may need to provide other tools such as a list of definitions of important terms, pictures, chapter summaries, or verbal explanation to help students maintain their motivation to read.

7) When teaching in Thailand, American and foreign teachers should be mindful that a strong respect toward education may extend to objects and items related to education, such as textbooks. This “linkage” may cause students to view reading as a formal and serious activity rather than fun. Teachers may need to introduce a variety books and include other activities to motivate reading.
8) The “lack” of reading interest may be due to the lack of relevance to the student’s life. For example, some Western textbooks may not have information that fits the Thai cultural context, while other books may not be age-appropriate. Teachers need to select textbooks with care and consideration of their “audience.”

9) Western influence and the view of English language as desirable are evident in many aspects of Thai society. One of the most common and popular trends among the young Thai parents is to use English words as their children’s nicknames. Foreigners may hear such unusual nicknames as Donut, Golf, Ball, Bank, Money, Arm, Stamp, God, A, B, C, Bee, Apple, and Tear. This issue may be viewed as trivial for some teachers, but could become the source of misunderstanding, confusion and embarrassment when teaching in Thai classrooms.

10) Culture plays a pivotal and significant role in education. When teaching students from different cultural backgrounds, educators must be mindful not only of the students’ culture, but of their own as well.

11) There are many different teaching and learning styles that stem from cultural differences, such as cooperation vs. competition, dependent vs. independent, active vs. passive, teacher-centered vs. student-centered, formal vs. casual, structured vs. flexible. Teachers should be aware of these different teaching and learning approaches.

12) Differences in cultural norms such as striving to “get ahead” among some Westerners (achievement-oriented) and to “get along” among many Thais (relationship-oriented) may cause a conflict in values. When teaching or living in Thailand, one needs to be aware of potential differences in the Thai values system, in order to avoid judging others as unmotivated or as too aggressive through ones’ cultural “lens.”
13) Thailand is considered a strong class conscious society. When teaching or living in Thailand, the awareness of one’s social class is pivotal in all social situations.

14) In Thailand, the King and members of the Royal Family are highly respected. American and foreign teachers unfamiliar with the Thai traditional social system should avoid criticizing or showing disrespect to the Royal Family (including objects with the image of the Royal Family).

15) Thai people generally view educators and education with extremely high esteem. With high respect and admiration, teachers should be mindful of their own behavior. It is considered a social obligation for teachers to maintain respectful manners both in and outside the classroom.

16) Teachers should be aware that the respect for educators could influence students’ learning behaviors, such as being passive learners, avoiding public criticism or expressing disagreement toward teachers, being reluctant to voice their opinion or showing their critical thinking ability.

17) With respect toward educators, a formal classroom evaluation is not a common practice in Thai institutions. American and foreign teachers may need to seek student feedback through alternative channels that they deem appropriate (e.g., through informal conversation, anonymous drop box).

18) Respect may create distance between students and educators. Out of respect, some students may be reluctant or uncomfortable to act informal or casual. Teachers should not take this cultural “distance” personally. Teachers should allow sufficient time for students to get to know the teachers and to develop a more meaningful academic relationship with a teacher.

19) Some questionable or “unacceptable” classroom behavior such as plagiarism or cheating could be rooted in respect and perceived “expectation” and “pleasing” toward teachers.
20) The reference towards teachers may result in teacher dependency among some Thai students. Therefore, mentoring and motivating students are important elements for successful teaching in Thailand.

21) The high respect toward education and teachers often extends to things and objects related to education as well. When teaching or living in Thailand, teachers should be aware to handle items such as textbooks, pictures, school facilities such as classroom desks with respect (i.e., avoid stepping or sitting on books, pictures of respectful items and desks).

22) Thailand is considered a collective, group-conscious society. This important cultural norm could influence the behavior of some students. For example, the “lack” of reading interest and skills among some Thai students may be linked to this cultural norm. Students in a strong group-conscious society may put more effort on socializing and group activities rather than reading, which for some is seen as an anti-social activity.

23) A strong group consciousness may cause some students to avoid being “outstanding” or acting like they are better than their peers. Teachers should encourage students’ performance, perhaps through a variety of channels such as group projects or small group assignments.

24) Because of a strong collective and relationship-oriented mindset, rules may be broken or “bent” to give way to relationship building. Be prepared that some rules may not be strictly followed or enforced in Thailand.

25) Using Western-oriented teaching approaches (i.e., Socratic methodology, student-centered, competitive learning) may be challenging to implement in Thai classrooms. Teachers should avoid using a “deficit” approach (i.e., viewing students as “lacking”). Instead, teachers should be aware that some teaching and learning methods are not universal and may not be a common practice (or successful) elsewhere. When utilizing methods that students are not accustomed to,
teachers should provide students with sufficient background and information on benefits, assumptions, and classroom expectations. For example, having a clear guidance of expected behavior and performance in a course outline, syllabus, or rubric will help students to know what is expected of them. Teachers also need to be patient and allow sufficient time for students to get familiar with new classroom approaches.

26) In addition to verbal expression, teachers should allow a variety of channels for students to express their critical reflections such as in writing, small group discussions, or informal discussions.

27) For students with limited English proficiency, teachers should provide a variety of assessment methods such as short answer, fill in the blank, multiple choice, and word matching.

28) The classroom environment such as the friendliness of the teachers can promote learning. For example, the cultural concept of sanook (enjoyment and fun) is important in Thailand. It may be useful and appropriate to use humor and entertaining activities in class to create a relaxing atmosphere, as long as teachers maintain respectful behavior.

29) To adjust to Thai culture, a variety of factors such as learning the local culture and language, and prior or long time cross-cultural exposure may benefit one’s cross-cultural experiences in Thailand.

30) Social ties or social networking with either home or host members benefit one’s cross-cultural experiences.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

Future research should increase the unit of analysis to include more informants, if researchers wish to generalize or make their findings more representative of the experiences of foreigner-teachers teaching in Thailand. For example, future studies could expand to include
participants with less established experience. Perhaps, they can focus on young, newly-arrived teachers to reflect this demographic and influx group of educators to Thailand. Researchers could also include non-native English speaking teachers to learn and compare the differences of their experiences while teaching in Thailand. It may also be useful in future studies to expand the demographics of the participants to include resident Thais in different regions or more remote areas where there is less of a Western influence both in life styles and teaching. Further, a larger and more balanced sample of male and female teachers may be useful to understand the cross-cultural experiences of female teachers compared to those of males.

In order to fully understand the cross-cultural experiences from all perspectives, future studies should also include the experiences and perceptions of students, not just teachers, in order to compare and contrast the cross-cultural experience in a classroom from all members involved in the educational experience. Interviewing both the students and the teachers would likely give a fuller, more complete understanding of the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. Future studies should also define some important key terms such as cross-cultural or “culture shock” or to ensure that each participant shares the same meaning and understanding of key concepts before they are interviewed.
References


APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Agreement to Participate in a Cross-cultural Teaching Study

Varaporn J. Mann
Investigator
486-9761

This research project is being conducted as a component of a dissertation for a doctoral degree. The purpose of the project is to learn the cross-cultural experiences of foreign teachers in Thailand. You are being asked to participate because you are a foreign teacher who has experience teaching in Thai classrooms.

Participation in this project will consist of a face-to-face, telephone, or e-mail interview with the investigator (Vara Mann) depending on your preference. Interview questions and possibly classroom observation will focus on your cross-cultural experiences when teaching in Thailand. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results. Each interview will last about one hour and the classroom observation will last about one hour. You may be contacted in person, by telephone or by e-mail, depending on your preference, after the initial interview, if there is a need for clarification or confirmation, to ensure accuracy or for your approval of any interview answers before the final report is written. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded (digital tape recorder) for the purpose of transcription and data analysis.

Participating in this research may be of no direct benefit to you. It is believed, however, that the results from this project will help other teachers who are teaching abroad or who are planning to teach abroad, especially in Thailand to be better equipped to deal with cross-cultural differences inside and outside the classroom. Teachers who teach in multicultural and diverse classrooms both in the U.S. and other countries may also benefit from this study as they may apply the knowledge gained from this study to their actual teaching situations.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the University of Hawaii Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research records will be stored in a locked file in the investigator’s residence for the duration of the research project. Audio tapes and other research records will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the project and may request that all information and data that you provided be immediately destroyed.
One hard copy of the consent form will be provided to you for your information and reference. If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the investigator, Vara Mann, at 486-9761.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808)956-5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu

Participant:

I have read and understand the above information, and agree to participate in this research project.

_______________________________________
Name (printed)

_______________________________________
Signature ____________________________ Date

I, thereby, give permission to the investigator to use a digital audio recorder to record the interview(s) for the purpose of transcription and data analysis.

_______________________________________
(Signature) ____________________________ Date
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions and Script

CROSS-CULTURAL TEACHING: EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN TEACHERS IN THAILAND

Interview Script

Present each interviewee with a consent form for signature and inform them about the purpose of the research and their rights.

Brief note to each participant:

Thank you very much for participating in this intensive interview research. Your time and participation are greatly appreciated.

I would like to inform you before the interview that this interview will take approximately one hour and will be tape recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. You may be contacted in person, by telephone or by e-mail, depending on your preference, after the initial interview, if there is a need for clarification or confirmation, to ensure accuracy or for your approval of any interview answers before the final report is written.

This interview is voluntary and you can withdraw at anytime or choose not to answer any question(s) you do not feel comfortable with. To protect your identity, I will not use your real name in this research, but will assign a pseudonym for you. You can also choose to use a pseudonym for anyone that you mention or refer to in this interview.

I will be the sole data collector and transcriber. In the process of data analysis, I might have to discuss and consult about the data with my Chair and committee members, but I will refer to you by your pseudonym only. All recorded tapes, field notes and transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home office and they will be destroyed upon acceptance of my dissertation by my doctoral committee, or upon your request. However, you can review the information, see the transcription and get access to the audiotape anytime before publication of the study.

Do you have any questions or concerns?
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FIRST PART: BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Please provide the following general biographical information:

Name (To be kept confidential) ______________________________________________ (M / F)

Address (work / home) ____________________________________________________

Phone: _____________________________ Email: ________________________________

Birth Year ___________ Birth Place (State in the U.S.)________________________

Ethnic background __________________________________________________________

Language(s) spoken (besides English)
________________________________________________________________________

Places lived (State and/or country) and when:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Academic Background:

What was your highest degree received? ______________________________________
What was your major? _______________________________________________________
Did you have any teaching experience before teaching in Thailand: ______(yes)____ (no) (If yes) Number of Year(s), month(s), or semester(s) ______________________________
What country (or countries) have you taught in before teaching in Thailand?
________________________________________________________________________

What was your teaching level (e.g., university, college, high-school, elementary, etc.)?
________________________________________________________________________

Subject(s) taught:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Teaching in Thailand:

Did you go to Thailand specifically to teach?
________________________________________________________________________
If so, why did you choose Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

If not, what was the purpose of your trip to Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

And, how did you get into teaching in Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

How did you prepare for your trip to Thailand (e.g., cross-cultural training, orientation, book, internet research, etc.)?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

How long did you teach in Thailand (Year(s), month(s), or semester(s))?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

How many times have you gone to Thailand to teach? ____________________________

In which province(s) did you teach?_________________________________________

What level(s) did you teach? (e.g., university, college, high-school, elementary, etc.)

_________________________________________________________________________

What subject or subjects did you teach?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Can you describe what it was like to be an American teacher in Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
What was a typical work day for you?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Can you describe your students?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Did you experience any cross-cultural misunderstandings in the classroom while you were teaching in Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

If so, please give some examples.

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

Did you experience any cross-cultural misunderstandings outside the classroom while you were teaching in Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

If so, please give some examples and describe your experience.

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

What was the most rewarding experience or experiences about teaching in Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

Can you give some examples?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
Can you describe a good day that you will never forget?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

What was the most difficult or challenging aspect about teaching in Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

Can you give some examples?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

Can you describe a bad day that you will never forget?

_________________________________________________________________________

How did you adjust to Thai culture?

_________________________________________________________________________

What was your coping mechanism?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

What teaching methods did you use in your classrooms?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

Can you describe your teaching method?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

Can you provide some examples of your teaching method or approach?
How did your identity as an American influence your experiences and effectiveness as a teacher in Thailand?

_________________________________________________________________________

How do you see your role in Thailand’s globalization process?

_________________________________________________________________________