Searching for a “home”: Examining the Experiences of Confucian Asian College Students with Third Culture Kid Backgrounds

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Searching for a “home”: Examining the Experiences of Confucian Asian College Students with Third Culture Kid Backgrounds

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School at the University of Missouri–St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Counseling

December 2020

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Abstract

Third culture kids (TCKs) spend their childhood and adolescence outside of their home countries. Because of their unique backgrounds, TCKs and adult TCKs face challenges including identity development, low self-esteem, lack of connection with their home countries, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, adjustment disorder, and others. Although the number of TCKs is increasing due to globalization, this population has been understudied. Moreover, most existing research has focused on TCKs in Western countries. Few researchers have studied Confucian Asian adult TCKs; that is, adult TCKs from China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and others. Confucian Asian countries have collectivistic cultures that value community harmony and cohesiveness above individuality. TCKs and adult TCKs of Confucian Asian descent face unique challenges. The present study focused on how Confucian Asian adult TCKs develop their sense of belonging in college. Using a phenomenological method, 11 individuals identifying as Confucian Asian adult TCKs were asked about their experiences of international mobile lifestyles to identify their struggles and the support systems higher education institutions can offer. There were five interview questions, and the data were analyzed to exact the essence of the reported phenomenon among the participants, which brought more knowledge about their sense of belonging and to learn more about the shared phenomenon among this population.

Keywords: Third culture kids, adult third culture kids, college education, Asian, Confucian Asian culture
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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Where are you from?” This is a common question posed by many college students when they meet other students for the first time. However, for third culture kids (TCKs) and adult TCKs, this question is not always easily answered. TCKs are individuals who move from one country to another during their childhood or adolescence, typically growing up outside of their passport countries (Pollock et al., 2017). They might not always consider their home countries to be their homes or places of origins (Bonebright, 2010). They may have a sense of “hometownlessness” and may face adjustment difficulties when they enter college. When they grow up, they are called adult TCKs (Washington & Gadikar, 2016). They may no longer be surrounded by other TCKs who can understand and share their experiences and may feel more isolated even in their home countries (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009).

Globalization has increased in every sector of modern society. Rapid developments in transportation, technology, and social media have made international travel and communication significantly easier and more accessible. For example, due to technological advancements, more companies can conduct businesses outside of their countries, thus creating a need for personnel to fill jobs abroad. Such employment opportunities provide individuals with rewarding professional careers in addition to rich cultural diversity experiences. However, issues of cultural adaptation and acculturation have created more demand for mental health support for individuals who have lived in foreign countries due to culture shock and reverse culture shock (Berry, 2005). Support is required not only to the employees who are assigned to work outside of their home
countries, but their immediate family members (for example, their spouses and children), since they also need help with cultural adjustments. Moreover, support for the cultural adjustments can be more crucial for children than adults, because it impacts their development (Melles & Frey, 2014).

Although there are limited data on the TCK population worldwide, estimates on the numbers of TCKs and cross-cultural kids show increases (Eakin, 1999). Experts believe the number will continue growing due to globalization (Melles & Frey, 2014; Pollock et al., 2017; Washington & Gadikar, 2016). TCKs face various challenges, including mental health adjustment, because of their unique international lifestyles. These challenges might be even more profound among Confucian Asian TCKs, the focus of this study, because of their unique cultural attributes and aspects.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how TCK experiences may have affected Confucian Asians as college students, especially in forming groups and developing a sense of belonging at college. Counselor educators, college counselors, other mental health professionals, and student support staff at colleges are in excellent positions to serve as leaders in providing academic and psychosocial support to maximize TCK students’ developmental outcomes. The goal was to have a better understanding of this population in general and Confucian Asian TCKs specifically, and how mental health professionals and student support staff at higher education institutions can provide more adequate support for these students.

**Background of the Problem**

Since the TCK population was defined in the 1960s by Ruth Hill Useem, members of this population have been studied by many researchers, including Bonebright
(2010), Cottrell (2007), Gaw (2000), Hoersting and Jenkins (2011), Pollock et al. (2017), Thurston-Gonzalez (2009), Useem and Cottrell (1999), Useem et al. (1963), and Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009). Many researchers share similar findings and notions about TCKs and adult TCKs, as discussed next.

**Issues Among Third Culture Kids and Adult Third Culture Kids**

International individuals, including immigrants, refugees, international students, TCKs, adult TCKs, other intercultural individuals, and cross-cultural kids have lived or continue to live outside of their home countries, not including their experiences as tourists. When people step outside of their home cultures, they can face challenges such as language barriers (McLachlan & Justice, 2007), discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007), overall life adjustments that include weather changes (Kim, 2005) and food culture changes (Lee & Rice, 2007), and cultural differences including different gender roles and customs (Berry, 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007). When they return to their home countries, they may face reverse culture shock, which is similar to culture shock but more intense (Gaw, 2000; N. J. Adler, 1986). Reverse culture shock can entail changes in identities or values and may cause additional psychological distress (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009).

TCKs and adult TCKs can face complex and unique challenges in their highly mobile lifestyles. They may be less ethnocentric (Straffon, 2003) and may have achieved more educational accomplishments (Cottrell, 2007). However, they might find it more difficult to develop a sense of belonging or develop a concrete identity (Pollock et al., 2017; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009) and may face mental health challenges including depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Melles & Frey, 2014).
Usually individuals feel comfortable with one’s home country and their culture that they grow up in, because of the sense of familiarity and connections with other community members. However, TCKs and adult TCKs can have different experiences with their home countries. Many individuals with TCK backgrounds report unfamiliarity and discomfort with their home countries after returning from their host countries, which is usually referred to as reverse culture shock (Berry, 2005).

Providing mental health support to international individuals is crucial for helping them cope with these issues (Pollock et al., 2017). However, many mental health professionals face challenges when it comes to providing effective counseling interventions to clients from different cultural backgrounds (Washington & Gadikar, 2016), even though mental health professionals are ethically obligated to provide culturally competent counseling interventions (American Counseling Association, 2014; Ratts et al., 2016). The conflicts come not only from cultural differences between clinicians and clients but also from the existing stigmas toward mental health among international individuals (J. Brown & Brown, 2013) and microaggressions by mental health professionals in counseling sessions (Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 2007). Improving multicultural counseling abilities among mental health professionals is essential in order to provide adequate support for these populations.

**Issues Among Confucian Asian Third Culture Kids**

**Discrimination**

Discrimination toward Confucian Asian TCKs in Confucian Asian countries is common due to the Confucian Asian culture, which values cohesiveness and harmony and has a long history of being colonized or threatened by Western countries (Pingali,
TCKs can encounter unexpected discrimination and xenophobia from people living in their home countries (Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Yoshida et al., 2009). When Confucian Asian TCKs return to their home countries, they may face intense reverse culture shock not only as a result of reintegration difficulties but from prejudice shown by other people in the community. Some Confucian Asian countries are prejudiced against returnees or TCKs as they are viewed as having advantages from their international experiences and their ability to speak more than one language (Yoshida et al., 2009). Therefore, even if TCKs return to their home countries, where they share the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they may feel isolated and discriminated against.

The TCK population has increased in recent years (Melles & Frey, 2014; Pollock et al., 2017; Washington & Gadikar, 2016). In Confucian Asian countries, many people move in and out for business or education (Long, 2016, Tanu, 2008). Many people in these countries have migrated to Western countries in hopes of finding better paying jobs or a better quality of education (Fechter & Korpela, 2016; Parreñas & Kim, 2011). For example, more than 10,000 Japanese individuals return to Japan every year (Japanese Overseas Educational Service, 2017). Additionally, according to Nagrath (2011), 345 more international schools opened in 2011. Among these schools, more than two thirds were in Confucian Asian countries. Long (2016) indicated that most of the students who attended international schools were Confucian Asian TCKs whose parents were on international business trips from other Confucian Asian countries.

Despite the increasing number of Confucian Asian TCKs, few researchers have studied this population (Long, 2016; Straffon, 2003; Tanu, 2008). This population can provide different perspectives on the experience of being a TCK. Confucian Asian
culture values harmony and cohesiveness. Therefore, individuals from Confucian Asian cultures who stepped outside of home countries as TCKs may face different challenges compared to other TCKs who are not from Confucian Asian countries or collectivist cultures.

**Struggles in College**

Confucian Asian TCKs often face multiple struggles at college. College students in general encounter various struggles when adjusting to their new college environments (Cress & Lampman, 2007). These challenges include academic concerns, psychosocial distress, exposure to greater cultural diversity, a lack of developmental support (e.g., separation from parents, struggles with developing their personal identity), and finding a sense of community in their academic spaces (Ross et al., 1999). In college, Confucian Asian adult TCKs may experience these common struggles in addition to lacking a sense of belonging (Bonebright, 2010; Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009), feeling pressure from their parents to perform academically (Ang & Huan, 2006), and experiencing racial/ethnic discrimination at college (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010).

**Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty et al., 1996). Having a sense of belonging is strongly related to people’s direction of life and positive self-image. Maslow identified the need for “love and belonging” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497) as fundamental to achieving self-acculturation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). To have high self-esteem, people need to feel respect and acceptance from other people (Maslow, 1943).
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs shows what people need in order to feel happy and content with their lives (Maslow, 1943). In his theory, Maslow explained that lower needs in the hierarchy must be satisfied before people can move up to satisfying higher needs. The hierarchy contains five levels. At the bottom are physical needs such as food, shelter, and water. The sense of safety is on the second level of the hierarchy. After people feel safe, they can start looking for love and belonging, the hierarchy’s third level. The fourth level is the need for self-esteem. At the top of the hierarchy is the need for self-actualization.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs shows that love and belonging are important for a person’s well-being. In Confucian Asian collectivistic cultures, the sense of belonging and the sense of ingroup are more important than in individualistic cultures (Triandis et al., 1990). This is because Confucian Asian cultures value cohesiveness and harmony in the community (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 2000). In Japan, there is a famous saying, Deru kui wa utareru, which means the stake that stands out can get hammered down. Since it is important to maintain the sense of cohesiveness and sameness in Confucian Asian cultures, individuals with different opinions or who pose a threat to the shared harmony can be excluded from the community. In this respect, it can be interesting to see how Confucian Asian TCKs experience their time in college when they are surrounded by individuals with different backgrounds, which the present study helped to illuminate.

Sense of belonging is important to individuals generally, but it can be more important for Confucian Asian individuals since their cultures value the sense of cohesiveness and group connection (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 1994).
Therefore, studying Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college increased the understanding of how they form a sense of belonging influenced by the contexts of their unique international backgrounds.

**Statement of the Problem**

Most studies on TCKs have focused on their social privileges (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009) and on TCKs with Western cultural backgrounds (Fechter & Korpela, 2016; Long, 2016). These studies have shown that TCKs are less ethnocentric (Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Pollock et al., 2017; Straffon, 2003), achieve education goals (Cottrell & Useem, 1999; Yamada, 2015; Wilcox, 2017), and are more flexible and adaptable to diverse cultures (e.g., are cultural chameleons; Tanu, 2008). They have also shown that TCKs struggle with culture shock and reverse culture shock from their international mobile lifestyles (Gaw, 2000; Pollock et al., 2017; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Wilcox, 2017) and can experience various mental health challenges and identity confusion due to their unique backgrounds (Gaw, 2000; Tanu, 2008; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).

Challenges faced by TCKs often do not disappear over the years and extend into adulthood. It is important to note that most studies of this population are based on the research for TCKs with social privileges (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009) and more focused on TCKs with Western cultural backgrounds (Fechter & Korpela, 2016; Long, 2016).

As previously mentioned, the challenges TCKs face may be more profound among Confucian Asian TCKs. These TCKs come from Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and China, where the philosophy of Confucius (Ōbuchi, 2015) influenced the cultural formation process. These Confucius Asian countries do not share only the philosophy of Confucius, they also have a strong sense of collectivism, respect
for seniors or family members, encouragements to follow rules, and sense of harmony (Öbuchi, 2015; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 1994). These cultural characteristics may create additional barriers for Confucian Asian adult TCKs to feel reconnected to their home culture after they return from overseas (Yoshida et al., 2009).

The majority of young adult TCKs go to college after completing high school (Cottrell, 2007). This is because they tend to have higher socioeconomic status and come from families that value education as compared to non-TCKs (Jurgensen, 2014; Wilcox, 2017). However, nearly half of them drop out or change their academic majors due to dissatisfaction or other reasons (Cottrell, 2007). Before enrolling in college, TCKs often do not have a chance to attend college open houses or an opportunity to learn in depth about their programs, simply because they are applying from outside of countries (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). They can also experience unexpected interpersonal problems and culture shock or reverse culture shock during college (Gaw, 2000; Melles & Frey, 2014). They might experience challenges such as deciding their future careers, identity confusion, or intimate relationships that they are not equipped to deal with. College is important for young adults, but especially for adult TCKs because they have the freedom to choose where to attend college, whereas they did not have the freedom to choose where to live growing up.

Given these presented issues, this transcendental phenomenological study highlighted the lived experiences in college of Confucian Asian adult TCKs, a population that has largely been ignored by researchers. The study focus was on understanding more about how their TCK backgrounds and their Confucian Asian culture impact their
experiences at college. The 11 participants provided rich insights reflecting their college life experiences, including their identity development.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the present study was to explore how Confucian Asian adult TCKs establish a sense of belonging in college. The goal was to increase the understanding of the phenomenon of interest among the growing number of these students. A sense of belonging is important to individuals generally, but it can be taken more seriously for Confucian Asian individuals since this culture values a sense of cohesiveness and connections in groups (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 1994). Therefore, by studying Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college, we as counselors can increase our understanding of their experiences of forming a sense of belonging that is influenced by their unique international backgrounds.

In this transcendental phenomenological study, I highlighted the lived experiences in college of 11 Confucian Asian adult TCKs, who were asked about their experiences of international mobile lifestyles to identify their struggles and the support systems higher education institutions may offer for members of a largely understudied population. In the past several decades, researchers have focused on TCKs and adult TCKs from Western countries (Gaw, 2000; Jurgensen, 2014; Priest, 2003; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Useem et al., 1963; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009), and there are a few studies on Confucian Asian TCKs (Long, 2016; Straffon, 2003; Tanu, 2008). As examples of the few studies on this population, Straffon (2003) conducted a cross-cultural study on TCKs enrolled in international schools in a Southeast Asian city to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity among students. Ninety-four percent of the
students reported high sensitivity levels for people of different cultures. Long (2016) also studied Chinese TCKs who were educated in Western curriculum to explore their cross-cultural identities and experiences. Overall, existing studies on Asian TCKs are limited in scope.

Cross-cultural research focusing on non-Western TCKs is important because TCK experiences likely differ because of their cultural backgrounds. For example, Mooradian (2004) noted the differences of experience between Japanese TCKs and American TCKs when they returned to their home countries. According to Mooradian, American TCKs might find their international experience positive, while Japanese TCKs might find these experiences negative as it sets them apart from other community members. One of the reasons for the lack of research focusing on Confucian Asian TCKs is that the term “third culture kids” is not widely recognized outside of Western countries. For example, TCKs are called kikokushijo—returnees in Japanese (Yoshida et al., 2009).

**Research Question**

The research question that guided this transcendental phenomenological study was, How do Confucian Asian adult TCKs experienced their social lives in college?

**Theoretical Framework**

This transcendental study was carried out in the scope of self-categorization theory, which developed from social identity theory. Self-categorization theory was developed by psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014). Their intention was to understand human behavior regarding ingroups and outgroups. They believed there is a human need to develop a sense of hostility and prejudice toward outgroups and kinship toward in groups in order to feel and maintain conformity and a
sense of belonging in the ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Conformity comes from social norms and standards set by the members of the group. Once individuals gain a sense of belonging in the ingroup, they start acting in ways that benefit the ingroup interests to enhance the connection with that group (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014).

Self-categorization theory added a deeper layer of understanding in the process of forming groups in social interactions (Turner, 2007). This theory was particularly suitable for the present study since self-categorization theory is based on non-Western social psychology. Self-categorization theory is based on the understanding that individuals tend to act in favor of the shared interest or group norms, even though they might have unique personality characteristics outside of the group relationship (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014). According to this theory, individuals are constantly assessing and defining what is their ingroup versus outgroups. Since the target population for this study had collectivist cultural backgrounds, self-categorization theory was considered to be suitable for deepening the understanding of the phenomenon of Confucian Asian adult TCKs’ cultural backgrounds on their college experiences.

Nature of the Study

Transcendental phenomenology was used to understand how Confucian Asian adult TCKs’ cultural backgrounds and international backgrounds impact their experiences in college. This research approach originated in Edmund Husserl’s philosophies. Husserl’s philosophy focused on learning about how people feel and experience their surroundings and evolved into a phenomenology qualitative research method (Aparajita Behera et al., 2018; Dowling, 2005).
In order to provide adequate support for any population, it is important to understand the unique challenges among the population and have more awareness about their lifestyles (Sue et al., 1992). By using transcendental phenomenology, I hoped to provide thick and rich descriptions of the lived experiences of Confucian Asian adult TCKs on college campuses to increase our awareness, as counselors, campus staff, or mental health professionals, of how to work with them.

**Definition of Terms**

Acculturation: Acculturation is defined as a “dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Barry (2001), moreover, believes that acculturation is learned through interactions with cultures other than one’s own. Therefore, anyone who steps outside of their own country or encounters a “foreign” culture can have the process of acculturation. Acculturation has four elements: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Barry, 2001; Berry, 2005). Each element reflects how much the person feels and how much socially and psychologically the individual needs to adapt in the new and diverse environment (Berry, 2005).

Adult third culture kids: When TCKs reach adulthood, they are referred to as adult TCKs (Melles & Schwartz, 2013).

Confucian Asian adult third culture kids: Confucian Asian adult TCKs are adult TCKs who are culturally rooted or are originally from Confucian Asian cultures. In Confucian Asian countries, the terms TCKs or adult TCKs are not widely acknowledged. Some Confucian Asian countries use another term when referencing TCKs such as
kikokushijo [the returned male and female children] or simply returnees (Yoshida et al., 2009).

Culture shock/reverse culture shock: Culture shock and reverse culture shock are described either as a U-curve or a W-curve and are referred to as a “sense of alienation” (P. S. Adler, 1975, p. 13).

Home country/host country: Home country is a person’s passport country. Host country is the country outside of the person’s passport country.

Third culture: Third culture can be difficult to explain and define. Useem et al. (1963) explained third culture as a bridge that connects children’s home cultures and host cultures. Washington and Gadikar (2016), moreover, defined the first culture as the home culture or the passport culture that an individual holds nationality and where the passport was originally issued. The second culture is the host culture or the host country where the person lives without having citizenship. This criterion has immigrants and refugees be removed from the category of TCK. Finally, the third culture is beyond an existing geographical location, but rather a psychosocial concept.

Third culture kids: TCKs are individuals who have lived outside of their passport countries for at least 1 year between ages 1 and 18 years (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).

**Study Delimitations**

This study’s focus was on Confucian Asian adult TCKs and their experiences of building a sense of belonging in college. The study was conducted from December 2019 to January 2020. I conducted live video interviews with all participants in English. There was no restriction in terms of nationality to participate in the study, but participation was restricted by participant ethnicity. The participants needed to have cultural backgrounds
from one of the Confucian Asian countries such as China, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan. The existing research has focused on TCKs in Western countries, especially the United States (Jurgensen, 2014; Priest, 2003; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). By studying the experiences among Confucian Asian adult TCKs, I intended to gather different perspectives and more understanding of these individuals. Participants also had to have been living outside of their home countries for more than 1 year before age 18 years. The participant needed to be accompanied by legal guardians such as biological parents or foster parents while they were living away from their home countries. This condition was placed to distinguish other international individuals who had lived outside of their home countries while studying abroad, such as ESOL students or international students in college. Therefore, the reason for living outside of their home country was due to their parents’ or guardian’s business, such as military service, a missionary purpose, an international business, or diplomatic work. There was no set number of participants, but the expected number of participants was between 10 and 15. The final sample was 11 participants.

**Significance of Study**

This study contributed to Confucian Asian adult TCKs in three ways. First, it can help mental health professionals, especially college professional counselors, offer more well-informed counseling services by having a greater understanding of Confucian Asian adult TCKs’ struggles and the impact of their international mobile lifestyles. Therefore, ultimately, this study can contribute to expanded knowledge for college professional counselors to meet the needs of Confucian Asian adult TCK students. Many researchers have proved recommendations for supporting international students on campus (Gebhard,
2012; Lee & Rice, 2007; Li & Gasser, 2005; Mizuno, 1997; Yakushko et al., 2008), yet only a few researchers have focused on adult TCKs (Bonebright, 2006; Cottrell, 2007; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009; Washington & Gadikar, 2016) and even fewer on adult TCKs on college (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Wilcox, 2017). As Ratts et al. (2016) emphasized, multiculturally sensitive counselors need to have an awareness of their clients’ mindsets. To have good awareness, counselors need to understand clients’ worldviews and experiences (Ratts et al., 2016). By understanding these important components, counselors can provide more effective counseling for clients.

This study was an important first step in helping college counselors expand their awareness of this population’s mindsets and how their experiences as TCKs helped to shape their worldviews. The study findings helped to develop counseling interventions that college counselors can use for TCK clients in sessions. In Chapter 5, I introduce therapeutic interventions that may help college counselors to explore the college social lives of TCK clients and their backgrounds and provide them suitable support for adjustment in the college. Secondly, this study can be beneficial for college student support staff, other than college counselors, as the findings may suggest more suitable campus programs or activities for adult TCKs. Cottrell (2007) reported that 94% of TCKs go to college after finishing high school. However, due to their upbringing, where they are often surrounded by a support network of other TCKs, they sometimes experience great distress from mingling with other college students who do not have the similar international backgrounds (Thurston-Gonzales, 2009). Therefore, it is important for college student support staff to be aware of their unique struggles and offer programs or activities to help students to have a smoother adjustment in their college life regardless if
they are attending school in their home countries or host countries. In Chapter 5, I present several recommendations for college administration staff and college instructors for working with TCK students at the beginning of college enrollment and during college life to increase support for these students. Lastly, this study brought awareness of issues and challenges faced not just by adult TCKs but specifically Confucian Asian adult TCKs, who are understudied (Long, 2016). As previously mentioned, the population of Confucian Asian TCKs is growing worldwide. By increasing the awareness of this population and their challenges among professionals such as college or school administrators, scholars, and counselors, including college counselors and class instructors, Confucian Asian TCKs may receive better support from their communities, home, and schools in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed this study’s framework, including the phenomenon of interest and the problem that was studied. The study methodology and theoretical foundation were also presented and discussed. Sections on study delimitations, definition of terms, and the study’s significance preceded the chapter conclusion.

This research focused on the understudied population of Confucian Asian adult TCKs and their experiences in college. This research used phenomenology, which allowed gaining more understanding of these individuals’ lived experiences and struggles related to their international lifestyles. The findings of this transcendental descriptive phenomenological study contributed to what is known about Confucian Asian adult TCKs and may help to direct more attention to the support they need on college
campuses. In Chapter 2, the literature review conducted to support and inform this study is presented.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter is an in-depth review of the literature on topics related to the primary research question, How do Confucian Asian adult TCKs experienced their social lives in college? This study was designed to learn more about Confucian Asian adult TCKs’ experiences through their college life stories.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical basis for this study, followed by discussions of TCK characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of TCK and adult TCK experiences and lifestyles, the concept of third culture, transition models, culture shock, acculturation models, individualism and collectivism, and Confucian cultures. I then discuss Confucian Asian adult TCK college students, developmental needs for college students in general, developmental needs for adult TCKs in college, and college support systems and networks. I end with a chapter conclusion.

Self-Categorization Theory

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study is rooted in self categorization theory. Self-categorization theory builds on social identity theory, developed by two psychologists, Henri Tajfel and John Turner. While social identity theory emphasizes how individuals choose groups to belong to through human interaction, self-categorization theory focuses on people’s passive attitudes regarding group categorization, which encourage them to avoid conflicts with others and instead leave the decision process to their ingroup. In other words, self-categorization theory focuses on people’s experiences of forming “groupness” and developing a sense of ingroupness versus outgroupness. In this section, I
further elaborate on the similarities and differences of both theories and on how self-categorization theory can apply to Confucian Asian adult TCKs.

**Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory focuses on the relationship between a person’s identity and society (Stets & Burke, 2000). Erik Erikson incorporated identity development in his infamous lifespan theory (Dunkel & Harbke, 2017). In Erikson’s theory, identity versus confusion, the fifth of eight lifespan stages, is one of the fundamental developmental stages during adolescence (Sokol, 2009). People develop fidelity in this stage by interacting with others. The person can gain a secure sense of identity by overcoming role confusion. Erikson was criticized for not clearly defining the concept of identity in his writings (Sokol, 2009). Therefore, in the present study, I used social identity as Tajfel and Turner (1986) defined it.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) further distinguished between personal identity and social identity. Personal identity indicates the subjective power people have to influence their lives. It is the lowest level of self-categorization. Individuals decide the action based on their personal motivation as independent entities separate from other individuals or groups (Sets & Burke, 2010). Social identity is the concept of self-image, which is formed from the social category the individual belongs to. People distinguish themselves from others by identifying who they are and who they are not (Schaetti, 2015). As such, self-categorization, or people’s subjective understanding and determination of the specific social groups they belong to (Stets & Burke, 2000) is important in social identity theory. For example, a female athlete might feel she belongs to a group of athletes when she interacts with nonathletes. However, she may feel more focused on the female part of
her identity in a coed athlete group when a male athlete makes a comment about sex differences.

Social groups are the groups people feel they belong to based on their understanding of themselves. This self-understanding is established by interacting with others and exploring the differences between ingroups and outgroups. Through self-categorization, people categorize others similar to them as an ingroup and people different from them as an outgroup, distinguishing “them” from “us” (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). This self-categorization process is called identification (Stets & Burke, 2000). Identity is developed through the self-categorization process (Sets & Burkes, 2010), discussed next.

**Self-Categorization Theory**

As previously noted, self-categorization theory developed from social identity theory; therefore, both theories cover similar parts of identity development (Turner, 2007). Self-categorization theory recognizes the influential relationship between individuals and society whereas social identity theory emphasizes the significant role of individuals in determining the ingroups to which they belong. Self-categorization theory explains how individuals are influenced by social relationships while they maintain their unique personalities (Turner, 2007). Depersonalization can develop if one’s social identity overcomes one’s personal identity (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014, p. 619). When social identification is lacking, group members behave uniquely and freely. However, once depersonalization developed through stricter social identification with a group, the group members start acting in ways that fit in with the constructed group norms or rules (Gundlach et al., 2006).
Unlike social identification theory, self-categorization theory is rooted in collectivist cultural ideas rather than an individualistic cultural perspective of self-concept (Gundlach et al., 2006; Tuner, 2007). Therefore, individuals’ behaviors can be influenced by how they self-categorize themselves in various situations. In other words, self-categorization assumes that individuals behave differently according to social situations. For example, juvenile criminals may be viewed differently depending on an individual’s identification as an educator versus as a parent. Educators might think about how to rehabilitate juvenile criminals through education. On the other hand, parents might consider how to protect their children from the potential dangers of being in school with juvenile criminals. As shown in this example, social expectations and social norms can influence individuals’ thought processes and behaviors. Therefore, self-categorization explains the process of how an individual’s psychological self-concept moves from the subjective understanding of “I” to “we” and ultimately to the “college students” or “Asian TCKs.”

Self-categorization theory was suitable for the present study because it can help to increase understanding and awareness of the issues surrounding the sense of belonging among adult Confucian Asian TCKs. It also aligns with the values of many Asian cultures. Asian cultures appreciate the connection and cohesiveness of relationships with others; feeling a connection with other members in the community is fundamental in these cultures (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). The desire to fit in with a group or community can be even greater among individuals with TCK backgrounds (Bonebright, 2010; Pollock et al., 2017). It is important to remember the unique growing-up experiences that adult TCKs have (Bonebright, 2010). They might not be familiar with the television shows
popular in their home cultures. They might have played different sports than most of their college friends. These differences between them and their majority of college students can give them a sense of isolation and distance.

In the present study, self-categorization theory was useful for providing a deep understanding of how Confucian Asian TCKs develop a sense of belonging as Asian individuals with international backgrounds, which can require reorganization of ingroup identification and building new relationships.

The Importance of a Sense of Belonging

Having a healthy sense of belonging is essential for human nature (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A sense of belonging is particularly important for individuals with Asian cultural backgrounds since their culture values the sense of harmony and appreciates the sense of ingroupness (Triandis, 1994, 2000). From the day people are born, they are surrounded by other individuals and the community. Healthy attachments and relationships between a mother and child are important for good human development and growth (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Having a sense of belonging is listed in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a fundamental need for human nature (Maslow, 1943). Maslow proposed his hierarchy of needs in 1943. He believed that people meet their full potential as whole persons when satisfying the need for self-actualization. According to his theory, people need to satisfy their basic needs before advancing to the next level. The basic needs include shelter, food/water, and physical warmth.

The sense of belonging comes after people fulfill their basic needs for safety. After successfully satisfying these needs, people can start working toward self-
actualization through satisfying other psychological needs, such as having romantic relationships with others and developing a positive self-image. A sense of belonging is important in overcoming life’s struggles as it acknowledges that others share similar experiences, which helps people to not feel isolated. Having a good sense of belonging equates to having a rich social network (Strayhorn, 2018).

There is a significant connection between belonging and mental well-being (Maslow, 1943; Triandis et al., 1990). People lacking a sense of belonging tend to develop mental health issues such as depression (Bonnie & Reg, 1999) and lower self-esteem (Kosic et al., 2014). Zhang et al. (2018) found that in college students, a sense of belonging minimized depression more than social support. In other words, college students find it more valuable to have a sense of belonging rather than having support networks in college. Other studies have shown that negative interpersonal relationships with other society members tend to cause stress and can even lead to depression (Coyne & Downey, 1991).

Belonging is essential for human beings; however, it is necessary to define what type of relationship is considered ideal. To have a good sense of belonging, there is a need for frequent and pleasant interactions with other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These interactions should maintain respect and care for another person’s well-being. They should also be consistent and without frequent changes. This leads to another question: What makes the sense of belonging so important? Again, Maslow noted that having a sense of belonging is a fundamental piece of well-being (Maslow, 1943). Lacking a sense of belonging makes people feel emotionally distressed and depressed. Two reasons for craving social bonds are the “survival and reproductive benefits”
Strong relationships with other society members are absolutely necessary to survive and have food, water, and shelter. It is important to have a connection with other group members to protect children and oneself.

Besides these survival instincts is having a sense of belonging with a particular person. If the connection is lost due to a conflict or death, it cannot be replaced by having a connection with any other person. The relationship with the person is special, and the memory is unforgettable (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Since having a sense of belonging is very important, and the uniqueness of each relationship is irreplaceable, people tend to have strong attachments to specific groups, which Brewer (1999) described as “attachment to one’s ingroup” (p. 429). Ingroup members create the concept of outgroups. By creating out-groups, members of the ingroup develop ingroup favoritism and negative attitudes toward specific out-groups (Brewer, 1999). Because of this negative attitude toward outgroups, people tend to cling to the relationships with their ingroups as they fear being in the outgroup.

The fear of not having a group to belong to strongly affects college students (Hamilton, 2014). Erikson’s psychosocial developmental stage explains the importance of sense of belonging in social context (Dunkel & Harbke, 2017). Erikson believed people face various challenges while they are growing up. There are eight psychosocial stages, starting with infancy (trust versus mistrust) and continuing through late adulthood (integrity versus despair). Moving to the next psychosocial stage requires satisfying the developmental challenges in the previous stage. The psychosocial stages start from infancy (trust versus mistrust) and go up to late adulthood (integrity versus despair).
College students are young adults at the stage of intimacy versus isolation. Cohen (2016) described this stage as a stage of building romantic relationships and friendships with others. It is important for individuals to have developed some solid sense of self-identity before entering this stage. People need clear understandings of themselves in order to build intimate and meaningful relationships with others. This young adulthood stage (intimacy versus isolation) is influenced by the adolescence stage (identity versus role confusion) and influences the middle adulthood stage (generativity versus stagnation); therefore, healthy connections with others are important (Zhang et al., 2018).

The intimacy versus isolation stage is greatly influenced by the previous experience of being an adolescent and can make an impact on forming adult life (Cohen, 2016). It is important to remember that some TCKs and adult TCKs might not have had the chance to fully develop their senses of identity due to their international and mobile lifestyles (Bonebright, 2010; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009) and possibly because of some early-life role confusion (Pollock et al., 2017). TCKs feel they belong everywhere and nowhere at the same time (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Many adult TCKs express their fear of returning home because of their lack of confidence (Yoshida et al., 2009). It is important to note that many adult TCKs choose to socialize with international students due to the lack of ingroupness among non-TCK students (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).

Who Are Third Culture Kids?

TCKs have been studied since the 1960s, but little is known about this growing population (Melles & Frey, 2014). There are even fewer studies specifically on Confucian Asian adult TCKs (Bonebright, 2010). Sociologist Ruth Hill Useem first
labeled this population as TCKs and is considered the “mother of TCKs” for her scholarly contributions to exploring this population (Pollock et al., 2017, p. 24).

In the late 1950s, Useem and her husband traveled to India to study the experiences of American expatriates who worked for American corporations there. During their trip, they became particularly attentive to the American children who moved to India with their parents. At the time, Useem simply referred to these children as “children who accompanied their parents to another culture” (Pollock et al., 2017, p. 26).

In 1963, Useem et al. defined TCKs as “communities of men stemming from both a Western and a non-Western society who regularly interact as they relate to their societies, or sections thereof, in a physical setting of a non-Western society” (p. 170). In 1989, TCK was redefined as “an individual who, having spent a significant part of the developmental years in a culture other than the parents’ culture, develops a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock et al., 2017, p. 24).

Children of diplomats, members of the military, missionaries, and corporate employees are usually considered examples of TCKs because of their highly international and mobile lifestyles (Hervey, 2009; Pollock et al., 2017). These children accompany their parents or guardians to other countries for business or missionary purposes. They have rich international experiences due to their exposure to various cultures. However, their mobile lifestyles can cause great distress, especially in terms of cultural adjustments. They can lack a sense of belonging (Moore & Barker, 2012) and struggle to develop cultural and ethnic identities (Bonebright, 2009; Pollock et al., 2017; Walters & Auton-
Cuff, 2009). These struggles can influence TCKs and adult TCKs throughout their lives (Bonebright, 2010; Ibraiz & Weisbord, 2013).

Because of the rapid globalization, the TCK population continues to grow, and there are more people with TCK backgrounds than ever before (Melles & Frey, 2014; Washington & Gadikar, 2016). However, statistical data indicating the actual numbers of TCKs and adult TCKs are lacking, an indication of this population being understudied in general. Existing research, while somewhat dated, provides some understanding of the size of this population. According to Gaw (2000), an estimated 37,000 TCKs return to the United States every year to attend college. Eakin (1999) estimated that about 4,000,000 people around the world grew up as TCKs. Melles and Frey (2014) and Washington and Gadikar (2016) predicted that this population would continue to increase in the next 20 years.

According to a 2017 United Nations report, 258,000,000 people live outside of their countries of birth. Some are adults, others are children or adolescents with international backgrounds. Some of these individuals can be considered TCKs or adult TCKs.

**Characteristics and Needs of Third Culture Kids**

There are many common characteristics among TCKs and adult TCKs. Some of them reflect the advantages of their experiences, others do not. TCKs and adult TCKs develop unique characteristics from their international backgrounds, although it is important not to overgeneralize their personalities and experiences when discussing this population. I present these characteristics as parts of the findings that many researchers
and scholars have mentioned in their research, but they should not be used to define all TCKs’ and adult TCKs’ experiences.

**Advantages of TCK and Adult TCK Experiences and Lifestyles**

TCKs and adult TCKs derive a number of benefits from their international lifestyles, and they tend to develop many positive character traits as a result. In general, they are known for being highly adaptable to unfamiliar environments, which makes them excellent at blending in (Moore & Barker, 2012; Ibraiz & Weisbord, 2013). They are less prejudiced and more open-minded due to their exposure to many different cultures compared to non-TCKs (Pollock et al., 2017; Straffon, 2003). TCKs who have attended international schools have shown higher intercultural sensitivities, defined as “an individual’s response to cultural differences and perspectives of people from other cultures” (Straffon, 2003, p. 488). Intercultural sensitivity can be measured by two polarized concepts: ethnocentric stages, which include denial, defense, and minimization; and ethnorelative stages, which include acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Straffon, 2003).

In a study on TCKs in international schools, Straffon (2003) found that 97% of the TCK participants had higher scores related to the ethnorelative perspectives of acceptance and cognitive adaptation. Given this result, he concluded that their rich and diverse experiences at schools among other students with similar experiences resulted in their having better intercultural sensitivity. Ibraiz and Weisbord (2013) had similar results, reflected in their finding that study participants obtained dynamic cross-cultural competencies, which they called dynamic CCs. Dynamic CCs can predict tolerance and flexibility levels in different cultural environments and are influenced by various factors.
including family backgrounds and other relational backgrounds (Melles & Schwartz, 2013). Ibraiz and Weisbord concluded that international experience and exposure to different cultures at an earlier age can result in more open cultural mindsets and more tolerance for ambiguity.

Another characteristic of TCKs is their facile social skills with adults and authorities. Most TCKs’ parents and guardians are assigned to overseas jobs by their company or the military. Therefore, TCKs form experiences and interact with various adults throughout the transition of moving to another country, which allows them to have more meaningful relationships (Pollock et al., 2017). In addition, they are known for being independent and more committed to higher levels of education (Cottrell, 2007).

**Disadvantages of TCK and Adult TCK Experiences and Lifestyles**

Because of relationships and lifestyles that often quickly change, TCKs and adult TCKs can face great distress throughout their transition periods. Some of these challenges relate to their tendency to be people pleasers. They are nice to everyone since easily integrating into other cultures is part of their survival skill sets. However, their words and actions can lack consistency, sometimes referring to as changing colors (Pollock et al., 2017). Their lifestyles are often unstable and changeable; therefore, they can find it difficult to make social commitments. This tendency can cause trouble with decision-making in terms of school activities or daily life decisions. These learned habits can also result in missing out on attending school gatherings or choosing the right school programs later in their lives (Pollock et al., 2017). TCKs and adult TCKs often struggle in building meaningful relationships with the local community, which can result in their having limited resources when they relocate (Pollock et al., 2017). They usually come
from socially privileged backgrounds such as from families of diplomats or entrepreneurs who undertake business opportunities outside of their home countries (Melles & Frey, 2014). Since they have financial and educational advantages, TCKs are usually sent to international schools or special schools where they meet other children with similar family backgrounds (Jurgensen, 2014; Wilcox, 2017). However, these circumstances can limit their life experiences in other ways, such as knowing how to access resources outside of their customary environments. Moreover, their privileged lifestyles can give them a sense of superiority, which can eventually prevent them from reassimilating or smoothly transitioning back into their home countries (Yoshida et al., 2009). They also face difficulties developing concrete identities (Bonebright, 2010; Pollock et al., 2017; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009).

Since they grow up in multiple countries, TCKs and adult TCKs sometimes lose a sense of loyalty to their own home countries. They may inherit the identity of “world citizen” rather than citizens of specific countries. This identity confusion can be referred to as “hometown-lessness.” They do not feel any belonging to a place, but rather a rootedness in communities and people. One of the most significant differences between TCKs and other international individuals is if there is an expectation of returning home at some point (Pollock et al., 2017). Unlike international students or permanent immigrants, TCKs often do not know how long they will remain in the host countries and where their next destinations will be because they are accompanying their parents or guardians. One of the qualitative research participants in Melles and Frey (2014) had relocated to six different countries since she was 9 years of age. She described her feelings of relocation and her experience at college as “uncomfortable” (Melles & Frey, 2014, p. 355) and
could not clearly identify her feelings. The experience of frequent relocations caused her difficulties in forming close relationships with other children, since many of these relationships dissolved due to her or the other children’s relocations. These experiences still impacted her well into adulthood. Such difficulty to open up, to seek for help, or form warm and close relationships appear to be common struggles among adult TCKs (Pollock et al., 2017; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Jurgensen (2014) reported an interesting dilemma among TCKs in that they sometimes face difficulties in connecting even with other TCKs due to diverse cultural backgrounds and upbringings.

Cultural Identity

There is a connection between a clear ethnic identity and one’s well-being (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). Sussman (2000) defined cultural identity as “the psychological counterpoint to national identity: the identity that describes the cultural self in content, evaluation and structure” (p. 358). Put differently, people determine their cultural origins based on where they feel they belong the most. Oftentimes, individuals identify their sense of belonging through legal documentation such as passports or ethnic nationalities. However, these cultural identities can be confusing for people with international lifestyle backgrounds such as TCKs and adult TCKs (Bonebright, 2010; Pollock et al., 2017; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). These individuals tend to have experience role confusion when moving away from their home cultures and facing the necessity of adopting new cultural identities (Berry, 2005; Gebhard, 2012; Sussman, 2000). TCKs and adult TCKs face difficulties in building connections with a specific culture, even with their home cultures (Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock et al., 2017; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Straffon, 2003). Developing a solid identity can be challenging for anyone, but Confucian Asian
TCKs might find the process even harder. Iwamoto and Liu (2010) said that the process of developing identity for Asian individuals is multidimensional and includes cultural behaviors, cultural knowledge, understanding of cultural beliefs, and customs in the culture. This is because Asian culture often values connection within society and finds meaning in harmony with other society members (Triandis, 1994). Therefore, developing a solid identity can be different and especially challenging for Confucian Asian TCKs who do not have much connection with the Confucian Asian community due to their relocations.

The Concept of Third Culture

The concept of third culture is important in understanding TCKs and adult TCKs. Washington and Gadikar (2016) defined first culture as the home culture or the passport culture in which an individual holds nationality. Second culture is the host culture where the person lives momentarily without having citizenship or a plan for permanent residency. Finally, third culture is more of a psychosocial than physical concept. Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) defined third culture as a culture between host and home cultures that TCKs and adult TCKs experience. Useem et al. (1963) explained third culture as a bridge between the home culture and the host culture that TCKs and adult TCKs use to connect with their cultural roots. Pollock et al. (2017) regarded third culture as “shared commonalities of those living an internationally mobile lifestyle” among TCK individuals (p. 26).

Interestingly, people with TCK backgrounds developed this sense of commonality by having complex and transitory lifestyles. This sense of shared commonality is not influenced by the nationalities or host countries they have visited but is instead
constructed during their transitioning from one culture to another (Melles & Frey, 2014). Generally, people acquire their cultural norms in or expectations of society by interacting with other community members. However, TCKs do not have the same learning experiences and processes as the majority of other non-TCKs. For example, in a 2009 study on women with TCK backgrounds, Walters and Auton-Cuff found psychological development a common struggle among the participants. During transitioning from setting to setting, they needed to quickly learn “how to act and behave” in unfamiliar settings instead of focusing on the stages of normal lifespan development as defined by Erikson (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009).

**Transition Models**

International lifestyles are common among TCKs. They typically follow their parents and guardians and travel to more than one foreign country. For example, one of the participants in Moore and Barker’s study (2012) lived in four different countries while growing up. Klemens and Bikos (2009) found that having multiple relocation experiences impacted TCKs’ relationships with their parents and caregivers. Because of the nature of their parents’ and guardians’ work, some families return to their home country after several years, but even TCKs who have lived in only one foreign country can experience some identity confusion (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Having a highly transitional lifestyle is known to cause identity development disturbances (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009) due to having to focus too heavily on adjusting to and surviving in the new environment instead of focusing on their life development like other children would (Pollock et al., 2017; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Researchers have found that the W-curve transition model developed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), Pollock et al.’s
(2017) five-stage transition model, and Barry’s (2005) acculturation model best explain the experiences of TCKs’ highly international mobile lifestyles.

Culture Shock

Culture shock, defined as “an anxiety that results from losing the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, and their substitution by other cues that are strange” (L. Brown & Holloway, 2008, p. 34). is an element in the W-curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) and the transition model (Pollock et al., 2017). Oberg (1960) said that culture shock comes from the sense of unknowing. Feeling that one does not know enough about the culture or the environment one is in naturally causes anxiety. When people feel that they understand their new environments, culture shock diminishes.

W-curve culture shock is a well-known model for explaining reverse culture shock among sojourners, or temporary residents. This model was introduced by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) as an extension of Lysgaard’s (1955) concept of U-curve culture shock. The U-curve model contains four stages that sojourners encounter after they enter the host culture (Oberg, 1960). The new cultural experience starts with the honeymoon stage, in which individuals find the culture, the people, and the new environment enjoyable rather than stressful. They are excited about all the new encounters. They are not concerned about cultural differences but find them thrilling and adventurous (Oberg, 1960). Like tourists, they can enjoy the unfamiliarity, the new culture, and the new people.

This initial excitement is followed by the next period, the hostile and aggressive/crisis stage (Oberg, 1960). At this point, sojourners feel hatred toward the host culture. They direct their frustration on the host culture and try to justify their discomfort
by adjustment issues. This stressful feeling can be triggered by any unsuccessful experience at school or home, such as school enrollment difficulties and troubles with customer service and others. They sometimes grow tired of having to use a foreign language (McLachlan & Justice, 2007) or are exasperated while adjusting to different weather or food (Y. S. E. Kim, 2005). Some of them miss family members back home; others feel stress related to new academic environments (McLachlan & Justice, 2007).

After the hostile and aggressive/crisis stage, sojourners enter the adjustment stage, which is when they start accepting the host culture’s differences with humor (Dettweiler et al., 2015; Oberg, 1960). At this stage, unlike the previous stage, sojourners may start making fun of their struggles to reduce distress from their culture shock. They might take superior attitudes toward their host culture by looking down on it or criticizing the cultural differences (Oberg, 1960). Some may also start seeing other people who might be experiencing more stress and compare their experiences (Dettweiler et al., 2015).

Adjustment is the final stage (McLachlan & Justice, 2007; Oberg, 1960). Sojourners now accept the new unfamiliar customs with respect and curiosity. They start enjoying the cultural differences and the diverse environments.

In addition to these four U-curve stages, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) added another stage to the period that reflects the sojourners’ return to their home countries. This model is now known as W-curve or UU-curve (Dettweiler, 2015). The W-curve model demonstrates the stress after returning home, which is also referred to as reverse culture shock or returning shock in U-curve culture shock model (Dettweiler, 2015; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).
Reverse culture shock, defined as “a process of readjusting, acculturating, and re-assimilating into one’s own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time” (Gaw, 2000, p. 84) is considered more consequential than culture shock (Koester, 1984; Mooradian, 2004; N. J. Adler, 1986). Most people expect some kind of challenges and difficulties when they go to different cultures. These expectations help to minimize the stress of culture shock. On the other hand, reverse culture shock occurs due to an unexpected unfamiliarity with one’s own home culture and country. The biggest difference between culture shock and reverse culture shock is the level of unexpectedness. When sojourners leave for another culture, they have some mental preparation for the possibility of encountering cultural differences and unfamiliarities. However, they expect no difficulties when returning to their home countries. They assume they will simply return to familiar places and be surrounded by unchanged friends and family members (Gaw, 2000). Additionally, they underestimate the changes in their home countries after being absent for an extended time. Their friends and family might have different relationships, there may be some societal changes, and their hometowns might have changed. Furthermore, they tend to not realize that their own identities and values also have changed after spending a significant time away from their home countries. The consequences of living in another culture are greater than most people anticipate. As Christofí and Thompson (2007) found, the international experience can impact one’s identity, which also can cause some challenges in the reacculturation process.

According to N. J. Adler (1986), the honeymoon period lasts only a month, or sometimes even only a few hours after arriving home. N. J. Adler, who examined the
experiences of governmental employees, found that about 2 to 3 months after returning home was the hardest due to reverse culture shock. One participant in a study by Yoshida et al. (2009) said the following about her experience of returning to her home country and her struggles with integration: “Instead of seeing me as me, they see me as a returnee (a fictional image). They do not try to understand me as a unique human being. They think they understand me based on their stereotypes” (Yoshida et al., 2009, p. 273).

This participant felt like people no longer accepted her as she was. After spending her time outside of home country, she was labeled as a “returnee” with stereotypes (Yoshida et al., 2009). Another participant in Yoshida et al. (2009) said that having a sense of acceptance and a sense of sameness in the home country smoothed the transition and made reverse culture shock less painful. This participant said, “Because most of the students are returnees, even those who are not tend to be very understanding and they don’t treat me as though I am different” (Yoshida et al., 2009, p. 272). Culture shock and reverse culture shock are unavoidable for any individuals who have lived outside of their passport countries. Even though the struggles have been widely discussed, there has been a lack of support for individuals who experience these painful periods, especially TCKs and adult TCKs.

Several scholars (L. Brown & Holloway, 2007; Mizuno, 1997; Yakushko et al., 2008) have suggested how mental health professionals and other support staff on campus can help ease the stressful impacts of culture shock and reverse culture shock among TCKs. When individuals enter a foreign or unfamiliar culture, they know less about norms and cultures than the locals do. Mizuno (1997) suggested a model for creating a systematic support for international students on campus, starting with meeting their basic
needs. Such support meets these students’ basic needs and improves their adjustment levels in the host culture. This includes building support networks beyond counseling services to reduce their stress from struggling. The specific supports include helping them communicate with their families in another country, dealing with language barriers, adjusting to different customs, opening a bank account, and other basic needs.

L. Brown and Holloway (2007) emphasized the need for providing resources and support networks shortly after students arrive in the host culture, which is when they need such support most. Receiving help at an earlier transitioning stage helps them feel more comfortable about asking for help later during their transition. Mizuno (1997) also strongly encouraged mental health professionals, including campus counselors, to become integrated in support systems early on to reduce the stigma around mental health among these students. Before offering counseling sessions, mental health professionals need to understand that there is no set period of time for TCK clients to continue using the services. International schools often provide educational and psychological support for TCKs. However, they experience high turnover rates among TCK students (Bonebright, 2010) because of the students’ transitory lifestyles. For this reason, Yakushko et al. (2008) suggested that counselors may consider offering fewer counseling sessions. In addition to the interventions previously mentioned, having basic counseling skills such as asking good open-ended questions (McDonald, 2011), developing multicultural competencies counseling skills (Mayorga et al., 2013), and having the ability to share the same worldview as their clients, including their struggles caused by culture shock and reverse culture shock (Sue, 1998). The additional intervention that
counselors can use clients with TCK backgrounds is addressed in more detail in Chapter 5.

**Five-Stage Transition Model**

To improve understanding of the TCK population, Pollock et al. (2017) identified five transition stages that people with highly mobile lifestyles experience: involvement, leaving, transition, entering, and reengagement. Each transition stage uniquely shapes TCKs’ experiences and constructs commonality with other TCKs. In the involvement stage, TCKs are in familiar places where they are surrounded by support networks and familiarities. They do not feel much culture-related stress. Other people in the community recognize and treat them as part of the community. They focus on the present and do not overly analyze or become concerned with the future or past. However, this comfortability changes once they enter the leaving stage. The leaving stage starts when TCKs are informed that they will leave their comfortable place for another completely unfamiliar place in the near future. It is time for them to start the mental and physical preparation for the changes. TCKs sometimes deny and ignore the experienced grief and sadness from these transitions, especially if they have been hurt before. If they have already experienced a painful separation from their familiarities, it is a natural reaction that they try to minimize the pain. The separation is not only with their friends or family, but also with their home and/or mementos. In Melles and Frey (2014), some adult TCKs mentioned they had learned how to block their emotional attachments while they were growing up.

The next stage begins soon after moving to a new place. This third stage is the transit period, and does not start until TCKs physically leave their previous places and
mentally decide to be part of their new communities (Washington & Gadikar, 2016). It takes at least 6 months until they mentally become prepared to explore and learn about the new environment (Purnell & Hoban, 2014). During this transition period, TCKs feel pressure and isolation because the community has already been established without them. Besides isolation in the community, they need to physically adjust to the new place. There might be many differences between old and new countries to get used to, including the language, the weather, types of food, transportation systems, etc. This is an “in motion” stage, since nothing is settled (Pollock et al., 2017).

TCKs need to learn new responsibilities and cultural norms as newcomers in the community. The experience of being new community members can negatively affect TCK self-esteem (Melles & Frey, 2014; Pollock et al., 2017; Washington & Gadikar, 2016). They may feel a sense of isolation not only from the community but also from the household. While TCKs go through the cultural adjustments and stress related to relocating, their parents or guardians experience their own challenges. TCK parents are sometimes too busy and overwhelmed to recognize their children’s adjustment difficulties in their new environment. TCKs might misinterpret that they are burdensome after seeing or hearing that their parents and guardians may be experiencing stress from their school enrollments (Melles & Frey, 2014). This is probably one of the most stressful periods for TCKs and their families.

After TCKs establish some foundation with their new locations, they begin the fourth stage of the transition stages, the entering stage. This stage starts at least 6 months after their arrival (Purnell & Hoban, 2014). As Pollock et al. (2017) stressed, the entering stage does not start merely by entering the new place. To reach this stage, TCKs need to
have some physical and mental settlement in their new locations. During this period, TCKs start feeling some enjoyment and excitement. However, they still feel confused, with complicated emotional swings between the new place and their previous place. They also start realizing how hard it is to fit in the community. For example, other students might laugh at TCKs for referring to a “boot” as a “trunk” and “bonnet” as a “hood” (Pollock et al., 2017). To other kids, it might be a joke, but for TCKs these minor language differences or cultural differences can be the whole process of learning the new culture and customs. Their concepts of normal or common sense are no longer the same.

After having successfully adjusted to their new environments during the entering stage, TCKs finally enter the last stage: reengagement. They feel they are finally welcomed and become a part of the new community. At last they can start focusing on the present rather than the future or the past. On the other hand, they cannot stop feeling anxiety while wondering how long before they have to relocate to a new environment. Even if they feel accepted and stable in their current relationships and communities, they will never consider the new place as home since the concept of home is an elusive concept for them. Besides these transitional stages, it is important to remember how TCK development might be influenced by their international lifestyles in their acculturation processes. Klemens and Biko (2009) found that TCKs had a harder time adjusting to their home culture if they returned to their home countries after age 15 years.

**Acculturation Models**

Berry’s acculturation model (2005) is another model to explain the TCK experience, especially Eastern Asian immigrants. Acculturation can be defined as “changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups,
and social influence” (Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 237). Cross-cultural experiences reflect from larger relationship dynamics (e.g., living outside of a home country) to minor interactions (e.g., greeting neighbors) with individuals with different cultural backgrounds due to the rapid globalization (Arnett, 2002).

The concept of acculturation was originally used to explain the unidimensional cultural adaptation process of individuals receiving a new culture when entering a new community (Schwartz et al., 2010). The concept of adaptation refers to longer-term experiences and the commitment to maintain learned acculturated behaviors in order to live in new cultural communities (Berry, 2015). Therefore, acculturation can be a temporary action to facilitate adapting to the host culture.

Berry (2015) stated that acculturation contains four dimensions reflecting the level of social and psychological adaptation in the host country: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation is the psychological action when migrated individuals (the minority) accept the dominant (majority) culture in order to fit in (Berry, 2005). Separation occurs when migrated individuals put more value on their home culture and distance themselves from the host culture. However, if they wish to maintain their home culture and yet accept the host culture, integration occurs. Finally, marginalization is when individuals have no interest in maintaining their home cultures and make no effort to integrate into their host cultures.

Barry (2001) intended to create an acculturation model for Eastern Asian immigrants in the United States to understand their acculturation process in Western countries. His findings are worth mentioning to bring a different perspective on the population in the present study: Confucian Asian adult TCKs. Barry found that Asian
immigrants have a greater desire to fit in rather than merely interact socially with people in the host culture. This might be rooted in Asian collectivism, which encourages fitting into the dominant society in order to have a sense of “ingroupness” (Triandis, 1994, 2000). Barry also found that when Asian immigrants experience less marginalization in the host country, they experience more assimilation and integration into the host country the longer they live in the country. Barry concluded that Asians tend to be enthusiastic about being accepted and mingling with the dominant society in the host culture.

**Individualist and Collectivist Cultures**

Human society largely reflects two cultures: individualist and collectivist (Triandis, 2000). These cultures differ in their values, which impacts people’s customs, behaviors, and emotions (Triandis, 2000). These differences are important to understand when discussing the experiences of TCKs and adult TCKs. Collectivism and individualism are not opposite concepts. However, the concept of collectivism versus individualism oversimplifies actual interactions among people in the rapidly changing globalized society (Takano & Osaka, 1997; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Collectivist and individualist cultures can coexist in the same community (Oyserman et al., 2002). Some cultures value more collectivism while others might focus more on individualism, but any culture can have both traits at its center (P. J. Watson et al., 2017). These cultural differences make it difficult to generalize college experiences among students across cultures. In recognition of this difficulty, only differences reported by study participants across different cultures are discussed next.
**Individualism**

Individualism tends to focus on self-interest more than community benefits (P. J. Watson et al., 2017). Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) listed four key characteristics among members of individualist cultures: personal choice, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and self-maximization. Personal choice reflects the privilege of choosing one’s way of life or future. It is linked to a person’s motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the personality trait of being optimistic about life. Because children in individualist cultures tend to respond well to external rewards for their performances, many schools in Western countries use token economies to encourage students to follow school rules and perform well academically (Dec et al., 1999). Self-esteem is also another important concept related to individualist cultures and has two important parts: the sense of acceptance by others and the positive feeling toward oneself (Biscontini, 2016). Self-esteem linked to other people’s approval is called interdependent self-esteem, while the self-esteem linked to one’s own perception of oneself is called independent self-esteem (Du et al., 2013). In individualist cultures, independent self-esteem is valued.

Lastly, self-maximization is the expectation and idealization of meeting one’s full potential. Maslow (1943) called this self-actualization, which results when people feel self-content and fulfilled. Unless people find some meaning and purpose in their actions, they may feel unsatisfied or as if something is missing after they meet all of their basic needs (Maslow, 1943).

**Collectivism**

Collectivist cultures value community harmony (Du et al., 2013; Triandis, 2000). Triandis (1994) listed four elements of collectivist cultures: community sharing, authority
ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. People in collectivist cultures embrace “the intimacy, oneness, cooperation, and self-sacrifice within the ingroup” (Triandis, 1994, p. 170). Community authority is ranked on by position or age. Lower ranked individuals show respect and admire and follow the rules created by higher ranked individuals. Members in the same ranking take turns and respect each other. Yeh and Huang (1996) explained this relationship in the community as “the big me” versus “the little me.” The big me refers to the community with other members, while the little me is about each individual in the community. To maintain harmony, individuals (the little me) are expected to sacrifice their own needs for the best of the community (the big me; Yeh & Huang, 1996). Therefore, if members feel disrespected or that they are treated unfairly based on the shared community value, they risk being ostracized from the community.

Members of collectivist cultures define their concepts of self based on their dependence and social perception, which is called Amae in Japanese culture (Triandis, 2000; Yeh & Huang, 1996). Compared to members of individualist cultures, members of collectivist cultures are expected to respect others and be more selfless. Some people feel excluded in collectivist cultures when they are originally from a different community. This is because collectivist cultures divide people into ingroups and outgroups to stabilize community conformity when they feel pressure from outside of their community. This can be triggered by a new community member or exploring new cultural norms. A community with collectivist cultural traits is close and tight (Triandis, 2000).

Confucian Cultures

I next discuss Confucian cultures and the influence of Confucius (551–479 BCE), a widely acknowledged Chinese philosopher in Asian countries. Confucius’s influence
can be seen in various Asian countries even today. However, the extent to which his philosophies influence each country differs to some degree. Takashima (2009) called this phenomenon and his impacts in multiple countries “imported culture” (p. 187), which means that many items and customs are exchanged between nations and communities and develop differently. Culture and customs as well as materials and goods can be imported. The imported culture can influence existing customs and people’s lifestyles. Once the imported culture is merged with the existing culture, the imported culture combines with the old culture to make a new culture. Once the culture is completely merged, the imported culture is no longer a copy from the original country, but instead becomes the country’s accepted culture. China, Confucius’s birthplace and origin of his philosophy, has had a prodigious influence on various societal areas, including discipline and daily life.

Some scholars oppose the idea that Confucius’s philosophy is tied to religion in any culture, but as Ōbuchi (2015) pointed out, Confucius was from a religious family, and he preached his philosophy in a group that focused on religious rituals. Chinese communities and rulers employed his doctrines to rule their countries, specifically by using the concept of loyalty (zhōng) as Confucius emphasized the importance of harmony in the society by respecting authority (Ōbuchi, 2015; Wang, 1990).

Confucius was one of the so-called “hundreds of thinkers” who gathered their thoughts and conceived practices to bring peace in troubled times in Chinese history. Confucius’s philosophy emphasized creating a strong sense of hierarchy, which was convenient for the rulers to adapt. Additionally, Chinese society is built on a patriarchal foundation; therefore, a bureaucrat is expected to be completely obedient to the emperor.
as the father or the oldest male family member as the head of the household (Wang, 1990).

Korean society strongly reflects Confucianism (Ōbuchi, 2015). Confucius is not a religious icon in Korea, but his philosophy influences interpersonal relationships in households and the society. In Korea, the norm is to respect older people and have a strong sense of hierarchy (Ōbuchi, 2015). Like in China, Korea also uses Confucius’s philosophy as an essential social tool to maintain harmony and cohesiveness (Ōbuchi, 2015). Lastly, Japan is another Asian country with strong Confucian philosophical influences. However, unlike China and Korea, Japanese society does not credit Confucian philosophy as having a direct influence on forming its culture. Confucian is not treated as a religious icon because his philosophy was originally introduced as a moral guidance system in the 5th century AD. Since then, Japanese government has included Confucian guidance in its educational curriculum.

Confucian philosophy clearly impacts Asian cultures in various ways. These diverse influences have impacted how culture has been shaped in each of the aforementioned countries. However, as Ōbuchi’s (2015) cross-cultural study showed, there are insignificant differences in the impact of Confucian philosophy among these countries.

**Confucian Asian Adult Third Culture Kids College Students**

There is little extant research on Confucian Asian adult TCKs, which makes it difficult to discuss their behaviors or the challenges they face in college. However, remembering their cultural backgrounds helps in understanding them. There are two important concepts in Confucianism: filial piety (xiào) and loyalty (zhōng; Wang, 1990).
Filial piety is a moral guidance on how to respect one’s parents and ancestors. Loyalty is the respect and obedience for authority and supremacy (Wang, 1990). These two key concepts have created a strong bond and a sense of ingroupness among individuals with Asian cultural backgrounds, which can influence their experiences at college. These values can motivate Asian college students to pursue higher levels of education, adopt ambitious standards, and develop tighter relationships with their family and community members (Yeh & Huang, 1996).

The concept of sense of shame presents significant challenges among Asian college students and possibly Confucian Asian TCKs and is the topic of much discussion among Asian individuals. Because of collectivist culture and Confucianism, Asian individuals pay more attention to their reputations and feedback from their surroundings (Han & Pong, 2015). When they feel they are not meeting standards or disappointing their family, they have a sense of shame (Ang & Huan, 2006; Long, 2016). However, they tend not to seek additional resources to ease their struggles (Han & Pong, 2015). This can be problematic, since Asian college students generally tend to pursue higher levels of education, are sensitive about social expectations, and develop tight relationships with their families and community members (Yeh & Huang, 1996).

Therefore, they might internalize their struggles. Moreover, Confucian Asian adult TCKs may face more intense identity confusion and lack a sense of belonging even after they grow up (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010), yet receive less sympathetic understanding from their communities (Pingali, 2018). Asian TCKs have specifically reported discomforts and difficulties in returning to their home countries after spending extended time abroad due to social expectations in collectivist cultures and the desire for sameness in the society.
(Long, 2016). These factors may cause additional college-related stress among Confucian Asian college students.

**Developmental Needs for College Students**

In order to understand Confucian Asian TCK college students, it is important to understand their common struggles as college students in addition to their challenges due to their cultural backgrounds and their backgrounds as TCKs. Because there is little research specifically on Confucian Asian adult TCKs who enter the college environment, I next discuss general challenges that college students face followed by some known struggles among Confucian Asian adult TCKs.

**General Developmental Needs for College Students**

Few developmental stage differences have been found in college experiences across cultures (Masuda et al., 2009). In spite of this, it is still important to address (or recognize) the differences (or distinction) between cultural influences and potential experiences among students based on their cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Jansen et al., 2013). I first discuss general developmental needs. The developmental needs of Asian college students are addressed in a later section in this chapter.

Entering college is life changing for many young adults, and they can encounter many hardships during their education (Civitci, 2015; Kitzrow, 2003; Oh & Kim, 2014; Ong & Cheong, 2009; Osberg & Boyer, 2016; Ross et al., 1999). Changes in their environments and gaining a new range of responsibilities are two reasons for the common struggles among college students (Kitzrow, 2003; Oh & Kim, 2014; Osberg & Boyer, 2016). They have left their parents and entered a new phase of life, gaining freedom and new responsibilities without having much preparation. Adjusting to their new lives can
cause great distress stemming from the pressure to succeed academically, from interpersonal conflicts (Ross et al., 1999), and their desire to find others to build their lives with (Civitci, 2015; Ong & Cheong, 2009). In addition to these environmental and responsibility changes are other stressors such as financial concerns, uncertainty about the future, and making career choices after graduating from college (Ong & Cheong, 2009). The stress students face at the college level is considered exceptional due to their transition into the adult stage of life (Arnett, 2000; Civitci, 2015; Killam & Degges-White, 2017).

The lack of readiness for college life is one source of distress (Almeida, 2015; Killam & Degges-White, 2017). College readiness, the level of mental and academic readiness or maturity of college students (Almeida, 2015), has been widely discussed for many years (Jansen et al., 2013). College readiness has three significant aspects: cognitive academic factors, noncognitive academic factors, and campus integration factors (Duncheon, 2015). The concerns associated with college readiness can be applied not only to traditional college students who are recent high school graduates but also to veteran students, nontraditional students, first-generation college students (Jansen et al., 2013), racial minority students (Killam & Degges-White, 2017), international students (Gebhard, 2010), and adult TCKs in college (Grappo, 2009).

University leaders need to be mindful of students’ different backgrounds and needs (Duncheon, 2015). For example, international students might express anxiety and discomfort in the classroom due to the unfamiliarity of the atmosphere (Gebhard, 2010). As a solution, some scholars have suggested more interaction with students in the host country to improve the sense of belonging and acculturation (Lee & Rice, 2007;
“Buddy systems” can provide opportunities for international students to mingle with students in their host countries. On the other hand, first-generation college students tend to have strong family bonds but less knowledge and access when it comes to choosing a career or pursuing higher education (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018). Moreover, racial and ethnic minorities face discrimination and lower degree completion rates (Duncheon, 2015; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Therefore, universities need to be aware of different demands and prepared to offer a variety of student services, especially in today’s rapidly changing society.

Developmental Needs for Asian College Students

Before starting this section, I address the lack of research on this topic. Many scholars have studied experiences and struggles among college students in Western countries (e.g. the United States and European countries), but few have focused on students from collectivist cultures and countries. There are many articles on Asian Americans, but few researchers have studied Confucian Asian students in college environments. Because of the rapid changes in the world due to globalization and that cultural differences can impact people’s lifestyles and experiences, including their time in college (Hirudayaraj & McLean, 2018; Museus & Quaye, 2009), research focusing on colleges outside of Western countries is crucial.

Because of their constant relocating, it is difficult to determine how many Confucian Asian TCKs there are worldwide. However, it is known that this population has been growing in Asian countries due to globalization and the rapid development of international businesses (Mayberry, 2016). Some estimates of the size of this population are as follows: Gaw (2000) stated that about 37,000 TCK students return to the United
States to attend college every year. In Japan, there are more than 10,000 Japanese TCKs who return every year (Japanese Overseas Educational Service, 2017).

Asian students tend to be perceived as “model minorities,” a stereotype that reinforces society’s perception that a group of people have better economic and educational backgrounds with fewer health concerns (Sabato, 2016). Asian college students in Western countries are often stereotyped in this manner. This damaging stereotype can affect how the Asian population receives attention and care, even in academic environments (Duncheon, 2015). Jung (2006) listed two reasons why the model minority myth is actually harmful to this population. First, many of them can develop mental health issues due to overwhelming stress and pressure to meet the standard as a model minority. Another reason is lack of support from the community due to the stereotype that they do not need support from community or society. Sabato (2016) noted that Asian populations are sometimes excluded in studies assessing risk behaviors due to this stereotype. These stereotypes can prevent members of the Asian community from receiving appropriate support.

The number of students choosing to go to college has been increasing in Asian countries (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2012), 40% of young adults who are enrolled in higher educational institutions in 2020 will be from China and India. The Chinese government has encouraged more citizens to enroll in higher education, with the goal of having 20% of the country’s population enrolled in college by 2020. This number is equivalent to 195,000,000 Chinese individuals in higher education worldwide.
According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2012), almost half of the populations in Japan and South Korea (51.4% and 47.7%, respectively) between 25 to 64 years of age have received higher education after high school, including college and other higher education degrees. This study assessed how many individuals from 46 countries decided to go to a higher education institution after finishing high school. In this study, Japan and South Korea were ranked in the top four; the United States and Canada rounded out the top group. These numbers show that education is seen as a top priority in Asian countries.

Many parents in Asian countries encourage their children to pursue higher education degrees and build stable careers. As previously discussed, Asian cultures value strong relationships among community members. Children are expected to listen to their parents, and the relationship does not change even after children become young adults (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 1994). Asian students tend to devote more time to their studies due to high expectations when it comes to their performance (Ang & Huan, 2006). Parental and societal pressure can cause stress and anxiety among Asian college students (Beiyu & Shirley, 2011). Many Asian college students reported the fear of “losing face” for not meeting or exceeding their parents’ or extended families’ expectations in academia or work, which pushes them to study more (Ang & Huan, 2006). Many scholars have acknowledged the unique concept of shame in Asian societies for doing something ungrateful or failing other community members (Ang & Huan, 2006; Ridley et al., 2000; Yeh & Huang, 1996). Collectivist cultures value harmony and cohesion (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 2000). Therefore, ingroupness can be stronger among college students with collectivism cultural backgrounds (Triandis et al.,
This influences how they form their sense of ingroup. These strong expectations pressure Asian students (Beiyu & Shirley, 2011), but they tend not to seek support due to stigma and fear of losing face (Ang & Huan, 2006; Gaw, 2000).

**Developmental Needs for Adult Third Culture Kids in College**

Even though few studies have been conducted on this population, there are some commonalities among adult TCKs’ experiences in college. First, adult TCKs are known for their educational privileges (Cottrell, 2007). Many TCKs have been enrolled in international schools, which offer higher and more progressive educational curricula (Thurston-Gonzales, 2009). However, it is important to note that among all TCKs, missionary children lag behind the others in higher education attainment (Thurston-Gonzales, 2009). This is because most missionary families have lesser financial luxury or opportunities compared to other international families, such as those of diplomats, the military, and businesspeople.

When it comes to college enrollment, the common struggle among adult TCKs is hesitation and anxiety related to their ability to fit into academic ecosystems (Bikos et al., 2009). Despite this, most adult TCKs go to college (Cottrell, 2007). It appears the most natural thing for them to do, especially because parents of TCKs generally expect their children to go to college after finishing high school. In Cottrell’s 2007 study, 94% of the TCKs went to college after finishing high school. The number was 4 times larger than the national average among American students in the United States at that time. However, the important question is if they are ready to enroll in college.

Jurgensen (2014) identified four areas considered common struggles among adult TCKs in college: parental attachment, reverse culture shock, perceived social support,
and college adjustment. TCKs and their families usually build strong bonds because of their highly international and mobile lifestyles (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2017). These strong bonds are understandable since they only have family members to support them during relocation. A participant in Yoshida et al. (2009) said she was comfortable in showing her true self to her family because she knew they would accept her as she was. These strong familial bonds sometimes make it more stressful for TCK students to part from their parents and family when entering college (Grappo, 2009).

In addition to separating from their parents, adult TCKs can face reverse culture shock if they choose to enter a college in their home country (Gaw, 2000; Hervey, 2009) or decide to continue living outside of their home countries. One participant in Bikos et al. (2009) feared going back to their home country because of the concern of not fitting in, even though the participant represented the dominant race in the county. Another participant in Bikos expressed fear of standing out for not being familiar enough with the social norms. Another participant in the same study expressed his fear of returning to his home country and no longer appearing different. He used to be “different” as a TCK in the host culture, therefore his distress stemmed from being part of the dominant culture in his home culture. Having a different appearance can give them the TCK identity and allow them to socially act or feel different. Therefore, this participant was worried that he would be expected to understand and act as other American students once he entered college.

Regardless of whether adult TCKs return to their home countries or relocate, it is important to remember that they may not be merely dealing with reverse culture shock, they may also be experiencing unresolved grief from being away from their friends and
families (Hervey, 2009; Pollock et al., 2017). They may face different experiences at
college compared to non-TCK students. If they were previously enrolled in an
international school, they were surrounded by other students who had similar global
mindsets and international backgrounds (Straffon, 2003; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009).
When they enter a college in their home country, they become hidden immigrants who do
not appear to be minorities by their appearances (Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Pollock et al.,
2017; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009). This makes it harder for them to be acknowledged in
regard to receiving support in college unless they actively ask about such support. On the
other hand, some adult TCKs lack the confidence to seek additional support (Hervey,
2009; Yoshida et al., 2009). This is because they might be afraid of making unseemly
gestures in their new environments, even if they are in their home countries. Like the
earlier linguistic example of boot and bonnet, TCKs may no longer be familiar with
certain words and cultural terms in their native languages. They may be afraid of making
a mistake and being ridiculed.

In addition to these struggles, adult TCKs can have unique college adjustment
issues (Hervey, 2009; Jurgensen, 2014; Pollock et al., 2017). One is their relationships
with their instructors. TCKs usually come from families with high educational
attainment, and they have been intellectually stimulated (Pollock et al., 2017). Therefore,
some adult TCKs find that college classes are less appealing and challenging (Hervey,
2009).

Grappo (2009) stated that choosing the right school can be challenging for TCKs
while they are still in their international mobile lifestyles. In Cottrell and Useem (1999),
49% of adult TCKs chose to switch their major or leave their first selected college
because they felt the program or school did not fit them. Many TCKs and their families are unable to access resources and assistance for selecting an appropriate university and program preceding attendance (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). They tend to apply for a college and a program while they are still traveling as they face having to use agencies to apply for a program of study. They might not have a chance to go on campus tours or talk to other students before they decide to apply.

Building friendships with other students can be another struggle. Many TCKs have open and friendly personalities and easily make friends, but they sometimes struggle in developing intimate friendships with other students (Melles & Frey, 2014). When they are unsure of cultural norms, they can be shy and may experience difficulties opening up. These tendencies may be more critical among adult TCKs who are experiencing more stressful reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000). Gaw (2000) also concluded that adult TCKs are less likely to seek support, including counseling, if they are under severe stress from reverse culture shock. Therefore, it is necessary for colleges to take the initiative to reach out to these students to prevent furthering dropout rates. Hervey (2009) highlighted the benefits of learning from adult TCKs for college teachers and staff. These students’ rich and unique international experiences should be valued and acknowledged in colleges and classrooms.

**College Support Systems**

College campuses have many well-established support networks. Each student development assistance program collaborates with other on-campus programs and offices to provide micro and macro approaches to student support. College counseling centers are usually some of the most visited campus facilities (Dipeolu et al., 2007). The number
of students using counseling centers has increased over the years for several reasons (Kitzrow, 2003; Pledge et al., 1998). According to a national survey conducted in 2001, 85% of college counseling centers reported an increase of students with severe psychological challenges from 1996 until 2001 (Gallagher et al., 2001). Eighty nine percent of university counseling centers had to hospitalize students to prevent further risks; 30% of universities reported students dying from suicide (Gallagher et al., 2001). Pledge et al. (1998) expressed concerns about changing needs among students at college counseling centers.

In addition to counseling centers, there are other student support networks available such as university-organized groups for international students, academic accommodation services for students with disabilities, offices focusing on racial and cultural minority students, and tutoring and educational coaching services to help students academically. However, a lack of cultural competencies and knowledge of student mental health needs are common concerns among staff members across universities and colleges (Mizuno, 1997). These issues might discourage adult TCKs from seeking additional support. Moreover, existing support might not be easily accessible for Asian students due to their bias toward asking for help (Ang & Huan, 2006; Gaw, 2000). The Asian community is known not only for having a stigma toward mental health support but also for having the cultural expectation to “brush off” their problems and toughen up to overcome issues (Masuda et al., 2009, p. 179). The community also values hierarchy and authority due to Confucian philosophy (Leong, 1993; Wang, 1990). Therefore, culturally appropriate and competent support is necessary for working with students with Asian cultural upbringings.
Support Networks for Confucian Asian Adult Third Culture Kids in College

Many scholars have emphasized the necessity of providing psychological support for TCKs and adult TCKs (Bonebright, 2010; Davis et al., 2015; Mayorga et al., 2013; Melles & Frey, 2014; Washington & Gadikar, 2016). Because of this population’s unique background, many counselors struggled to determine the most appropriate and effective approaches for assisting TCKs and adult TCKs. These struggles are common among counselors and college support staff due to the globalization of college campuses (Mizuno, 1997).

As Mizuno (1997) emphasized, providing effective support requires collaboration between various organizations, especially for students with diverse cultural backgrounds. Even though Mizuno created his model to be applied to international students in Japan, it is also applicable to adult TCKs in college. Mizuno divided types of student support into two categories: basic support and solution-focused interventions. Basic support provides fundamental support to help students adopt diverse cultures and have smoother transitions when doing so. Solution-focused interventions are a more complex support that includes psychological support such as counseling for students.

Washington and Gadikar (2016) suggested several approaches for working with adult TCKs in counseling sessions. One is to use open-ended questions. Asking open-ended questions is a basic counseling technique, but it provides adult TCKs more opportunities to process their experiences and feelings (McDonald, 2011). Davis et al. (2015) shared similar views on the importance of helping TCKs process their feelings so they can work on grieving the loss of their highly international and mobile lifestyles. Close-ended questions can confine client responses and deprive them of the opportunity
to explore, resulting in their only providing basic background information to their counselors. By using effective open-ended questions during intake sessions, counselors can more clearly understand their clients’ backgrounds, such as the number of schools they have attended or the countries they have lived in (Washington & Gadikar, 2016).

Another effective intervention is empowering clients by pointing out their strengths. Many adult TCKs have a strong sense of pride and appreciation of their international backgrounds (Pollock et al., 2017). However, some adult TCKs carry low self-esteem. In Hoersting and Jenkins’s (2011) study, adult TCKs in college reported having lower self-esteem in comparison to non-TCK college students. Low self-esteem can lead to apprehension or insecurity due to unfair treatment and discrimination after they return to their home countries (Yoshida et al., 2009). The tendency for low self-esteem is especially significant for Confucian Asian adult TCKs due to their collectivist cultural backgrounds. It is also important to remember high stress levels among TCKs and adult TCKs due to their frequent farewells and grief. Counselors can help adult TCKs by identifying their earned strengths from their international backgrounds (McDonald, 2011).

It is important for counselors to have multicultural competencies in their counseling skills (Washington & Gadikar, 2016). Being able to synchronize with the global frame of mind that adult TCKs share is important (Hervey, 2009). Since adult TCKs have traveled to different countries, regardless of their nationality, they have strong attachments to each of the countries in which they have lived (Pollock et al., 2017). Counselors need to be aware of their international mindsets and be familiar with world
news in order to understand domestic happenings, social affairs, and current events such as conflicts and natural disasters in other countries.

Counselors should avoid assuming that adult TCK clients can speak their home countries’ languages to avoid microaggressions and miscommunications in counseling sessions. Many TCKs are enrolled in international schools that teach in English or other foreign languages (Straffon, 2003; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009). Some TCKs go to their home country schools on weekends to learn of their native cultures and languages, but their opportunities to learn and speak their native languages can be limited. Therefore, counselors should refrain from assuming that adult TCKs are fluent in their native languages.

Since TCKs and adult TCKs are considered socially marginalized populations, counselors are ethically obligated to provide culturally competent counseling services (Washington & Gadikar, 2016). More training is critical for furthering multicultural counseling competencies to meet the unique needs of TCKs and adult TCKs (Bushong, 2013).

**Conclusion**

College students with TCK backgrounds have been understudied (Thurston-Gonzales, 2009). Since the term TCK was defined in the 1960s, many scholars have studied this population. However, most of the studies have focused on TCKs from Western countries, mainly from the United States (Pollock et al., 2017; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). In the present study, I hoped to bring more awareness among mental health professionals and student affairs staff at colleges to
support Asian college students with TCK backgrounds. By narrowing the character of the study population, I reached a deeper understanding of the population under consideration.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Many researchers have conducted studies on TCKs since this group was identified in 1963. These researchers have illuminated shared struggles among TCKs (Cottrell, 2007; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Jurgensen, 2014; Pollock et al., 2017; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). However, few researchers have focused on Confucian Asian adult TCKs; most have discussed American TCKs and American adult TCKs (Cottrell, 2007; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). There are even fewer studies on adult TCKs with Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds (Long, 2016; Straffon, 2003).

Given rapid changes in modern society along with the increasing number of international individuals, more attention needs to be paid to this understudied population (Melles & Frey, 2014; Pollock et al., 2017; Washington & Gadikar, 2016). The present study was designed to increase awareness of the unique experiences of Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college. The research question was, How do Confucian Asian adult TCKs describe their social lives in college?

As noted, few scholars have recognized or studied Confucian Asian adult TCKs (Long, 2016; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Tanu, 2008). Considering the growth of this population (Eakin, 1999), researchers should not overlook TCKs and the necessity of expanding the knowledge about this population to better serve their needs in college. In this chapter, the present study’s methodology is discussed, beginning with an overview of qualitative research methods, the specific qualitative method employed in this study, the process of enhancing study trustworthiness, and the potential limitations and ethical considerations in this study.
Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research methods are beneficial for understanding shared experiences of a specific group of individuals (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the main objective of using a qualitative method in this study was to understand Confucian Asian adult TCKs’ college life experiences in order to offer them more effective support in college. Qualitative research is suitable when “theories are not yet available to explain phenomena . . . to facilitate the theory building process” (Morrow, 2009, p. 211). TCKs and adult TCKs with Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds have not yet been empirically studied. Therefore, qualitative research methods can bring awareness to this community in a way that enhances future research. Since qualitative research values the power of language, the participants’ data were handled with extra attention and respect (Morrow, 2009).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method rooted in the writings of Edmund Husserl (Dowling, 2005). Husserl was a German philosopher who was inspired by the concept of intentionality developed by Franz Brentano (Dowling, 2005; Owen, 1996). Husserl developed phenomenological philosophy and introduced it as a way of processing thoughts through consciously and intentionally thinking (Dowling, 2005). The term phenomenology originates from a Greek word, phainein, which means to reveal the truth (Christensen et al., 2017). Influenced by this philosophy, Martin Heidegger developed a research method to study human life from participants’ subjective perceptions (Creswell et al., 2007; Owen, 1996). After Heidegger, several prominent
philosophers and psychologists, such as Adrian Van Kaam and Amedeo Giorgi, further developed phenomenology as a qualitative research method (Dowling, 2005).

Phenomenology is designed to extract the essence of participants’ lived experiences surrounding the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, the purpose of using phenomenology is to explore and understand the complex lived experiences from the point of view of “those who lived it” (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 220). In other words, phenomenology contributes to having a deeper understanding of the “lifeworld” (Lebenswelt in German) of participants (Dowling, 2005).

**Transcendental Phenomenology**

Transcendental phenomenology is based on Husserl’s philosophy of seeking to understand human experiences and acts of minds (Aparajita Behera al., 2018). Husserl was interested in learning more about how people consciously behave in their environments. Based on Husserl’s theory, Adrian Van Kaam developed this philosophy into a qualitative research method called transcendental phenomenology. Van Kaam used transcendental phenomenology to help individuals form their thoughts into clear knowledge and information for others to understand. The process is called explication (Van Kaam, 1959, p. 66). Transcendental phenomenological researchers collect lived experiences of participants through interviews and other data sources. As a part of the research process, Van Kaam emphasized the importance of apprehending the core component of a phenomenon, which could make other readers feel they “understand” the phenomenon (Van Kaam, 1959, p. 67). Moreover, transcendental phenomenology is based on the belief that the core of experiences of the phenomenon (i.e., the essence) are similar throughout the population. Therefore, in transcendental phenomenology,
researchers focus on uncovering the core shared experience regardless of differences among individuals.

Additionally, transcendental phenomenologists believe that researchers can observe the phenomenon. Husserl believed in assembling scientific research evidence resulting in objective and independent phenomena that could be studied (Moustakas, 1994; Perry, 2013). In other words, transcendental phenomenology is based on the belief that researchers can bracket their subjective beliefs in order to accurately understand the presented phenomenon (Perry, 2013). To get the essence of the lifeworld, or Lebenswelt, researchers need to identify their assumptions and preexisting knowledge, feelings, and beliefs to accurately understand the participants’ experiences of the phenomenon (Perry, 2013; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011). The presented phenomenon continually exists regardless of whether researchers can intentionally perceive it or not (Perry, 2013). This belief differentiates transcendental phenomenology from other phenomenology methods, such as hermeneutic phenomenology, which is based on the conclusion that it is impossible for researchers to separate their subjective understandings in interpreting the phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenologists suggest that researchers’ interpretations can impact the results whereas transcendental phenomenologists suggest that researchers bracket subjective understandings and thoughts to maintain objectivity.

To view the phenomenon objectively in transcendental phenomenology, researchers need to understand their inner awareness during the research process and set it aside during the data analysis process. People’s conscious understanding is continuously shaped by the reality in front of them (Moustakas, 1994). People constantly
take in the reality of the outer world and use their experiences of the outer world to shape their subjective understanding. In research, data analysis can be influenced by researchers’ subjective cognitive thought processes, including their preexisting assumptions or knowledge about the research topic. In transcendental phenomenology, researchers can objectify their understanding of the presented phenomenon by using three unique ideas to conceptualize how to reduce the impact of their influence on the analysis. These unique ideas are bracketing, intentionality, and intuition.

**Bracketing**

Bracketing, or epoché, is part of the process of phenomenological process (Merriam, 2002a; Moustakas, 1994; Tufford & Newman, 2012). The word epoché comes from a Greek word meaning “refraining from judgement” (D. G. Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50). The process has two parts: the abstention and the methodological abstention (Wertz, 2005). Abstention means recognizing and having an awareness of the preexisting scientific assumption and knowledge about the target population and the phenomenon under consideration. Methodological abstention, on the other hand, is about the researcher’s emotions and feelings toward the target phenomenon. As Wertz (2005) stated, methodological abstention is used to “suspend or put out of play our naive belief” (p. 168). By engaging in these processes, researchers can refrain from letting their existing beliefs, knowledge, or feelings influence the process of the analysis.

**Intentionality**

According to Moustakas (1994, p. 28), “Intentionality indicates the orientation of the mind to its object; the object exists in the mind in an intentional way.” Intentionality consists of two components: noema and noesis. These two concepts are inseparable and
always need to coexist (Ashworth & Greasley, 2009). Noema explains how humans perceive an object. Moustakas (1994) described noema as the appearances of uniqueness and difference of individuals based on various factors such as one’s willingness, judging, experience, and other subjective feelings. On the other hand, noesis is defined as “perfect self-evidence” influenced by noema (Aparajita Behera et al., 2018; Moustakas, 1994, p. 30). As an example to explain the difference between noema and noesis, Ashworth and Greasley (2009) used a story of a student who had struggled with learning from texts due to his dyslexia. To this student, the discomfort and struggle associated with learning from texts is noesis. The student’s subjective perception and determination of texts is noema. In the process of research, the researcher needs to be mindful about the participants’ noema and noesis to fully comprehend the phenomenon. Similarly, researchers need to be mindful about their own noema and noesis through bracketing to prevent them from influencing the analysis process (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011).

**Intuition**

Intuition is another key component of transcendental phenomenology. Moustakas (1994) said intuition is the “beginning place in deriving knowledge of human experience” (p. 32). Intuition is the concept of the self. Through intuition, people perceive the object or the phenomenon in front of them. Intuition is an important component in making transcendental phenomenology logical. Logical investigations “arise out of ideational intuition founded on certain experiences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45).

By using these three ideas, researchers use transcendental phenomenology to objectively explain the essential experience of the target phenomenon (Christensen et al., 2017; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011), which is why I chose this method. TCKs have unique
international backgrounds due to their international and transitory lifestyles. Their reality is defined by the experiences, cultures, and interpersonal relationships that they have encountered throughout their lives, rather than based on their assigned nationality or where they have lived.

Phenomenology helps researchers who want to investigate what is happening within the participants regarding their experiences affected by the outer world (D. G. Hays & Wood, 2011). Among non-TCK individuals, knowledge of the experience of TCKs can be limited. I hope that findings from the present study can help non-TCKs individuals understand TCKs’ experiences. By conducting research on this particular population using transcendental phenomenology, study findings created awareness about the lived experiences of this population and support services for TCKs.

Research Design

Interviews

Since the purpose of the present study was to learn about the experiences of Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college, I used semistructured interviews to collect data. Semistructured interviews consist of scripted and ordered open-ended questions that provide flexibility for study participants to share their experiences and unscripted follow-up questions (probes) that allow researchers to encourage participants to clarify or provide more depth (Rabionet, 2009). This interview style can guide participants to share specific experiences with depth. However, semistructured interviews have some limitations compared to unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews do not impose many limitations; interviewers can be flexible in wording and ordering questions. However, such flexibility can interfere with the researcher’s ability to obtain useful
responses for the study as the interviews may lack consistency in content (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, I used probing interview questions between the structured interview questions to provide consistency and deepen the responses from participants.

Five interview questions were created for this study. All were asked in English regardless of the participants’ primary languages:

1. Which of your experiences in college stands out to you?
2. How was your friend network while you were in college?
3. What, if any, impact did your third culture and/or international backgrounds have on your social life in college?
4. What, if any, impact did your Asian cultural backgrounds have on your social life in college?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

During the interviews, I asked probing interview questions as needed. I also asked for clarification or additional information from participants, if necessary. There are two benefits of using probing interview questions (Kuha et al., 2018). First, probing questions are helpful for researchers to reduce the likelihood that participants do not provide a clear answer to the interview questions. Additionally, probing questions can reduce differences in participants’ responses. Through well-timed probing questions, participants who hesitate to answer the questions initially can provide more clarification so that their answers have similar depth as other participants’ answers. However, a disadvantage of using probing questions is that they can make interviews longer (Kuha et al., 2018; Patton, 2015). This can burden participants by increasing their time commitment to the
study. Therefore, it is important to have consistency provided by structured interview questions and probing questions to equalize the participants’ time commitment.

I used follow-up probing questions when participants did not provide enough information when answering the interview questions about their college experiences or their sense of belongingness in college and when clarification was needed about the statements they had provided. If participants provided shallow responses about their general experiences of college, I used probing questions such as “Tell me more about your college experience, especially about your friends” or “I appreciate your inputs, but could you elaborate on how you felt about this?” Again, the point of probing questions is to gain more information from participants by challenging them. However, I did not repeatedly use probing questions even if participants did not provide clarification to the initial probe to avoid placing any additional stress on them (Patton, 2015). I carefully utilized this technique, considering the risk of exhausting participants and taking too much of their time.

**Participants**

I originally expected to recruit 10 to 15 study participants. In the final study, I recruited 11 participants and found that the data reached saturation with these participants. The method for assessing the data saturation is discussed in the Trustworthiness section. For phenomenology, recruiting participants is an important process because the research findings are heavily influenced by the participants and their responses (Dowling, 2005; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Researchers are expected to choose participants carefully to ensure they have rich experiences and meet the study criteria.
Potential participants in the present study needed to meet the following four criteria. First, they needed to self-identify as adult TCKs or have backgrounds fitting this definition. To be considered an adult TCK, individuals must be over 18 years of age and self-identify as having an international transitory background. A TCK background implies living outside of the home/passport country for at least for 1 year during their childhood or adolescence due to the parents’ or legal guardians’ works (Pollock et al., 2017; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). Other individuals who had relocated and had possibly experienced struggles similar to TCKs, such as international students or internationally adopted children, were not included in this study. Individuals who study abroad decide to leave their home country for educational opportunities with purpose and willingness. These individuals know how long they can stay in another country and they usually receive substantial support from their educational institutions. In contrast, TCKs generally move outside of their passport countries due to their parents or guardians’ work (military, business, diplomat, or missionary purposes). They do not have the freedom to decide if or when they want to leave their home countries (Pollock et al., 2017). Therefore, TCKs or adult TCKs with study abroad backgrounds were included but non-TCK individuals who only had experiences of studying abroad were excluded. Also, any biracial/multiracial or bicultural/multicultural individual who has lived in a country other than their home country that is also one of their parents’ home countries were not included in this study. One of the significant stressors facing TCKs and adult TCKs is being surrounded by a foreign culture where they do not feel they belong. Biracial/multiracial or bicultural/multicultural children who have one parent from that country may receive some comfort and support based on their backgrounds, which
potentially makes acculturation easier. Additionally, these biracial/multiracial individuals have a different identity development process than nonbiracial/multiracial individuals (Collins, 2000). They face different struggles such as identity confusion and racial/ethnical discrimination. Additionally, I excluded refugees or children of permanent immigrant residents in the host country unless the individuals obtained permanent residency after they moved to the host country while having a temporary immigration visa first.

Racial and ethnic background was the second criterion for participation. Participants were required to identify as Asian or multiracial with a Confucian Asian cultural background and a non-Confucian Asian cultural background and with family roots from an Eastern Asian country with Confucian cultural influences. To be considered as an Asian TCK for the purpose of this study, at least one of the participant’s biological parents had to be from an Eastern Asian country with Confucian cultural influences (e.g., China, Korea, Japan). The participant also had to be raised by their parents or other legal guardians who value and understand Asian culture.

Educational background was the third criterion for participation. Participants needed to have graduated from college within the last 5 years or be enrolled as a senior or fourth-year college student by the time of the interview. Therefore, they needed to have obtained a bachelor’s degree or equivalent between December 2014 and December 2018 or anticipate graduating with a bachelor’s or an equivalent degree in 2020. Students who were enrolled in a community college or a 2-year university program were included in this study, but students who obtained their degrees from an entirely online college program were excluded due to the possibility of having different college experiences.
Potential participants who recently started college or who were in their sophomore or junior years were not included in order to provide more insights into the impact of international mobile lifestyles on college experiences across the full college experience. For example, there is a difference between the experiences of first-year college students and senior college students. First-year students tend to struggle with interpersonal relationships and the lack of academic knowledge (Clark, 2005). In comparison, senior college students wrestle with deciding on their future careers more than with their academics (Ghosh & Fouad, 2017) and they have more knowledge about the available resources on campus. For these reasons, I focused only on senior college students and those who had already graduated college.

Lastly, the participants needed to be able to understand and explain their experiences in English regardless of their primary language. This helped to avoid any translation errors during data analysis.

**Recruiting Participants**

Purposeful and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants who had similar experiences as TCKs and to increase the potential participant pool. I used purposeful sampling since I had established specific study criteria, and the participants were selected to meet these criteria. I used snowball sampling as I asked recruited participants to connect me with other potential adult TCKs participants. Snowball sampling methods are widely used in other studies on this population (Jurgensen, 2014; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009) because TCKs often have strong connections with other TCKs. Additionally, this population might have been challenging to access using traditional recruitment methods due to their international mobile lifestyles.
For the initial recruitment process, I contacted my acquaintances, including TCKs, with international backgrounds. I also posted recruitment information on TCK communities on social media networks including Facebook, Reddit, and others (see Appendix A for the recruitment email). The email and the social media posts stated that the study was approved by the University of Missouri St. Louis’s institutional review board and explained the study purpose and design. Additionally, I contacted several educational institutes located in the United States and in Japan for permission to recruit study participants. I shared the approval letter from the University of Missouri St. Louis institutional review board when I contacted these institutes. I also sent the consent form, interview questions, demographic questions, and the recruitment letter. For the Japanese university, I contacted them initially in Japanese, but sent all materials in English. They responded with their approval to recruit participants in English. To recruit more participants through snowball sampling, participants were asked to share the study with acquaintances or friends with similar backgrounds.

The recruitment information on social media and the recruitment emails contained a link to access an online survey. This survey also contained the informed consent agreement. The agreement included my background and the study purpose. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without specifying the reason and that they could refuse to answer any interview question. The agreement also mentioned the potential risks of study participation, including potential emotional discomfort from sharing painful memories and public exposure due to sharing personal reflections and experiences that others in the TCK community could recognize. To reduce this risk, I avoided using quotations in the resulting manuscript that could
potentially lead to identifying the participants. Participants were not required to return a signed consent form, but it was assumed that they had read and agreed with the consent form by completing the survey. See Appendix B for the informed consent form.

The survey included demographic questions about participant age, identified gender, country of origin, parents’ cultural background, race/ethnicity, number of years of living outside of their host countries while growing up, number of years in college, type of educational institution attended, college major, year of their graduation, and their current occupation. Additionally, after completing the survey, participants were asked to choose from the following platforms to conduct the video interviews: Skype, Zoom, LINE, Facetime, or no preference. They were also asked for their email addresses for future communication, including receiving the interview questions. If they chose no preference, participants were asked to use Skype. They also were asked to choose the interview date and time (see Appendix C for the demographic questions and questions regarding interview setting).

**Data Collection**

Prior to the first interview, I bracketed my ideas and thoughts about the population and the research topic in a journal. Because of my international background, I had a subjective bias and some preexisting knowledge about this population. I kept this journal to review during the data analysis process.

After the participants submitted the online survey, I contacted those who met the participation criteria via email to confirm their interview time and interview method (see Appendix D for this email). If they did not choose a specific method of interview and/or time, I sent them an email asking them to pick the method and time (see Appendix E).
I recruited 11 participants for this study. Seventeen individuals completed the online survey. However, I lost contact with one potential participant, and four did not qualify for the study due to their time of graduation or their backgrounds. One participant completed the survey after the data had reached saturation.

In recognition of the risk of breaching confidentiality, and the tight TCK community, I chose not to disclose detailed demographic information on each participant. Among the 11 participants, three self-identified as male and eight as female. Their ethnic backgrounds were varied. There were six Japanese, one was Canadian Chinese (parents were from China), one was Taiwanese (Taiwanese American; parents were from Taiwan), one was Korean, one was Chinese, and one was a bioethnic individual with Japanese and Chinese parents. Their age range was 21 to 25 years. Five graduated between 2016 and 2018, one withdrew after finishing 3 years of college, and five were currently senior students at college and planning to graduate by summer 2020. I decided to include one participant who withdrew from college because this individual had consecutive years of experience at college and could speak to the lived experience of being an adult Asian TCK in college as did other senior students in my study.

Regarding host countries, the participants had lived in various countries during their childhoods. These countries were Singapore (n = 3), Germany (n = 2), United Kingdom (n = 2), United States (n = 2), South Africa (n = 1), China (n = 1), South Africa (n = 1), Romania (n = 1), Australia (n = 1), Taiwan (n = 2), and Italy (n = 1). Among all participants, five had lived in more than one host country outside of their passport countries while growing up. All participants had lived outside of their passport countries for more than 3.5 years during their childhoods. The average number of years of living
outside of passport countries for all participants was 9.8 and the range was 3.5 to 18. Two
participants chose to study abroad outside of their passport countries during college.

I stored all the data on my personal computer. Once individuals agreed to
participate in the study, they completed the demographic survey through Qualtrics. I
downloaded the completed surveys to my computer, which also contained their
demographic information. After I downloaded the surveys, I assigned each participant an
anonymous ID number (e.g., 001), which linked to their contact information in the
spreadsheet. These anonymous codes did not contain any identifying information about
the participants (e.g., emails, initials, names) to protect their identities. I used these codes
to label each recorded video file, demographic information file (without their names), and
memoing file. I secured all electronically stored data, including the spreadsheet with the
contact information, labeled recorded interview video file, transcribed interview
materials, and my memoing notes, on my computer with two passcode protections. I
erased the spreadsheet with participants’ contact information shortly after study
completion.

All the interviews were conducted over online video platforms, and I recorded
them on my computer. All interviews were conducted in English. The participants were
encouraged to share their experiences in English, even if it was their second language.
Interview length varied from 25 min to 1 hr. The interview questions were emailed to
participants prior to the interview (see Appendix F for the email containing the interview
questions). This allowed the participants to review the questions, prepare their answers,
and estimate the time of the interview session. The interviews were conducted at the time
requested by each participant. This was an important consideration since there were time
zone differences. I continued recruiting participants until saturation was achieved, as per Dworkin (2012) and D. G. Hays and Singh (2012). During the interviews, a few participants used Japanese. I translated these sentences into English during the interviews and asked participants to verify the accuracy of my translations. I also translated these sentences into English during transcribing and sent the materials to participants for review.

After finishing the interviews and completing memoing, I assigned anonymous codes to the recorded video and demographic information files. I exported the video interviews and completed demographic surveys and stored them on my personal computer. This device is password protected, and I protected the files with an additional password to prevent breaches of confidentiality. I saved the data until I completed transcribing, after which I erased the recorded interview data from my personal device.

**Transcribing**

To ensure data transcription accuracy, I followed McLellan et al.’s (2003) guidelines for transcribing. The participant labels in the transcribed materials were as follows: anonymous IDs, the number of countries they have lived in, and the interview date. The labels for each participant were on the left side of the transcription document.

In addition to these labels, I used the following symbols to help with the subsequent data coding. “?” was used for any question that a participant stated during the interview. “!” was used when the participants expressed surprise or excitement during the interview. “???” was used for any ambiguous statement. “…” was used for a pause or silence of less than 30 s on the participants’ side. I italicized words emphasized by
“[ ]” was used when identifiable information is modified in the transcript. “(as translated as)” was used to translate the Japanese sentences into English.

I transcribed each interview shortly after it was recorded. Additionally, I used Microsoft Word’s commenting function to take notes reflecting my observations of the participants’ nonverbals such as laughter, smiles, long pauses, and changing tones. I used “(as translated as)” after Japanese sentences for a few participants who used Japanese during the interviews.

After completing the transcriptions, I sent them to the participants to review and verify. Prior to sharing the transcribed data, the participants’ identifiable information was removed except for the countries that they had visited or lived in. Their background information was considered important to include since their unique experiences are constructed from the cultural differences between their passport countries and their host countries (Pollock et al., 2017). Specific location information, such as names of schools they attended or cities they had lived in, were removed. I transcribed all materials myself for confidentiality purposes and to help me attain prolonged engagement with the data, as per Merriam & Tisdell (2016). Another benefit of transcribing by myself was to increase the consistency across the data. Transcribing the interviews myself helped me to recognize the patterns throughout the participants’ comments.

Memoing

I used memoing during transcribing and at other points throughout this study. First, I wrote down my reactions and thoughts that occurred shortly after the interview. Then, I conducted memoing while transcribing the interviews by noting nonverbal information in the videos. In each memo, I wrote down my reactions, emotions,
questions, and thoughts next to the appropriate transcribed line. These notes provided an additional layer of information during data analysis.

Memoing was used to bring my reflections, thoughts, and questions to my awareness as I analyzed the interviews (see M. E. Watson, 2009). Memoing is widely used in phenomenology and is considered essential to the data analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Pringle et al., 2011). Corbin and Strauss (1990) stated that memoing can greatly impact the quality of findings. If phenomenological researchers pursue coding without memoing, many conceptual details can be overlooked or lost.

**Data Analysis**

The focus of transcendental phenomenology is to understand the lifeworld of the participants without letting researchers’ subjective beliefs interfere with the process of understanding the phenomenon under consideration (Dowling, 2005, p. 132). For this study, I used Moustakas’s modified five step method (1994) based on Van Kaam’s theory (1959).

**Data Analysis Method**

As noted, I used Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenological data analysis approach to capturing the essence of the experiences of Confucian Asian adult TCKs. The steps were as follows:

1. Horizontalization phenomenology reduction (from bracketing to horizontalization).
2. Clustering and thematizing the invariant continents.
3. Imaginative variation.
4. Validation of the generated themes.
5. Compose textual structural description of the meaning and themes.

The data analysis process started immediately after the first interview (see Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The data sources included memoing, the participants’ nonverbal information from the video interviews, and the text of the transcribed verbal interviews. Qualitative research deals with massive amounts of information, and researchers can easily lose or overlook essential information. Therefore, I was careful to conduct the data analyzing process using horizontalization and memoing (see M. E. Watson, 2009).

**Horizontalization**

Horizontalization is the process of finding significant horizons by analyzing all of the data and treating all parts of the data as having equal weight (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Horizons are “the textual meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Therefore, I first read the transcribed interview materials without having a research-focused mind. By reading the material without having subjective attention, I was able to grasp the participants’ expressions and meanings in the broadest context (see M. E. Watson, 2009).

**Reduction and Elimination**

After reading the material without a research focus, I read it again several times to find repeated statements, which indicated the significance of the statements. I continued reading the material until I could no longer find new significant parts that needed to be noted. In other words, I continued reading and eliminating the repeated statements or coded findings until all the findings were saturated. This process helped to create subthemes for the next step.
Once I found the repeated statements from the participants (i.e., horizons), I highlighted them in the transcripts. As Moustakas (1994) explained, these repeated parts should contain “a moment of experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding” the phenomenon and information that is “possible to abstract and label” (p. 121). Any expressions or statements that did not meet these two criteria were not coded as a horizon. Any vague expressions were also not coded.

**Clustering and Themeing of the Meaning**

Next, I grouped the horizons into several topics for each individual interview transcript based on the similarities of the horizons. When I found parts that I considered meaningful, I highlighted them using a tool in Microsoft Excel. This process helped me to see if there were any patterns in the participants’ responses. I focused on finding core values in the transcribed materials, per Moustakas (1994). This process is called “clustering of horizons into themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). This process is used to ensure that the generated horizons are accurate to the participants’ intentions (Smith & Osborn, 2003) and to help create the subthemes through the next step; imaginative variation (Phillips-Paula et al., 2011).

**Imaginative Variation**

After preparing the transcribed data for analysis, I used imaginative variation to check the appropriateness of the horizons. Imaginative variation involves creating and looking at subthemes from different angles (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011). Moustakas (1994) explained imaginative variation as describing essential factors of the phenomenon. Therefore, this process is helpful for defining which horizons are central rather than incidental for the existence of the phenomenon (Dowling, 2005;
Wertz, 2005). In this process, I sought all possibilities by using imagination from the textural description, which is the “what” of the phenomenon that participants experienced. The textual descriptions helped to capture the underlying themes and obtain structural descriptions of how participants experienced the moment (see Cordes, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). This method helped me understand if the horizons contributed to the phenomenon and how they were influenced by the essential factors (see Qutoshi, 2018).

In imaginative variation, I focused on two key concepts: textural description and structural description (Creswell et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994; M. E. Watson, 2009). First, I focused on the experiences of the participants with textual description. Textual description was used to describe what each participant experienced to uncover the nature of their experiences. For example, textual description may illuminate participants’ experiences of struggles of readjusting to their home countries. Next, I used structural description to label how the experience occurred and how the participant experienced the incident. With the help of structural description, I focused on how the participants felt or acted during the reported event (i.e., the textual description). I added my observations of the participants’ verbal and nonverbal feelings and thoughts by adding a comment to each incident using a tool in Microsoft Excel (see Table 1 for an example of a spreadsheet with codes and themes). Textual description and structural description helped me to capture the participants’ lived experiences.

While analyzing the data, I reviewed the three memo sets I created during the bracketing process. I used these memos to ensure that these accumulated codes and themes were not based on my subjective bias and existing academic knowledge but based on the participants’ shared experiences.
### Table 1

Spreadsheet with Codes and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID (Line number)</th>
<th>Raw data</th>
<th>Textual description</th>
<th>Structural description</th>
<th>Labeled subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001 (35)</td>
<td>“Since I didn’t have friends here, I didn’t live here so much back in Korea. I was getting desperate to meet new people. [I was] so getting so excited to meet new friends.”</td>
<td>Expecting new people and expanding social networks at college.</td>
<td>Excitement from meeting new people.</td>
<td>Excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>009 (140)</td>
<td>“I met a lot of new students there as well. And that reminded me of my childhood, and like how I got to meet new people and got out of [my] comfort zone.”</td>
<td>Experience of going to study abroad.</td>
<td>Comfort from meeting new people.</td>
<td>Excitement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Composite Textural–Structural Description

After using imaginative variation to validate the necessity of found horizons and group them into subthemes, I gathered these subthemes into main themes or a “synthesis of meaning and essence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). This process is called composing a
textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994). At this stage, I ensured that each subtheme was valid and could be labeled as a main theme explaining the phenomenon. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), I carefully assessed these subthemes by comparing and reflecting on them relative to other subthemes. First, I checked if these subthemes were “expressed explicitly in the complete transcription” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). If they were not, I checked if they were “compatible with the phenomenon with other participants” reported experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). If the subthemes were neither complete nor compatible, I removed them. After this process, I added the main themes, which were components of most or all of the participants’ lived experiences. In the process of combining multiple codes into larger themes, I labeled the main themes using Excel spreadsheets based on the gathered horizons.

**Trustworthiness**

Phenomena in qualitative studies mainly exist in people’s minds. Therefore, there are as many “realities” as there are participants. I might also have a different understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Egon, 1982). Therefore, without providing evidence of trustworthiness, qualitative research can mislead readers by reflecting the researcher’s subjective and biased perspective. Having strong trustworthiness is important in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Easton et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009). Trustworthiness, which also can be referred to as reliability and validity, is the level of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the research method and the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used the methods suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1982) to ensure the current study’s trustworthiness.
Credibility

Credibility is used to increase the authenticity of results (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility is directly associated with the data presented by the participants and the phenomena that the data reflect. Even though credibility is a fundamental aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research, it is difficult to assess since the participants are human beings in qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I used three methods to demonstrate credibility.

Bracketing

The first method is bracketing or epoché. Bracketing is an important process for increasing the trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam, 2000a; Tufford & Newman, 2012). It is a process of revealing unknown and possibly negative ideas that might interfere with the accuracy of study results (D. G. Hays & Wood, 2011; Tufford & Newman, 2012). In phenomenology, bracketing does not eliminate all the researcher’s knowledge or beliefs but only the natural attitudes and bias of the target phenomenon that a researcher might have (Moustakas, 1994). This process can bring the researcher’s awareness to internal and external suppositions that include culture, history, experiences, feelings, values, or academic reflection (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Through this awareness, bracketing challenges researchers and encourages them to be open to new ideas (Moustakas, 1994).

I used memoing to bracket my assumptions and biases about the population prior to the interviews and during the transcribing phase. This allowed prolonged engagement with the data to “overcome distortions introduced by the inquirer’s presence, to test for ethnocentrism” (Lincoln & Guba, 1982, p. 247). I took time to understand my own bias
and subjective understanding of Confucian Asian adult TCKs and the general experiences of college students without having any restrictions or judgements.

Prior to the first interview, I focused on bracketing my existing knowledge and subjective biases toward TCKs, CCKs, Confucian Asian culture, my experience as a CCK in Japan, my existing knowledge about culture shock, my personal experience of culture shock and reverse culture shock, and other preexisting knowledge related to the current study. This process helped me to understand my subjective biases, which could have influenced my nonverbal communication during the interview sessions with the participants. By keeping these records, I could distinguish my personal biases from the participants’ shared experiences.

**Persistent Observation**

I also used persistent observation to ensure credibility. Persistent observation helps researchers acknowledge and respect “pervasive” findings even if they are unexpected or unusual (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Persistent observation helped me to eliminate potential themes that were not relevant and acknowledge meaningful responses from participants. I used this method during imaginative variation to narrow the subthemes. By using persistent observation, I remained open minded during the interviews and during data analysis. During data analysis, I reviewed the transcripts multiple times to ensure that I did not eliminate unusual parts as a result of my biases. When I found any unexpected parts in the transcripts, I took extra time to carefully assess if the parts should be included in the themes or not.
Triangulation

Triangulation was the third method of ensuring credibility that I used in this study. There are different kinds of triangulation. Denzin (1971, p. 177) stated that triangulation has two forces to improve a study: the “situationally” force to check the proposition of oneself and the “temporarily” force to specify the accuracy of the person’s understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, I used three types of investigators to analyze the data: the participants through transcription review and member checking, myself as the primary researcher, and peer reviews with my dissertation committee members (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The participants were the first type of investigators and were involved in the data analysis process in two ways. First, they reviewed the transcripts for accuracy before data analysis began. After I finished transcribing the interview materials, I shared the transcripts with the participants. By reviewing their transcripts for accuracy, the participants could ensure that their intended responses and meanings were delivered and received correctly by me (respondent validation; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They were asked to correct the transcription if they found any errors. They had 2 weeks to complete the transcription review. If I did not hear back from them after 2 weeks, I used the transcript without their review.

Second, the participants were invited to complete a member check (see Appendix G). The member check involved participants reviewing the generated themes to determine their accuracy and appropriateness, avoid any misunderstandings, and clarify the meaning (respondent validation; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member check was optional for participants. They were asked if they were willing to participate in member
checking in the transcription review email. Participants received instructions from me with the materials to review. There was a list of generated themes and the conceptual units associated with the themes in the materials. Conceptual units were descriptions of the conceptual process used to generate these themes. In the instructions, participants were asked to review the materials and answer three questions about the materials. In the first step, they were asked to see if they felt the themes were accurate to their experiences as Confucian Asian adult TCKs. Second, they determined if the words or units were clear and true to their experiences. Lastly, they were asked if there were any additional themes that they believed should have been included on the list. Participants shared their thoughts and answers through email. They had 2 weeks to complete this review.

The second type of investigator was me as the researcher. Taking the lead role on the data analysis process, I followed Van Kaam’s (1959) five steps as modified by Moustakas (1994). I conducted the data analysis procedure until the main themes were generated to describe the experiences of participants as Confucian Asian adult TCKs.

The last type of investigator was the dissertation committee members. I increased the credibility of results by having my committee chair review my data analysis. Before meeting with my chair for peer review, I read the feedback from participants who completed member checks. During the peer review meeting, I had discussions with my dissertation chair to create the most accurate themes to describe the phenomenon. I stayed open-minded to his suggestions. This triangulation process allowed me to have different perspectives on the data as opposed to only analyzing it myself (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Transferability

Transferability is another aspect of trustworthiness and reflects study generalizability. In other words, generalizability assesses if the data maintains some sense of general representation of the target population. Lincoln and Guba (1982) recommended two methods to increase transferability. One method is using purposeful sampling to increase the consistency of the findings. To maintain consistency in this study’s findings, I created clear eligibility criteria. In addition to purposeful sampling, I wrote accurate and detailed descriptions of the participants’ experiences and had the participants review transcriptions for accuracy (thick description; Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Qualitative research relies greatly on the power of description (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and calls for using thick and rich descriptions to present the participants’ experiences.

Moreover, I adopted a measurement to assess data saturation. It is important to obtain an adequate amount of data in qualitative research. The data are considered saturated when little or no new information is gathered during analysis (Semenov et al., 2015). To help achieve saturation, I first interviewed 11 participants. After interviewing 11 participants and transcribing their interviews, I analyzed the data from the first nine participants following the five-step transcendental method (Moustakas, 1994; Van Kaam, 1959). After generating the themes for the first nine participants, I analyzed the remaining two participants’ transcribed materials to see if their data fit the existing theme structure. I did not find any new themes in these two participants’ data, so I considered saturation achieved.
**Dependability**

Dependability shows if the study has reliability and stability; in other words, whether the study is repeatable under similar research circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used a dependability audit to ensure dependability. With this dependability audit, I shared my research progress regularly with my chair and ensured that my research steps were accurate and consistent. My committee chair gave me feedback and advice on my process but did not create codes or themes.

**Bracketing Statement**

In this section, I present the full text of the bracketing statement I used to reduce potential bias in the results. As previously mentioned, I returned to this statement throughout data analysis to maintain objectivity.

I am originally from Japan and moved to the United States in 2009. I do not identify myself as a TCK, but rather an adult cross-culture kid (adult CCK). Adult CCKs are defined as adults who have lived in and/or meaningfully interacted with two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during the first 18 years of their lives (Pollock et al., 2017). CCKs can face similar struggles and dilemmas as TCKs, but these two groups are not categorized together.

Even though I do not have a background to define myself as a TCK, I interacted with many people outside of the dominant Japanese culture through my church while I was growing up. There were numerous church members who were not from Japan who taught me about different countries and cultures. Japan has a Christian population of less than 1%. Due to my experience of growing up as a religious minority and having frequent interactions with people from outside Japanese society, I developed identity confusion.
and lacked a sense of belongingness in the Japanese community. Additionally, I grew up with individuals who have identified themselves as TCKs. I have been familiar with the Asian TCK population for much of my life. These long-standing friendships, continuing from childhood into adulthood, have given me some subjective understanding of this population.

Since I have an international background and friendships with individuals who have TCK backgrounds, I will remain conscientious about my own bias and feelings toward this population. My friends of international backgrounds have shared with me their difficulties with finding their “tribe” or having experienced struggles with readjusting to their home or host cultures after traveling. My background with them might impact my data analysis process, especially when I encounter stories from participants who had less difficulty with developing a sense of belongingness. Additionally, since I have an Asian heritage and cultural background, I might have a tendency to overgeneralize the Asian cultural characters of participants. I might underestimate or overestimate the differences among Asian cultures in the Confucian countries. Therefore, I remain open-minded to receiving unexpected responses from participants, including statements that are different from my experiences or my subjective understanding of this population.

I appreciate and am grateful for the rich, unique international experiences that I had while I was growing up. My experiences have increased my interest in studying this population of Confucian Asian adult TCKs. I hope that, through this study, more people will better understand the experiences of this population.
Limitations

There are various limitations in this study. Brink (1993) stated four threatening factors to qualitative research: the researcher who conducts the research, the recruited participants, the situation or the social context of conducting the research, and the research method(s) related to the data. Each risk factor may have limited this study.

The researcher is the first potential threatening factor. In any research project, the researcher is a primary research instrument who interacts with the participants and collects and analyzes the data (Merriam, 2002b). It is challenging to define the reality that the researcher tries to understand since it is everchanging (Golafshani, 2003). Regardless of the methods or paradigms used, the phenomenon is constantly interrupted, constructed, and reconstructed by various people, including the researcher (Merriam, 2002b). To have an accurate understanding of the generated phenomenon, the researcher needs to have an appropriate boundary with the data (i.e., remove their biases from the data analysis process) and conduct bracketing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pringle et al., 2011).

Secondly, research participants can be threats to research validity. Participants might intentionally or unintentionally mislead the researcher by providing inaccurate or dishonest information. Participants might over- or underreport their experiences during the interview due to social pressure or a desire to please the researcher. This is problematic since it can overgeneralize the findings and misrepresent the population under consideration (Green, 2008). The third threatening factor is the environment. Participants might act differently in an unfamiliar interview setting. Participants might provide less information to the researcher compared to other times when they are surrounded by their trusted friends or family.
Based on these concerns, there are several possible threats that might influence the present study’s findings. The first is my having potential biases and preexisting knowledge about the population. I devoted a section for bracketing, as a CCK and a person originally from Japan, to explain my own biases about TCKs and Confucian Asian cultures. It was crucial for me to have a clear boundary with the data. Even though I have bracketed my thoughts and repeatedly came back to self-checking during data analysis, it would be hard to deny the potential influence from my internal beliefs on the results.

Another potential limitation is the language used during the interviews. I conducted interviews in English regardless of the participant’s primary language. Therefore, there was a possibility that the participants might not have been able to explain their feelings or experiences easily in English. As previously noted, the participants in qualitative research can over- or underreport their experiences in unfamiliar interview settings. I believe this risk might have been even higher if they used their second language for an interview, due to the potential language barriers. Therefore, I used probing questions to ask the participants for clarifications during the interviews, which provided a wider range of responses from the participants and myself (see Rabionet, 2009).

The last potential limitation is the threat of overgeneralizing the participants’ experiences as Asian TCKs. The participants were recruited from cross-cultural settings in several Asian countries. Even though these cultures have some shared cultural characteristics and customs based on their historical backgrounds and Confucian philosophies, it is important to acknowledge the differences among these cultures. Another overgeneralizing threat is the type of participants. TCKs generally come from
four backgrounds (military, missionary, business, and diplomatic). These four groups are usually described as having similar experiences due to their international lifestyles. However, it is important not to overlook the unique experiences of each TCK. For example, Thurston-Gonzalez (2009) noted that children of missionaries had fewer social privileges compared to other TCK groups. They also enroll in public schools with other local children while other TCKs are usually sent to private international schools or schools designed to provide educational support for TCKs. Therefore, the shared stories and experiences revealed in this study might not reflect the TCKs who do not fit in with the experiences of the majority of the TCKs population. Similarly, the snowball sampling method can mean that recruited participants are more likely to come from the same country or have the same ethnic background. This also reduces the uniqueness and diversity of the participants.

**Ethical Considerations**

Several ethical concerns were recognized in conducting this study. One was potential participants discomfort caused by discussing their international relocation experiences as TCKs. Because of the instability and insecurity resulting from unsureness about the future, many adult TCKs have developed mental challenges. Therefore, there was a concern that the participants might have felt unsettled in sharing their stories during their interviews. To minimize the potential discomfort, the participants were advised that they did not have to answer any interview questions that made them feel uncomfortable. They were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without stating a reason. I maintained a supportive and caring attitude throughout the interview process.
Another ethical consideration was confidentiality and protection of the participants’ identities. TCKs are often part of a small and close network of their peers. Additionally, snowball sampling was used in this study. There was a risk that the TCK participants who asked other participants to take part in the study might have revealed their study participation to others. Since participants shared personal stories, it was essential to protect their identities. To maintain confidentiality, I used identification codes and did not share any potentially identifying information with third parties. I also did not individually introduce the background for each participant to avoid breaching confidentiality.

The last ethical consideration was the term TCKs. TCK is a term used to refer to individuals who have spent a significant portion of their lives away from their home culture group. Some participants might not feel comfortable or might disagree with the term. Some might not identify themselves with it, even though they have backgrounds that fit the definition. For example, kikokushijo (returnee) is more commonly used in Japan than TCK (Yoshida et al, 2009). This term is used to refer to individuals who grew up outside of Japan and then returned to Japan. It was important to be considerate of the participants’ self-identification. Some people might find the term TCK offensive since it can overgeneralize their unique experiences. As Thurston-Gonzales (2009) shared in her study, people tend to overly assume similarities among a group of people.

**Conclusion**

The study methodology and research process were discussed in this chapter. For any researcher, it is important to constantly evaluate the reasoning behind the research and think about how society can benefit from the findings. The findings in this study may
be beneficial for anyone who serves college students and international individuals, including TCKs. The number of TCKs has been growing due rapid globalization and the increasing number of international businesses (Melles & Frey, 2014; Washington & Gadikar, 2016). Through this research, I hope more people will start acknowledging the unique backgrounds and needs of TCKs from Asian countries.
Chapter 4

Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings from the phenomenological data analysis conducted for this study. The study purpose was to deepen the understanding about the college experiences of adult TCKs who have Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds. Six main themes were generated during data analysis: excitement, pressure and frustration, connection, disconnection, impact of Asian culture, and impact from TCK backgrounds. Each main theme has two to four subthemes.

Theme 1: Excitement

Excitement, the first generated theme, stemmed from the new stimulating environment participants experienced at college and their experience of expanding their networks. Overall, many participants expressed exciting and fun experiences at college in their classes or in meeting new people.

New Environment

Several participants reported their positive experiences in college life, especially when they met new people or encountered new opinions or cultures. Most participants talked about how they valued the opportunity to learn about different opinions and cultures, which will be reviewed more in the later section. One participant, who had little experience living in her home country growing up, talked about excitement on the first day of college: “Since I didn’t have friends here, I didn’t live here so much back in Korea. I was getting desperate to meet new people. [I was] so getting so excited to meet new friends.” Another participant also had a positive experience when he visited his future college outside of his home country:
I went to a school in America. And how welcoming the Americans were, compared to other countries and cultures. Also, the sense of community that people had with each other, that was something that really stood out during my college experience.

Their international and transitory lifestyles seem to have influenced the participants to be more open-minded and to feel attracted to people who shared their values and who were open-minded regardless of their cultural backgrounds. One participant, who struggled to find people she felt connected to, described with excitement the people she ended up becoming friends with:

I was attracted to these people; people who were curious and open-minded, and wanted to travel abroad . . . they are drawn to me too because of my background . . . because this was something they wanted to do.

Another participant talked about her positive experience of meeting new people while she studied abroad: “I met a lot of new students there as well. And that reminded me of my childhood, and like how I got to meet new people and got out of [my] comfort zone.”

**Academic Stimulation**

Besides meeting new people and expanding their views, participants also mentioned how they enjoyed the academic part of their college lives (e.g., classes and their majors). Several participants talked about how intense their classes were in college, but many of them also talked about how these classes gave them positive stimulation to learn more. They particularly enjoyed class discussions or learning different perspectives from professors.
A few participants had double majors, and two participants were either currently enrolled in or applying for post-baccalaureate programs. Their excitement in learning about new perspectives and cultures seemed to have made class discussions or academic challenges more exciting and enjoyable. The participants also seemed to take classes seriously and valued having higher achievement in an educational setting. One participant said,

I studied sociology and anthropology. I really enjoyed taking classes in that department, and in other departments, like women and gender studies. I think I just really really enjoyed my classes . . . and liked the professors. And in terms of other stuff, I think it’s just being part of [a] small school and in that kind of environment . . . sometimes it was hard, but most of the time it was really enjoyable.

Another participant, who went outside of his home country to enroll in college, reported similar experiences:

In terms of education, I did history. And I really enjoyed the history. For there to be a lot of difference in history like a lot of discussion in history. There is no right or wrong answer. And [it] asks you what your opinion is and why you think it happens, and . . . eventually how it leads to the present society.

Another participant talked about her exciting experience of learning subjects from a different perspective:

So, like I took Japanese arts and Japanese history, they were very interesting. They were taught by non-Japanese scholars, they were quite fresh for me. I
thought they were very new. Because of stuff that I didn’t think about. They
taught things that I didn’t expect to hear. It was like the new perspectives for me.
Among the 11 participants, two studied abroad during college, and both studied abroad
twice in different countries. One participant talked about how she chose her destinations
based on her academic interests:
For Greece, I went there because I was very interested in history. Also, I wanted
to take my major classes, which were anthropology. I chose two campuses in
European countries, because my major, my first major was international studies. I
am focusing on Europe. My focus was in Europe, that was the reason why I chose
there.

**Theme 2: Pressure and Frustration**

Many participants reported feeling pressure and frustration because of their
unique international backgrounds. The struggles occurred in and outside of their school
settings. They experienced frustration when they felt labeled or categorized by society
because of their international backgrounds or Asian appearances. They also found the
different curriculums across cultures and countries sometimes hard to become
accustomed to. These pressures were present regardless if they were in their home or host
countries. They experienced pressure from societies and frustration from their difficulties
with acculturation. Interestingly, they also encountered frustration from their own TCK
community due to its unique environment.

**Academic Pressure**

Even though participants mentioned their positive experiences in college, they
still faced pressure and frustration. The sources of frustration in academic settings were
varied, but several participants mentioned their struggles with high expectations and large numbers of assignments. One student mentioned the pressure to prove herself to her parents besides achieving well academically:

I also felt generally there was a pressure to perform, to do well. And we were all attending the school that we know it’s good! Like it’s a really good liberal arts school, but [at the] international level no one knows it. So I think there was a lot of pressure from parents, like “Oh, you picked the school.” So at least from my parents that like “I’ve never heard of the school. Are you sure it’s a good school?” So I felt like I had to prove to my parents that I was getting a good education.

Another participant talked about her struggles understanding the class materials in her first language:

When I went to college, I took some classes in Korean. In the beginning it was still tough, because the only Korean that I could really do well was conversational. That’s like a really basic level, right? But in school, it’s more like complicated stuff, you know. They used a lot of Chinese letters too, and that I don’t know anything about. In the beginning, that was hard. But I would like to speak . . . I would like to understand things, but . . . I wrote down things I didn’t understand, and came back home, and I searched for them.

Another participant recalled his intense experience in his college’s competitive environment:

My impression was that it was a very competitive environment. And in that sense that people weren’t just good at the subject academically, I found it intimidating that they were intentionally listed who were better than me academically as well
as in the extracurricular activities. As well as in terms of at least they were good at studies. For instance, they were good at getting up at 5 a.m. and took a quick shower and started revising. I haven’t met anyone like that, but that’s what I had.

**Acculturation**

Almost all the participants mentioned their struggles to acculturate to either their host or home cultures during college or while they were growing up. Their acculturation experiences are reviewed in more detail in a later section on culture shock and reverse culture shock. Several participants expressed frustration when they encountered unexpected cultural customs or differences at college. For example, one Japanese participant was particularly surprised by the differences in how professors handled questions in the classroom:

The relationship between me and my professors was different from what I thought before. In Taiwan or in Singapore, teachers were kind of like friends. Teachers were teachers, but we were kind of still close. But in Japan, they were different. Teachers were like teachers! Like, they are super respectable. Well, you know, it’s a super high position for students, so when I have a question for professors, I go to the professor’s office, right? You know, “Knock, knock, knock [on the door]. Excuse me. I have a question.” And I didn’t understand why I should have to do that. If I have a question in class, why am I not asking the question during the class? I couldn’t do that. No one did that. And professors always said things like “If you have any questions, please visit my office.” So I was like “Okay . . . I only had one question, but yeah I can do that.”
This participant encountered other struggles with her home culture and she even thought about leaving the college. “It was hard. It took a long time to understand the culture, so I was like, ‘God, should I leave this college?’” Another participant recalled her experience during childhood in her home country after living abroad:

I felt like I was restricted a little bit. I wasn’t really being myself. I felt like I had to be the same as everyone else. I had to act the same way as everyone else.

Mostly because of the schooling system, but that’s how I felt when I was a child. Her mother even commented on her adjusting to the home culture, but she responded to her mother with the intention of easing her mother’s and her own concern: “At that time I was still trying to adjust to life in Japan. So, I was like ‘No, I am okay here,’ I was telling my mother that ‘I was doing okay here.’” Another participant shared her frustration in making connections in her host culture during college:

Americans, they can be very friendly at first and very nice to help you out. For example, if you ask for directions, they often take you all the way there and [are] very friendly and say, “Oh, have a good day.” But if you want to continue building a relationship from that initial point, it’s very hard.

Participants experienced the frustrations and discomforts of being labeled by society. They felt misunderstood and unsupported due to their unique international backgrounds and their Asian backgrounds. One participant talked about her experiences of being labeled as an Asian immigrant due to her appearance and her accent:

Because they just look at me, and then it’s very easy for them to categorize me into “one of those.” Most of the time they categorize me as someone an Asian immigrant who grew up and was born and raised in America because of my
accent. But I’m not. And there is nothing wrong with that, but I think when people have that preconceived notion, they . . . will have ideas and stereotypes. Not necessarily bad, but they just have the idea about you before they meet and talk to you [based on] how you look.

Another student talked about her experiences of being labeled as non-Korean by others in her home country due to her TCK background: “They kind of look up to me as a foreigner, they don’t consider me as a Korean.” Another participant expressed his frustration when he was asked the “Where are you from?” question, since he has difficulty with defining where he is from:

When people ask me that question, they try to pin me down in terms of my cultural identity. It does not allow me to give me the nuanced answer . . . which I feel is very important to me. So I get a little bit defensive when people ask me that question.

He also talked about how people react when he tells them about his ethnic identity:

A lot of times when I do respond saying that “Oh, I am Chinese” . . . that’s where I am originally from. Then “Oh, but you are not really Chinese.” And I will go “Yes, because I am also” [the nationalities of countries he has lived in]. Then they respond as “Ahh, so that’s why you behave, how you talk, and this is how you think.”

**Differences in the Third Culture Kid Community**

Participants expressed concerns and stress related to the TCK community itself even though members of that group tend to have broader worldviews. Several participants described the TCK community as “small” and tight. For example, one
participant said, “I meet a new friend, but he is a friend of my other friends. [The TCK community is] so small.” Another participant intentionally applied for a university outside of his passport country. He said:

I had my initial mindset trying to leave my international circle in Japan. Ah, because it is a small community. International school kids know each other, and [are] always with each other. So . . . [a] different place would be nice for me.

One participant talked about the differences he encountered in his interactions with other TCKs from his home country:

When I am with my Chinese friends [who are also TCK], I notice the differences, in our mannerisms, in how we dress and in how we . . . you know the preferences, what we do in our spare time. I notice the differences, and I use that to draw lines in terms of . . . this is where I share the similarities with you, and this is where I don’t share the similarities with you.

Another participant talked about characteristics of her TCK friends whom she felt were rather closed minded: “Like some people, if I say, ‘I think this,’ then they won’t hear other ones. Only think about this one, but they are very stubborn.”

**Theme 3: Connection**

The next generated theme was the participants’ sense of connection. They mentioned feeling connected with other students who have TCK backgrounds, with the Asian community where they felt connected through shared culture, and with students in host cultures.
Connection With Other Third Culture Kids

Many participants mentioned how they valued connections with other TCKs. A number of them made friends through high school where they met other TCKs. A few participants met other TCKs in college. Most participants talked about how they appreciated their friends with TCK backgrounds since they could understand each other. As discussed in the previous subtheme, participants described the TCK community as small and tight, but they also enjoyed the connection with other TCKs because it provided comfort and a sense of belonging. One participant who attended university in her home country had trouble developing friendships with students who were not adult TCKs. She referred them as “Korean-Korean” who did not have much international experience:

I met some great people, but those were Korean-Korean friends who really don’t have international backgrounds. So first, we hit it off and talked about each other, got to know each other, but then that was about it. There were a lot of misunderstandings, different background culture and all that.

When I asked her the sources of her struggles, she replied:

I have a better view of the international world, basically. I have more experience. I have a lot of Western influence [and less] Asian influence, so the way I think is more open minded. Whereas, for my friends, this generation, our generation, they are becoming more open-minded for sure. But still . . . they are still behind the rest of the world, right? So when I talk to them about just what goes around the world, like feminism, politics and all that, they are still . . . I see myself as if there is a barrier between us, when we have that kind of conversation.
She felt disappointed after her struggles with making friends at first:

So half, about the semester end in my freshman year, I was getting really kind of depressed, but not severely. I was like “Oh I am not gonna be able to find friends that I am gonna stick to for the rest of my life,” because at that point I was like, “They are not gonna understand me. I don’t understand them.”

She finally became friends with people who also had TCK backgrounds at college. “I met two friends who were basically like me. Grew up in another country and came back to Korea for college. And we hit like off at the beginning.”

Another participant talked about the importance of having shared or similar backgrounds with other adult TCKs. “I had friends from high school who . . . I stayed [close to] because I felt very comfortable, so I spent a lot of time with them. And we went to the same college, and I just tended to stay with them.” Another participant remained in contact and tried to maintain her friendships with her adult TCK friends:

I was in college, there were only Japanese students, because there were no international students in college. It’s a physical education university. No international students, and no one could speak English as well. It was a huge difference, so [I] called my friends from high school, and I spoke a lot of Taiwanese and Mandarin, so I will not forget my Taiwanese skill.

To answer my question about her reason for maintaining her friendships with other adult TCKs, she stated that:

I can speak Mandarin, or Taiwanese or English, because I was there. I was in Taiwan or Singapore, or I moved to America. So that’s kind of proof that I was
there . . . I didn’t want to forget that I was in Taiwan as a student or my childhood memory.

**Connection With Asian Communities**

The participants embraced connections with Asian communities. Some believed that connecting with people who have shared cultures and expectations helped them build friendships faster. Several participants joined college clubs to enhance their connection with Asian culture and community. One such participant said:

I joined [a Japanese international student association] because of my friend. There are not that many students from Japan in my school, so some of the members who were already organizing the club were struggling to come up with an idea, or [were] not sure about whether all the information was correct. So, I thought, me personally, I have some experiences living in Japan, so I wanted to share my experience. And I wanted more people to be interested in it.

One participant joined a club to learn how to play the koto, the traditional Japanese instrument: “I am in the club to play the instrument, but in that club there are not many, or there are not as many returnees in my class, so it more likely consists of Jun-Japa [purely Japanese]. When I asked her why she chose the instrument and the club, she responded, “Maybe it is part of my interest toward Japanese culture. Because . . . I learned piano, but that is a Western instrument. But I never had the experience to do Japanese instruments, so it was just an interesting one.”

Participants’ sense of connection with the Asian community did not change even outside of their home cultures. One participant who studied abroad in the United States said, “I tended to stay with Asian community, somehow. But there were Chinese students
and Korean students there whom I became very close to. I think it was something I enjoyed sharing.”

The sharing culture is something multiple participants mentioned during the interviews when referring to the Confucian Asian culture. One participant described Confucian Asian culture as “reciprocal,” which is influenced by Confucian philosophy: “If someone gives you a gift, it is your duty to reciprocate it, even though you didn’t ask them to give you a gift. . . . [because] it is an Asian identity to think about the benefits of others instead of yourself.” Several participants noted sharing foods as part of Confucian Asian culture. One participant talked about how going to Asian restaurants and sharing the foods helped her to stay even closer to her Asian friends: “I think eating is always big, it’s always like normal social activity to do with other Asian people. And that’s something and also knowing how to enjoy the food and sharing the food.” It appeared the connection with other Asian students was especially important to her, since she chose a university that was not in a major city and she had a limited number of Asian students to hang out with. She compared herself to other Asian TCKs who chose to go to big cities during the interview in stating:

There they had automatically already had the big Asian community, and they just automatically had people that . . . I mean it’s just very natural to move to California and you still feel like it still feels like a comfortable culture. But I think moving to [the state where her college located] and not having the predominant Asian environment definitely made me realize that “Oh, I don’t actually fit in here.”
Unlike her Asian TCK friends, she moved to a place where there were few TCKs or Asian communities. Therefore, she joined a club related to her cultural identity:

I joined a club called Asian Students in America, so that is mainly to [deal] with Asian Americans but also international Asians, like any Asian students in America. And so, most of my friends I made were through that group or the people that I talked to were through that group, because we all could understand what it’s like to be both Asian and American.

One participant emphasized the importance of choosing a college based on his connection with the Asian community. He intentionally chose to go to university outside of his home country, but he was aware of the importance of connection with the Asian community for Confucian Asian TCKs: “You know, just be careful where you choose to go to college, if you don’t feel comfortable without Asian aspect, if you are an Asian.”

Theme 4: Disconnection

Theme 4 reflects the participants’ disconnection with their home or host cultures and their disconnected experiences with other individuals in their communities. This theme appeared more often than any other. The disconnection can be with their home cultures or their host cultures. They reported disconnections with non-TCK individuals and even other TCKs. For some participants, disconnection resulted in frustration. However, others found it amusing or felt no emotion attached to the disconnection.

Differences With Home Cultures

Many participants expressed their sense of disconnection with their home cultures. Participants felt this disconnection for various reasons, but most reported experiencing reverse culture shock when they returned to their home countries. One
participant, who was originally from the United States but has spent most of her life in two different countries, said:

When I went to college, I definitely felt like [an outsider]. I felt like it [is] because I moved around and I don’t have a home, like a stable home, or like I don’t know where I am from, those things always made me feel like an outsider. So the people I met in college, a lot of them acted like American, or they were American in general, or they grew up in one place, they lived with their family all that time, and they want to go back to be [with] their family, and they see them every Christmas, every Thanksgiving, and every summer, like I just didn’t really relate to that, I guess. And I think sometimes I felt bad about it. I felt bad, like I was an “outsider.” I felt bad that I didn’t have a stable place to go back to, or know where I am really from, or know what my background is.

Another participant also talked about her disconnection with her cultural identity and how she struggled with it.

As a third culture kid, I’ve been exposed to these different cultures, especially like I said I went to an international school, like my friends were from all over the world. But when you get a college you are not in the international environment anymore. Even though I am, and I strongly identify as a third culture kid, at the end of the day, I’m still ethically Chinese. And I think throughout college that something I am still doing is trying to connect with the part of me. Because my experiences at college made me realize that at the end of the day people see my Asian face. It is still part of me. I am still in a way representing my ethnicity.
Therefore, to many participants, their cultural or ethnic identities partially represented them instead of wholly representing their identities. Most participants mentioned their image or idea of an Asian person and they reflected on how they did not fit in that image, which could make them feel disconnected from their home countries. For example, one participant joined several student groups related to her cultural identity while she was in college. She talked about her experience in these clubs:

I did not feel as much connection there, because I am obviously [of] an Asian descent. My family is Chinese, but the only clubs that our school had were Asian American clubs and they had a Chinese American club. I don’t really fit in within either so, even though I joined those, and people were very nice and there were things that I could, there were definitely things that I had in common with many of them. But it was not quite the perfect fit.

The sense of disconnection was also based on the nature of Confucian Asian culture. One participant explained how Confucian Asian culture is exclusive:

Japanese community tends to be very exclusive, I feel. I still have trouble sometimes. I feel like I am not part of the community of Jun-Japa. Like Jun-Japan, we call it Jun-Japa; the purely Japanese. ‘Cause I am not. I am half Chinese and also I have been at an international school for a long time.

Some encountered social rejections for their bringing their values as TCKs back to their home countries. For example, a participant who did not grow up in his home country returned there for a job. He was often criticized for his sense of humor by people in his home country: “Tatemae [Japanese manners] makes me feel tired. A lot of people say I’m dry. I don’t know. People say, ‘Why do you say such a thing?’” Another
participant talked about how she blamed herself for feeling excluded in her home country:

I just felt very excluded, because, I mean because of the predominantly White school, most of my floor was also so very White in my dorm. And you know, people like to play board games, like just doing all things that, or talking about the movies or shows that I’ve never seen. And they just did all these things that I just didn’t understand. And I just always thought that something was wrong with me individually.

Similarly, another participant talked about how she felt disconnected with her home country when she was in a public elementary school:

My mom told me recently that I came back from school early on . . . in Korea. And somehow, I told the teacher that we were supposed to do something, but I was like, “But I don’t know how to do this.” Like, “I did not grow up here.” That’s something I said. I don’t remember exactly. So even back then, I kind of saw the difference [between] myself and the rest of the kids.

Another participant explained that her disconnection with her home culture was based on her international background.

I was in England for 4 years, between 4 to 8 years old, and even when I came back, I was . . . I went to an international school, so I wasn’t growing up in a Japanese kind of environment. So, I didn’t have much of a relationship. I didn’t have the opportunity to learn about Japanese stuff, so I don’t feel much relation to culture, I don’t think I did to my culture.
Differences with Host Cultures

Participants talked about their disconnection with their host cultures in addition to their home cultures. When they entered the host culture, they tended to realize their minority status compared to the dominant culture. For instance, a few participants had difficulty connecting with students from the dominant culture due to those students’ lack of understanding of participants’ international backgrounds, culture shock, and language barriers. One participant was surprised by how much culture shock she experienced when she went to a U.S. college since she was originally from Canada:

There is a unique, specific type of culture shock, because I went to a college in the U.S. I was born, I am a Canadian citizen. Because I am still a Canadian, when I go to America, I should not experience that much culture shock because of the Western cultures. But I still, surprisingly I still felt a lot of that.

When the participant was asked what she was surprised about in the host culture, she responded:

I was surprised that people didn’t seem as open minded as when I was back in high school. Because I was lucky. I was at [an] international school. So people from lots of different cultures are very open minded and curious.

Another participant who was originally from Japan and grew up in Singapore and Taiwan talked about her struggle with the language barrier in the United States:

When I got into my master’s program, I went to my class, right? And that was a huge classroom. Because my [the name of language program] had only six students, and when I was in the master’s program, I had a lot of students on my back. So, I was like “God!” And, when the first teacher spoke up, ‘God, she
speaks so fast.’’ Like everything went superfast. PowerPoint and her speaking went super fast.

Because of the language barrier, she also had difficulty making friends in the United States: “Yah, I couldn’t make any friends, because of the language issue. It was huge. It was like, everyone speaks super hard, super fast. I didn’t, I couldn’t understand what they were talking about.”

**Differences from Non-Third Culture Kids**

Most participants talked about their sense of disconnection with non-TCKs individuals. They referred to non-TCKs as those who do not have international transit experiences like they have had. They described a non-TCK individual as someone who has a “100%” Asian cultural identity, including “100% Japanese,” “Korean-Korean,” “Japanese-Japanese,” “American” (those without much exposure to diverse cultural backgrounds), or “Jun-Japa” (purely Japanese). Participants said they had trouble communicating or building relationships with these non-TCKs unless they had international mindsets like the participants did. One participant said:

I realized that Japanese people are not interested in other cultures, foreigners. They are them, they love their cultures, they love their food, they love their everything. But they didn’t have any interest in other cultures. It’s like “Ohhh cool, you are a Japanese returnee,” you know. Yah, but they didn’t have a chance to learn about other cultures, that’s why they are not interested in.

Similarly, another student talked about her experience interacting with non-TCK in the United States:
I generally found that people were still very . . . they had an American bubble; the narrowed worldview. Weren’t as curious about . . . they almost didn’t really know how to react when I told them that I was . . . about my international background. Like they were “Oh, okay . . . “

When this participant was asked to define non-TCKs, her response, with hesitation, was: “I would say people who have never left Japan would be one.” Another participant surprisingly talked about the non-TCK college friends who do not hesitate to skip classes while she and her other TCK friends enjoyed learning and educational simulation.

Another participant tried to make more connections with non-TCK students and joined a club:

I was in a dance club, and most students were [non-TCKs] in the dance club. And I wanted to be closer with these . . . other students, so I joined the dance club. But then, I didn’t feel like that I was part of the community that much. I ended up not attending.

**Differences Among Third Culture Kids**

Participants also talked about some differences in the TCK community. As mentioned earlier, the TCK community is small for many participants. Therefore, some participants decided to leave the small community to expand their views of the world. Again, many participants mentioned their appreciation of different cultures. Several participants mentioned their experiences of being different among TCKs while they were growing up or even after they entered university. For example, one participant talked about how her experience was different compared to other TCKs because of her background of living in South Africa:
When I went to Taiwan and went to school there, I definitely felt like an outsider because I grew up in South Africa. Most of my classmates were Taiwanese or Taiwanese American, so they grew up in Taiwan or they grew up in America. Another talked about his finding and intentionally drawing a line with other TCKs from the same country:

When I am with my Chinese friends [who are also TCKs], I notice the differences, in our mannerisms, in how we dress and in how we . . . you know the preferences, what we do in our spare time. I notice the differences, and I use that to draw lines in terms of . . . this is where I share the similarities with you, and this is where I don’t share the similarities with you.

He also talked about his confusion with these differences even though they had the similar TCK backgrounds:

[We] grew up in China, went [outside of home country] and grew up in Australia, and we actually went to the same university and so and so forth. So, there are actually lots of similarities in [our backgrounds], and but then, [the shared] values wise there are actually a difference of not to a degree, but to some degrees, I think.

When I asked him how the differences occurred between him and other TCKs, his response was that it was linked to the age they were when they moved away from their passport countries:

I think I came right in the middle of the period where I was forming my cultural identity. Probably [my TCK friends] might have formed [their cultural identities] already, and they transitioned [to outside of their home country], and then went
away to different countries [again], where they are able to retain the value that much more strongly. I think that 1 or 2 years of difference [between me and them] can make a lot of difference.

Since, another participant also talked about how she recognized the differences between herself and other non-TCK children, it is important to note that impact from the year of age when they leave or return to their home countries additional to which country they have grown up at.

Another participant talked about the present differences among TCKs depending on where they had grown up as TCKs: “Because, in [university name], there are returnees from America and they are not punctual. They can’t speak keigo and sonkeigo [honorific Japanese language styles]. I forgot they are not normal Japanese, when I went back to Japan.”

**Theme 5: Impact from Confucian Asian Culture**

Many participants reflected on how their Confucian Asian culture influenced their experiences as TCKs in and outside of their home countries. To the question of assessing the cultural influence from Confucian Asian cultures, some participants denied any impact of influence from Confucian Asian cultures on them. Interestingly, the participants mentioned their interactions with other Confucian Asian individuals to measure their impacts regardless if they reported any impact or no impact from their Confucian Asian background. Yet, many participants seemed to imply some kind of impact from their Confucian Asian cultural or ethnic backgrounds even after denying the influence.
No Impact from Confucian Asian Culture

A few participants denied experiencing any impact from Confucian Asian cultures since they had either grown up in other Confucian Asian countries or simply did not feel much connection with Confucian Asian cultures while they were in college. One participant said he did not feel there was much impact from his Confucian Asian culture since he was surrounded by non-Asian friends:

Asian culture, like I said before, not a lot. Maybe it would have been different, if these people I met were from Asia. Then I would have adopted them as being surrounded. I think because the people who surrounded my environment weren’t Asian, I had no need to return to my Asian background. Because a lot of my friends don’t know a single Japanese word. I am the only Japanese person they know, so they would ask me questions about Japan. But that’s about it.

Another participant also denied experiencing any impact since he was enrolled in a university without much of a Confucian Asian cultural influence: “There wasn’t much of the Asian presence. So not really a lot of what being an Asian really, kind of came out.” A few participants could not identify the central components of Asian culture, and some denied any impact from Confucian Asian culture on their social life in college. For example, one participant responded, “I didn’t know how, what kind of aspect of my Asian cultural background is. So, I don’t think there is as much of an impact on my third culture than an international background.”

Impact from Confucian Asian Culture

Despite denying the impact from Confucian Asian culture, many participants still talked about how their Confucian Asian backgrounds impacted their social networks in
college. A few participants talked about how their interactions with others were impacted by their Confucian Asian cultures. One participant discussed how her Confucian Asian cultural background helped her build her social networks in college:

I think that like, at the end of the day, I do have, I get along well with both international Asians and Asian Americans equally well. I have never really figured out why, but I think I just understand a lot about Asian culture. I mean having lived in Taiwan and my family still there . . . I know what it’s like.

Many participants developed their Confucian Asian identities through their interactions with their parents. Others learned more about their Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds after they returned to their home countries. As one participant said, “I had a lot of Asian and Korean influences. Like my parents told me to only speak in Korean when I am back home.”

Another participant also talked about the influence from her parents:

My parents are both Japanese, and they’ve been teaching Japanese language since I was a kid. I feel like I got to connect with students from . . . Asian countries, especially those from Japan. [They] are easier than other students at first. But as I said, after that 2 years, after I studied abroad, I started gaining more experience, so that changed a little bit, but at first I think I was making more connections with students from Asian countries easier than other students.

Several participants stated how Confucian Asian communities value harmony and respect for others. As the participant said, “[Regarding the] Confucian culture and his philosophy, to me, [it created a] bond by relationship with each other.” Another person said: “Asian identity [means] to think about the benefits of others instead of individuals.”
Lastly, one participant felt her Confucian Asian background inspired her to learn more about Confucian Asian cultures. “Because of my Asian background, I became more sensitive toward cultural differences in Asia and the West. This is the reason why I became interested in studying about Asia, East Asia, mainly.”

**Theme 6: Impact from Third Culture Kid Background**

Throughout the interviews, participants talked about the influence and impact of their highly mobile lifestyles. I generated three subthemes for this main theme: the complexity of defining identity, adaptivity and lacking a home.

**Complexity of Defining Identity**

Many participants talked about how it was difficult for them to form their identities in general. Participants felt that their TCK backgrounds were the reason why it was challenging for them to understand their identities. One participant talked about how she felt disconnected with her national identity, even though she was raised by Japanese parents:

I do not think I can define my identity now. I feel like I cannot say I am 100% Japanese identity, nor I have an identity from any other countries that I have lived in. I feel like it’s very mixed and complicated, which is why I am still trying to figure it out.

Another participant talked about how she chose to attend a university in her home country after thinking about her identity:

I chose to go back to Japan, because I didn’t know why I was called a Japanese, because I grew up in Singapore and Taiwan mostly. But people called me
Japanese, and I was like “No I’ve never lived in Japan” (giggling). I wanted to learn about Japanese culture, the real one. So, I wanted to go back.

A few participants defined their identities as more of mixed culture or TCK identity. One participant from Korea talked about how TCK people have mixed cultural backgrounds: “People like us are basically mixed of both cultures, right? But if I have to identify myself, still call myself Asian, Korean and all that, right?” Likewise, another participant described his identity as “having two people in one body.” One participant shared an interesting insight of how their identity evolved and changed overtime:

My parents were trying to teach me how to be a Japanese [while the participant was in Romania] I think. But it shifted a lot. After I moved to Japan, I got more used to it there. And I think my identity was completely Japanese while I was there, but then . . . I still was questioning myself. And at some point, . . . I felt more being myself outside of Japan.

Lacking a Home and Feeling Like an “Outsider”

Most participants shared their sense of lacking a home or feeling like an outsider in any community. This is different than feeling a disconnection from one’s home country, a subtheme discussed previously, because it reflects participants’ cultural identities and their sense of belonging in a community outside of the TCK network. One participant talked about his complicated concept of home that is not defined by geographic place:

I don’t really have a location for my home, and I’ve moved around all the time. My family has moved around all the time. Sometimes when I am not always with family, I think I am home. So that’s the reason that I return when I get there, there
are people who live in the same place for all their life. To them, they have a
concrete representation, but for me it was more abstract. It’s not something you
can easily capture by a place.

Another participant shared a similar feeling of lacking a home, of feeling like being an
outsider regardless of where she is:

When I went to college, I definitely felt like, . . . because I moved around and I
don’t have a home, like a stable home, or like I don’t know where I am from,
those things always made me feel like an outsider.

She also talked about her feeling bad for being an outsider and seeing people who can
easily define their home based on location and family:

I felt bad, like I was an “outsider”. . . I felt bad that I didn’t have a stable place to
go back to, or know where I am really from, or know what my background is. So
that made me struggle for sure . . . I still think I still experience that even after
college. People are, people all have their family and friends at one place, and I
just cannot relate to it.

Similarly, another participant talked about her conflicted feelings when others considered
her a foreigner: “I wasn’t local back in Romania. But now I am back in my home country
technically, but I am not considered local here.”

“World Citizen”

Besides having identity crisis and feeling like an outsider, participants also talked
about how their international experiences positively impacted their sense of identity. The
last sub-theme for the impact from TCK experience is their identities as a world citizen. I
defined the world citizen identity as having an appreciation of diversity and the ability to switch between cultures and languages.

Since they have grown up outside of their passport countries, all participants could speak multiple languages including their first languages. Their multilingual abilities were necessity tools for living outside of their passport countries and helped them connecting with other students or make friends. Participants empathized the importance of learning and improving their second language. TCKs usually go to international schools where it is common to use multiple languages. As one participant said, “it was natural for us to speak in other languages like in English, Chinese, mandarin in my high school.” A few participants said their abilities in their second languages exceeded their abilities in their first languages. As one participant said,

So my fluency in English is much better than my Chinese in terms of writing and reading, but I think when it comes to speaking and listening, I still like…it’s still on the part. But from writing perspective, my English is way pass my Chinese. Because I spent so long in English environment, and I don't have chance to practice ah reading and writing [Chinese].

Some participants also felt they treated their first and second languages as the same and they sometime mixed them when they spoke. For example, one participant stated, “speaking wise, I feel mixing Japanese and English, which is not exactly a language, but...”

Additionally, the participants described their adaptivity and flexibility in their new college environments as being influenced by their TCK backgrounds. I found this was part of their world citizen identity. One participant talked about how his adaptivity
helped him expand his college network: “I think being abroad and in [a] foreign country, you adapt naturally. That is something you have to do. I made friends immediately without any trouble.” Another participant talked about how his international background helped him make friends in college: “I think that my international aspect actually made it easier to maintain conversations with people. Because I do have a lot of knowledge about what life might be like in other countries.” Moreover, another participant talked about the communication and observation skills that she has learned from living outside of her home country:

Since I have been living in different countries for 9 years, since I was born until I was 9 years old, I think I got very good at communicating with others even though I wasn’t fully understanding other languages. Because what I experienced in the past was first, I didn’t know their language there, so I had to listen carefully and guess what they were saying by looking at their facial expressions and movements and gestures and everything. I became very good at observing people, I think, and I became flexible with getting adjusted to them.

Lastly, one participant talked about the importance of having flexibility and respecting differences:

In Singapore, there are a lot of ethnicities, there are people from other countries; Chinese, Malaysian, European. And, maybe . . . in Singapore, they have so many sources in the world. They have different characters…That is, I was impacted by my international background, so in discussion, I want to know about [what] you [think] about this thing . . . I always say that . . . if we were accepted, we are not
fighting a war. I think. I hope so. We should know about other ones, otherwise the
mind is small, and it’s not good.
Chapter 5
Discussion

The present study was designed to increase awareness of the unique experiences of Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college. The research question was, How do Confucian Asian adult TCKs experienced their social lives in college? As previously discussed, few scholars have recognized or studied Confucian Asian adult TCKs (Long, 2016; Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Tanu, 2008). Considering this population’s growth (Eakin, 1999), scholars and therapists should not overlook TCKs and the necessity of expanding the knowledge about this population to better serve their needs in college.

From the interviews of the 11 study participants, I developed six main themes during data analysis: excitement, pressure and frustration, connection, disconnection, impact of Confucian Asian culture, impact of TCK background, and impact from TCK backgrounds. In this chapter, I discuss the significance of these main themes and subthemes in light of the existing literature. I will root the meaning of these themes in the scope of self-categorization theory to illuminate how Confucian Asian adult TCKs developed their senses of ingroups and defined their outgroups in college.

Self-Categorization Theory

As discussed in Chapter 2, self-categorization focuses on understanding how people develop a sense of belonging with others (Turner, 2007). According to this theory, individuals feel they belong in the ingroup and do not feel they are part of the outgroup. Once they feel welcomed and gain positive experiences, they start behaving according to the group’s social norms to strengthen their relationships with other group members. This theory is particularly useful to explain the unique experiences of Confucian Asian adult
TCKs since they identify in both as Confucian Asians and as world citizen, which was influenced by their international mobile lifestyles.

In the present study, the participants distinguished their ingroup identity and outgroup identity when they were asked about their social experiences at college. Their experiences about how they established and maintained their social networks based on cultural identities and international mindsets became new findings in this study. Some researchers have discussed the strong ingroupness among TCKs based on their having shared experiences (Pollock et al., 2017), but there is no research about the sense of groupness among Confucian Asian TCKs or adult TCKs.

In this study, participants found connections with two types of groups: groups with international mindsets and Asian communities. Participants talked about their excitement and interest in expanding their views and establishing their social networks in college. Many talked about how they valued making friends, even though some encounters did not result in developing close relationships that contributed to their sense of ingroupness. Some participants reported difficulty feeling connected to other college students who did not share the same perspectives on the world or their values. Some participants talked about their disappointments with other students as the reasons for these difficulties, but some blamed themselves. From the perspective of self-categorization theory, this may be because individuals are constantly assessing how to behave to match the group’s norms (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014). Having backgrounds different than the majority of their peers in college made the participants feel more isolated and confused when trying to fit in with existing groups. The participants have unique backgrounds as TCKs and have identity as world citizens, but they also have
cultural identities as Asians. Their Asian cultural backgrounds might enhance this sense of isolation even more. The study findings revealed a unique perspective on how Confucian Asian adult TCKs established their conformity with other individuals in college.

They experienced the similar struggles even in the Confucian Asian community. One participant described the Confucian Asian community as exclusive. Another participant could not understand Confucian Asian customs and did not feel welcome in her home country, which even made her question her choice of university. However, participants in the present study mentioned longing for connection with other Asian students more than with international students who temporarily lived in the country. The study findings contradicted past research on TCKs showing that they tend to spend time mostly with international students who have similar international backgrounds (Pollock et al., 2017; Wilcox, 2017). From a self-categorization standpoint, there was a dilemma between perceived fit and perceived readiness among Confucian Asian adult TCKs when they tried to enter the Confucian Asian community. Perceived fit refers to the extent to which individuals feel they belong in the given category. Perceived readiness corresponds to how the person feels they belong in multiple categories (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014). Therefore, when Confucian Asian adult TCKs initially enter the Confucian Asian community, they have the expectations of fitting into categories similar to their cultural backgrounds. They might encounter difficulty in fitting in, since the perceived readiness or accessibility is based on their experience in and relationship with Confucian Asian culture. Confucian Asian adult TCKs might not have enough readiness or accessibility to fit in with Confucian Asian culture due to their international mobile lifestyles. In other
words, they might not be familiar with the customs or have developed an identity to link
to the community or category.

Navigating ingroups and outgroups also leads to developing complex cultural
identities among Confucian Asian adult TCKs. Many mentioned their identity confusion,
which is a common struggle among TCKs (Bonebright, 2010; Walters & Auton-Cuff,
2009). This confusion was complicated by the Asian cultural value of forming a sense of
groupness with others based on similarity (Iwamoto & Liu, 2010). The present study is
one of the first to reflect the unique cultural identity development of Confucian Asian
TCKs. Moreover, TCKs sometimes are categorized as a different group separate from
their racial identities or other international individuals (Pollock et al., 2017). This
incident is introduced as a crossed category (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014). Crossed
categories happen when an individual identifies more than one subcategory to represent
them. In this study, participants carry both Confucian Asian identities and identities as a
world citizen. When there is more than subcategory, it is called crossed categories, which
leads to the possibility of stereotypes or discrimination by allowing the subcategory to be
disregarded or tokenized (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014). This happens commonly among
participants when they tried to form relationships with other Confucian Asian individuals.
They were treated as outsiders or labeled as non-Asians due to their international
backgrounds. Therefore, it is particularly important to pay attention to this unique
struggle for identity among Confucian Asian adult TCKs.

Many participants in the present study were trying to connect with other Asian
individuals to clarify their identities after they entered college. Many mentioned parental
influences that impacted their behaviors and their cultural identities. This might be
another factor that encouraged and motivated them to connect with other Asians when they entered college since Confucian Asian culture emphasizes relationships with parents (xiao) and elderly family members (Triandis, 2001; Young, 2017). Yet, participants still struggled with reentering Asian countries after spending years in foreign countries. For example, one participant chose to join a student group to learn a traditional instrument to expand her knowledge of her home culture. Similarly, several participants joined a college student group that represented their home culture to create more connection with their cultural identities. However, it turned out that many experienced difficulties in establishing connections in these groups.

Moreover, many had trouble defining their cultural identities and their places in Confucian Asian culture. When the participants were asked to define Confucian Asian culture or Asian culture, they defined it as a culture based on commonality and sharing with other members in the community. Overall, most participants agreed that they valued the sharing of the moment or having shared interests including with friends in college. Therefore, when their communities did not acknowledge commonality, the participants felt blocked from these communities, which sometimes led to a sense of exclusion, or, in other words, being a member of the outgroup.

Besides their cultural identities, participants expressed their interests and desires to develop the sense of ingroup with other individuals who also shared international backgrounds like them, which I referred it as identity as a “world citizen.” In the process, they experienced disappointment with people who did not share their values on campus. Many felt excluded or discriminated against by others which discouraged them from establishing further relationships with non-TCK individuals in college. Many participants
felt disappointed when they learned that non-TCK individuals, who did not have much international experience, had less interest toward different cultures and less flexibility than they did. One of the unique characters of TCKs is their international mindsets (Pollock et al., 2017; Straffon, 2003) that allow them to accept and view the world from multiple perspectives.

The identity of a world citizen is very meaningful for TCK individuals. Therefore, they get frustrated and disappointed when they encounter others who do not share similar values. This disappointment discouraged participants in this study even more from making additional efforts to connect with others, and it might have furthered the distance between the participants and non-TCKs. Similar reactions were reported by international students in their host countries (Williams & Johnson, 2011). International students have reported struggles with making friends with students from host countries due to lacking commonality and discrimination (Geary, 2016). Some international students also felt the students in host countries might not be interested in their backgrounds, even though they attempted to remain open-minded to learning about the cultural differences (Williams & Johnson, 2011). Confucian Asian TCKs might experience a similar dilemma with the non-TCK students at college since they are categorized as outsiders in their home countries (Perez, 2017). These ingroup rivalries and exclusions that participants felt can be linked to the phenomenon of intergroup discrimination (Billing & Tajfel, 1973). Intergroup rivalry increases an ingroup’s stability as its members discriminate against other groups in favor of their own group (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014). Participants experienced this favoritism in groups they felt they belonged to.
Intergroup discrimination occurred frequently for participants. For example, participants often talked about their closer relationships with other TCKs in contrast to their disconnection with non-TCKs. This shows their intergroup discrimination toward non-TCKs based on their established relationships in TCK society. Furthermore, I believe their cultural identities as Asian and a world citizen might have enhanced the intergroup discriminations since the Confucian Asian culture is known to respect homogeneity (Perez, 2017). Also, the use of self-categorization theory drew attention to this interesting character of this population. Participants categorized non-TCK individuals more as outsiders within their world citizen identity and sometimes cultural differences among TCKs caused ingroup rivalry. For example, one participant talked about her struggle to feel connected even within the Confucian Asian TCK community due to their diverse cultural backgrounds and her differences growing up as TCKs. Another participant also felt he did not have the same mindsets as his TCK friends due to their different political views and different upbringings, even though they had “lots of similarity in terms of in paper” including the same cultural background, close ages to each other, and having went to the same schools. Despite these similarities, he still felt disconnected with them. Lastly, one participant talked about how some of her TCK friends were different in terms of punctuality, since they grew up in countries where there was a more relaxed relationship with time in general. Unlike other studies on the broader TCK population, it is important to talk about this particular population not only based on their international backgrounds but also based on self- categorization rooted in Confucian Asian cultural influences. Few researchers have discussed how college students establish ingroup and outgroup through the lens of self-categorization theory. There are studies about social
networks in college (Oh & Kim, 2014; Osberg & Boyer, 2016). However, none of them were rooted in self-categorization theory. Therefore, this study offers a new approach to understand college students, including students who are not Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college.

Some findings from this study were similar to findings from studies on peer groupness in the general college student population. Other findings were unique. In this study, Confucian Asian adult TCKs often felt challenged in establishing groupness. For example, shared language or common interests are tools for establishing relationships with other students and feeling connected with others (Hummon, 1994). However, as several participants implied, they sometimes were not familiar with the latest pop culture or customs. Their struggles were understandable since they tend to have had limited experience growing up in their home countries. Pop culture changes rapidly, which makes it hard for TCKs to be familiar with it. In the present study, several participants reported that it was usually their parents or other TCKs at school they practiced their native languages with or discussed cultural values from their home cultures.

TCKs and adult TCKs lacking a sense of belonging has been well studied (Aldelina, 2018; Cottrell & Useem, 1999; Fail et al., 2004; Pollock et al., 2017; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Having a sense of belonging is crucial to adult TCKs. Because of their highly mobile lifestyles, they tend to feel connection through relationships rather than through a geographic location (Fail et al., 2004). Therefore, it is understandable that Confucian Asian adult TCKs felt confused and rootless even after entering college. The study participants repeatedly talked about feeling isolated when they could not find other college students who appeared to understand and share their international values.
Sometimes, they also felt isolated in student organizations that represented their home cultures. One study participant mentioned that she felt disconnected in multiple student organizations on campus. The disconnection occurred even in an organization that appeared to be somewhat aligned with her cultural identity (an Asian American student organization) as she felt it was not “the perfect fit” in representing her TCK identity.

Many scholars agree that a sense of belonging is essential for college students and the importance of having a healthy friendship can be key to satisfying college lives (Coyne & Downey, 1991; Hagerty & Williams, 1999; Strayhorn, 2018). Hagerty and Williams (1999) emphasized the importance of college students having positive relationships with peers to reduce depression. Despite the importance of connection, many college students experience challenges establishing these connections. According to Ross et al. (1999), conflicts from interpersonal relationships were the most reported source of stress for college students. Similarly, participants in this study reported experiencing unexpected distress in entering college and through their interactions with other college students. However, the participants’ stress resulted from their acculturation stress or social discrimination. Adult TCKs often move between cultures at young ages and at formative times when they are developing their sense of self and forming their cultural identities and values (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Even though the stress related to interpersonal relationships appeared to be somewhat similar to the general experience of college students, the present study’s findings represent an important first step in acknowledging how these sources of stress are different for Confucian Asian adult TCKs.
Another study finding similar to previous research on a general college student population (Forbes et al., 2020) was how college students showed appreciation and felt kinship to their ingroups. College students showed appreciation to their ingroups more often than their outgroups in both behavior and verbal communications. Participants in this study talked favorably about their friends at college. Many were clear about the differences between students whom they felt were part of their ingroups versus the students they felt disconnected from as part of their outgroups. Sometimes this connection was through their shared cultural or ethnic identities or through similar personality traits, such as the international mindsets as TCKs. This finding is similar to William and Johnson’s (2011) on how international students form groups. International students are known to stay in their same ethnic college student groups and establish ingroups with students with similar backgrounds (Williams & Johnson, 2011). As previously mentioned, several of the present study’s participants intentionally chose to participate in groups that represented their cultures and sometimes helped them to develop their cultural identities. They often chose to stay in their groups on campus where they feel connected through similarities.

In general, study body diversity has increased at colleges worldwide in recent years. College counselors need to be equipped to serve clients with international backgrounds, including adult TCK college students. As Washington and Gadikar (2016) emphasized, counselors have an obligation to provide adequate service for adult TCKs, who are also often referred to as minorities or “hidden immigrants” (Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Pollock et al., 2017; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009). The present study’s participants reported difficulties with acculturating to their home cultures and having smooth
transitions to college life. However, none mentioned seeking support from available university services, including their campus counseling centers. Mental health often is stigmatized among Asian college students (Masuda et al., 2009), even as Asian international students are more likely to be referred to college counseling centers compared to other international students (Yakushko et al., 2008). Gaw (2000) concluded that TCKs who experience more stress from reverse culture shock are less likely to seek support, including counseling service. Many participants in Gaw reported experiencing culture shock or reverse culture shock during college, which can discourage them from seeking support from mental health professionals. According to Gaw, reverse culture shock may reduce motivation and discourage students from seeking help outside of their network of family and friends. Also, they might have less trust and see mental health professionals as lacking experience in addressing issues related to their TCK backgrounds.

The present study’s participants showed the confusion and discomfort Confucian Asian adult TCKs can experience when establishing social networks in college. A few participants experienced some level of depressive feelings and self-blame when they had trouble feeling connected to or being welcomed by other non-TCK college students. That is to say, they felt like part of the outgroup. Additionally, having social networks can be an essential aspect of the well-being of college students with Asian cultural values since collectivist cultures, including Confucian Asian cultures, tend to value being part of an ingroup (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 1994). Another potential reason for study participants having trouble establishing meaningful social relationships was due to their lacking experience in the social settings. Since TCKs have traveled frequently
without having concrete settlement in any one place, they sometimes struggle with learning the process of forming groups with non-TCKs or feeling committed to one place for an extended time (Pollock et al., 2017).

Self-categorization theory describes their complicated experiences well by using the idea of self-concept. The originators of self-categorization theory introduced a concept called “crossed categories” which implies that individuals have subcategories which can influence their sense of belonging and their relationships with others. As I have discussed earlier, participants posed at least two separate identities: Confucian Asian identity and their identities as a world citizen. The participants talked about the importance of both identities and some felt “there are two people in one body.” They treated different cultures and countries as part of their homes. Clearly, identity can be fluid for this population, influenced by their TCKs and Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds. Self-categorization theory’s crossed categories focus on the individuals’ different traits (e.g., gender, age), while this phenomenon of multiple identities co-existing is similar to “self-concept” in the theory, which indicates how the individual identifies themself based on the social norm and group culture (Turner, 2007).

Self-concept and identity are similar but slightly different. According to the self-categorization theory, self-concept is a large umbrella term to cover different sub-categories including identities based on culture; gender; socio-economic status; sexual orientation and other traits including descriptions, sub-categories of the person and so on (Turner, 2007). Identity is another subjective understanding of self with a much narrower context than that of self-concept. For example, with cultural identity, as discussed earlier, it defines and describes the person’s cultural roots and connection. Gender identity can
influence how the person’s behavior or beliefs. Identity is more about the sole self-understanding from one perspective (e.g., gender, culture), while self-concept allows individuals to consider the intersection of more than one definition of self. With the concept of identity, it does not give more than one identity to describe the person, but with self-concept, it allows introducing the rich and varied characters of the individual.

Therefore, self-categorization theory adapted the idea of how to explain the person as a whole with idea of self-concept instead of only from the perspective of one singular identity at a time. Confucian adult TCKs can identify themselves as TCKs with their culture identities, but they also have Confucian Asian culture identity. Identity for TCKs might not be as static as others who do not have complex international backgrounds (Fail et al., 2004). These two identities can be held together by the bigger umbrella of self-concept. Given these unique identity of Confucian adult TCKs, identity fluidity can occur when there are two identities that exist equally in a person under self-concept. Confucian Asian adult TCKs can flow each identity back and forth depending on the group which they are interacting with or being surrounded by. Self-categorization theory allows for meaningful understanding for Confucian Asian TCKs who have collectivist cultural backgrounds along with TCK identities as a world citizen. The findings show how their identities can be fluid and these identities can co-exist. However, the theory might still lack to grasp the important and unique experience among Confucian Asian TCKs given the unique characteristic of the population. Self-categorization theory describes how identities are influenced by backgrounds and how multiple identities can co-exist under the larger umbrella of self-concept. However, it lacks an explanation of how these co-existing identities can influence their self-concept, and the impact of having
more than one identity on individuals. For example, the Confucian Asian adult TCKs claimed to have both Confucian Asian identities and world citizen identities. Self-categorization theory explains and supports identity fluid and having multiple identities. However, the participants also experienced and reported the unique dilemma of their identities; Confucian Asian adult TCKs value their identities as world citizens when they encounter disconnection with non-TCK individuals. At the same time, they valued and longed for having a connection with Confucian Asian identity and its community. This is an area where the theory does not offer much insight. Self-categorization theory also does not talk about how co-existing identities can influence one’s self-concept. In this study, participants expressed their identity confusion and struggled to define themselves due to having multiple identities, which is not addressed within self-categorization theory. These areas are particularly important to understand to have more understanding of TCK population since the identity is fluid for them (Gaw, 2000; Tanu, 2008; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).

Implications

This study’s findings illuminate unique insights into the complexity of finding a group and feeling connected to other students among Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college. These findings have implications for various people working at colleges or other educational institutions, including college counselors and student development support offices, to better support TCK college students and college students with Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds. The reasons for the lack of support for TCK college students may be rooted in the lack of information on this population and the complexity of their needs. Thus, creating systematic institutional support structures for this population is
essential for smoothing their transition into college, which would ultimately help them adjust to their host or home cultures (Long, 2016). As hidden immigrants (Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Pollock et al., 2017; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009), their struggles can be overlooked, and it is crucial to address their unique needs in order to improve their college experiences. In the next section, I provide suggestions for college faculty and staff to support college students with TCK backgrounds, including Confucian Asian adult TCK college students.

**College Counselors**

Based on this study’s findings, college counselors should educate themselves on Confucian Asian adult TCKs to learn about their unique backgrounds, their common challenges, and their international knowledge. College counselors can read the many studies published on TCKs in recent years due to expanded globalization (e.g., see Pollock et al., 2017 and Bushong, 2013). Moreover, there are good numbers of online platforms such as group online forums (e.g., TCKidNow or Global Connection) or general forums on Facebook or Reddit that focus on TCKs. These sites are created and run by the TCK population and can help professionals learn about the strengths of TCKs and their potential challenges. These resources can help college counselors understand this population, since there are few established theories on supporting this population at this time. Additionally, college counselors should avoid overgeneralizing the experiences of TCKs based on their preexisting knowledge and experiences from serving immigrants or international students since their experiences in both their host and home countries are different (Pollock et al., 2017).
College counselors also need to be aware of the unique struggles of TCK status as hidden immigrants (Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Pollock et al., 2017; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009) as they are often mistaken for immigrants or international students in their host countries and as residents in their home countries due to their appearances. In the present study, several participants voiced their frustrations, sometimes with humor, about facing microaggressions and stereotypes based on their Asian appearances.

**RESPECTFUL Model**

To improve therapeutic relationships, I would suggest using multiculturally focused counseling frameworks such as the RESPECTFUL model (D'Andrea & Daniel, 2001) and the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016) through the scope of self-categorization theory (Turner, 2007). The RESPECTFUL model helps counselors understand their clients’ identities in complex and intersecting ways. This model is suitable for counselors working with TCKs and adult TCKs because counselors can learn important social and contextual factors influencing their TCKs clients. Such factors can greatly impact people’s identities (D'Andrea & Daniel, 2001; P.A. Hays, 2009). As confirmed by the present study’s findings, identity is one of the most crucial challenges facing TCKs and adult TCKs (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009).

(D'Andrea & Daniel, 2001, p. 422). When clinicians use the RESPECTFUL model, they have the clients share their cultural influences and backgrounds in these areas. In additional to the current components of the RESPECTFUL model, counselors also might explore the client’s world citizen identity by asking for more information about their living experiences and places they have lived in the past. After the intake,
counselors can ask clients to clarify or provide more information based on the RESPECTFUL model as appropriate and needed. Basic information such as age, self-identified gender, race, and nationality or sexual orientation typically provided during an intake is not enough in terms of understanding clients’ backgrounds, especially for adult TCKs. Counselors might not be able to provide efficient support and understanding to adult TCK clients if they have limited information about their clients’ cultural identities. Counselors need to understand the complexity of adult TCKs’ experiences in college, which may include identity confusion (Gaw, 2000; Tanu, 2008; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009), hidden immigrant status (Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Pollock et al., 2009; Thurston-Gonzales, 2009), culture shock and reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000), other unique challenges (Bushong, 2013) and their identity as “world citizen”. If a counselor is not aware that a client has a TCK background, their therapeutic approach may be ineffective which could cause the client to prematurely drop out of counseling (Bushong, 2013). The RESPECTFUL model is designed not only understanding the cultural backgrounds of clients but also to reveal the residential and family backgrounds. This model is especially useful for Confucian Asian TCKs who value the connection with community and family.

To obtain more information, counselors can use probing questions to deepen their understanding of clients. For example, if clients disclosed only their cultural identities without sharing much about their highly mobile lifestyles, counselors could ask for more information about the places they have lived in their lives using the RESPECTFUL model. This is particularly important for Confucian Asian adult TCK clients. A counselor might misjudge Confucian Asian adult TCKs’ backgrounds based on appearance by categorizing them as residents in their Asian home country, an Asian American, or an
international student from Asian country. This misjudgment can lead to overlooking their exclusive challenges and their unique values. Therefore, even if clients still provide little information, counselors can follow up to ask about potential discomfort with sharing and show that they are interested in learning more about the clients’ backgrounds with an empathetic attitude (Bushong, 2013).

Some clients might be hesitant to share their negative experiences since they might not want to go through the sense of loss involved with explaining these experiences or they might be reluctant to define their international transit experiences if they are traumatic experiences (Pollock et al., 2009). Moreover, if they are Confucian Asian adult TCKs, they might feel they are betraying their parents by talking negatively about their experiences, since their parents might have intended to provide great experiences for them to attend college. Understanding this potential hesitancy in discussing negative experiences is particularly important for counselors who are more privileged than their clients in order to establish therapeutic rapport (Ratts et al., 2016). These conversations can feel challenging for counselors since the first session focuses on establishing rapport between clinician and client. Clinicians should avoid pressuring clients to share their personal backgrounds and instead provide an empathetic approach when inviting them to disclose their backgrounds.

Using the RESPECTFUL model can help clinicians understand their clients’ cultural backgrounds in more depth and see if they experience identity challenges or academic challenges, including languages. Counselors can also understand the potential impact of transitioning by knowing which countries clients have lived in as well as their nationalities. As Bushong (2013) stated, counselors should be aware of their clients’
cultural shifts based on the countries they have lived in and how much time they lived in each country as well as the impact of these shifts. For example, a person who moved from Japan to Germany faced a different cultural transition compared to someone who moved from Taiwan to Korea. This transition is different not only in terms of language but also in terms of customs and sense of belonging. Counselors should initiate the conversation and encourage clients to elaborate on their transition stories by asking a sufficient number of open questions and expressing that they are interested in the clients’ stories. For example, a counselor might say, “Tell me more about your experiences when you lived abroad.”

After identifying that the client is an adult TCK, the counselor can start the conversation by asking about how the client might feel about being a TCK. For example, a counselor might ask “I wonder how you were impacted by this profound experience and how it has continued to impact you in college?” If the client is a Confucian Asian adult TCK from China living in the United after traveling to other English-speaking countries, instead of praising the client’s language fluency, the counselor can focus on potential identity struggles related to language and how others might miscategorize the client for mistaking him or her as an Asian American.

Counselors also can start dialogs about their clients’ experiences with other Asian and Chinese international students in college. Clients are likely to appreciate counselors’ flexibility in seeking to understand their unique challenges. Counselors can always go back to the RESPECTFUL model after a few sessions to acquire more information about students. It is important to reflect clients’ realities within the context of their cultures and countries (P. A. Hays, 2016). For example, adult TCKs who grew up in foreign countries
but returned to their home countries might no longer be the racial minority in their home countries. Asking questions about the clients’ experiences in navigating different cultures can help clients know that their stories are valid and valued.

**Diagnosing Adult Third Culture Kid Clients**

Counselors need to be cautious when diagnosing adult TCK clients (Bushong, 2013). They need to be fully aware of the influence of a highly mobile lifestyle on their clients’ potential sense of loss (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009), PTSD, adjustment disorder, and anxiety (Melles & Frey, 2014). Counselors should provide adequate resources and therapeutic interventions based on their clients’ cultural identities and unique needs instead of diagnosing them without having a more complete picture of their backgrounds.

**Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies**

In recognition of the complexities and depths of Confucian Asian adult TCK identities and experiences, college counselors should use the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) when working with these clients. These competencies were designed to address the complex relationships between clients and clinicians based on power and privilege. The MSJCC represents an important framework to help counselors, especially those who are more privileged than their clients, address the cultural differences between clients and counselors. Adult TCKs can feel misunderstood by counselors when the counselors are not familiar with TCKs’ unique struggles. The MSJCC’s conceptual framework is useful for this reason as well since it allows counselors to use a social advocate role to offer systematic support to clients (Ratts et al., 2016).
Using the MSJCC can help to reveal relationship differences between client and counselor, even if the adult TCK client appears to have a similar cultural background as the counselor. Counselors can frequently self-check to see how their approaches might be influenced by their own biases. Ratts et al. (2015) discussed how individuals’ thoughts and behaviors were influenced by not only their cultural backgrounds but also other factors such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and political views. In sessions with clients with TCK backgrounds, counselors should be aware that clients’ presented identities might not define them. For example, an Asian male counselor with an Asian male adult college TCK student client in an Asian country should not assume that their relationship is based on a “privileged counselor and privileged client” relationship. In this example, both the client and the clinician may have the expectation of being privileged based on having shared power and status in society (Ratts et al., 2015). However, as previously discussed, the client might be more like a marginalized client due to the TCK background. Then, the counselor should be aware that he or she holds more power and more privilege in the society than the client, and this awareness should extend to the session.

Counselors should take different approaches to providing support for clients who are privileged and those who are not. With the MSJCC, counselors can determine which approaches are appropriate working with their clients. Counselors need to have self-awareness and be careful about their statements when they work with marginalized clients.

Additionally, the MSJCC encourages counselors to have more self-awareness in applying therapeutic skills. To increase self-awareness, counselors can continue asking
questions of themselves about their biases and how they might impact their relationships with their clients. Before commenting on clients’ stories, counselors need to be mindful of whether their comments would be beneficial for the clients to hear and if these comments might reflect their personal biases or be based on stereotypes they hold. Therefore, counselors should pay close attention to their clients’ stories and continuously conceptualize these stories.

For example, if an adult TCK client talked about his or her trouble with establishing meaningful relationships on campus, it might not only be because of common challenges that college students face but might also be because the client is not familiar with pop culture or might experience reverse culture shock. This was shared by one of the participants in the present study who was surprised and shocked when she entered college in the United States. It was especially troublesome for her since she went to an “American school” in a foreign country. Other participants mentioned their confusion associated with unfamiliarity with the dominant culture, mannerisms, and microaggression. This is why counselors need to have time for self-education about clients and their TCK communities. Because of their international experiences, TCKs can experience struggles when readjusting to their home cultures.

Self-Categorization Theory

By using a combination of the MSJCC and self-categorization theory, counselors can not only understand multicultural relationships between themselves and their clients, they can also understand adult TCKs’ interpersonal relational issues with other college students. Self-categorization theory is based on individuals’ social and personal identities in the context of a community (Beauchamp & Dunlop, 2014; Turner, 2007). In other
words, self-categorization theorists perceive individuals as part of a community instead of as independent individuals. The social identity refers to how people identify themselves based on the group they feel connected to as a concept of “we” or “us.” In contrast, personal identity is the concept of self as “I” and “me” (Turner, 2007).

Self-categorization theory is used to understand individuals from a collectivist perspective (Oldmeadow et al., 2019). In other words, it emphasizes the connection between a person and a group and how the person experiences interactions with others. Therefore, self-categorization theory can help counselors understand the unique struggles of Confucian Asian adult TCKs. For example, the participants in this study often talked about how they identified themselves as adult TCKs and how the TCK community influenced their values. They talked about their values of appreciating international diversity and interacting with people with different values. As they said, it was because they have grown up in international environments as TCKs and learned the beauty of different cultures and opinions.

The study participants also talked about how their stories and values are different compared to non-TCK college students. In this context, they socially identified themselves as parts of the TCK group. On the other hand, when they started talking about their identities as Confucian Asians, they naturally shifted their self-identified social identities to more of the influence of Confucian Asian cultural values on them. They talked about how they could relate to other students with Confucian Asian backgrounds and how other people treated or perceived them in the category of “Asians.” This complexity of social identity demonstrates the importance of counselors using
multiculturally focused counseling techniques and self-categorization theory to understand adult TCKs’ identity development and struggles.

Counselors need to have a complete understanding of which social groups their clients identify as ingroups and outgroups. From a more practical standpoint, counselors can use self-categorization theory during counseling sessions by asking about differences in clients’ experiences of forming friendships while they were living outside of their passport countries as TCKs versus their current experiences at college. This can help to clarify how their experiences as TCKs might influence their current challenges.

One way to help clients with TCKs is to use a tool to identify the social network more clearly to both clients and counselors in counseling sessions. In the relationship circle intervention, counselors ask clients to create and discuss graphic representations of the relationships in their lives. The graphical representation helps facilitate a discussion of how close the client feels to each friend/group and the reasons behind that level of closeness. This method was originally introduced by Kos (n.d.); I modified it into a therapeutic intervention for adult TCK clients.

The relationship circle activity can help both clinicians and clients better understand the levels of intimacy and friendship in clients’ social networks. This is particularly beneficial for adult TCKs since their social networks tend to be international and wide (Pollock et al., 2009). Kos (n.d.) suggested that the circles be labeled in order from closest to farthest away as the circle of intimacy, the circle of friendship, the circle of participation, and the circle of exchange. The circle of intimacy includes people who are closest to clients; friends or people who are closest and most valuable in their lives (i.e., family or significant others). The circle of friendship holds the people whom the
client feels close to but not as close as the circle of intimacy. They can be friends who know about the client’s background stories, provide support, and offer friendship. The circle of participation includes the individuals who are more acquainted with the client. The client might have relationships with them through student organizations or in classrooms. Lastly, the circle of exchange includes people the client has business or task-oriented relationships with. They can be doctors at a clinic or residential hall assistants at a student dorm.

With the modified relationship circle for adult TCK clients, counselors simply ask clients to write the names of friends or the names of the student organizations depending on whom they feel close to without defining each relationship with the labels used by Kos (n.d.). Figure 1 is an example of the worksheet that can be used in the session.

**Figure 1**
Example of Circle of Relationship Worksheet
To use this worksheet, the counselor first explains the purpose of this activity as understanding relationships with other people in college life and personal life. The goal of this activity is to raise clients’ awareness about their relationships, help them identify relationships they want to improve, and develop strategies for how to improve these relationships.

After explaining the purpose, the counselor places the client’s name in the center of the worksheet and hands it to the client. The counselor then asks the client to write the names of the most important relationships and organizations in his or her life in the first circle around the client’s name. The counselor can say, “Let’s start this activity. There is no right or wrong answer. First, please write the person or groups of people that you feel the closest to. This can be your parents, siblings, or even your best friends.” It is more beneficial for the client to write down the actual names of friends instead of student organizations, although some might not feel comfortable with disclosing their friends’ names during the session. Counselors can review and explain confidentiality to clients if they are reluctant to share names by saying, “You might be concerned about sharing their actual names with me, but again counseling is confidential unless you disclose information revealing harm to others or yourself, or legal reason. Your secret will remain here. It might be easier to track your social network if you share their actual names or nicknames, but I will respect your decision if you do not want to share names.” Ultimately, the counselor should respect the client’s decision. Clients also can label the friends’ category whatever they like. They may label them as “my college friends,” “my friends from student organizations,” or “my TCK friends” or with people’s names.
When the client finishes filling in the first circle, the counselor asks the client to identify and write their good friends who are not as close as the individuals they placed in the second circle. The counselor might say, “Now, let’s write the names of friends or people you feel close to, but not as close as the first circle. They can be your good friends, but not your best friends.” In the next step, the counselor directs the client to put down names of other individuals in their social network in the third circle, whom they consider “acquaintances” more than friends or close relationships. The counselor might say, “This time, I want you to write down in the third circle about people in your life whom you consider acquaintances. They can be friends, or they have potential to be closer, but who you do not feel a strong emotional connection with.” In the furthest circle, the client is instructed to add anyone who is in their life, but who they have a more business type relationship as opposed to a friendship. These individuals could be professors or academic tutors. The counselor can say, “In the last circle, add the people whom you have only business-like relationships such as your doctor or professors from the classroom.”

After filling in the circle, the counselor and client can explore how comfortable and connected the client feels with each relationship. The counselor can ask what made the client feel close to the particular people and what prevents the client from getting close to others. If there are any relational challenges that the client experiences, this is a good moment to discuss them. If the client wants to get closer to particular people, the client and the counselor can discuss what would help the client get closer.

After completing the first circle and discussing the client’s relationships, the counselor can give the client a second circle, blank and identical to the first circle, to
clarify the client’s ideal friendship or social network circle. In the new worksheet, clients write down the names or categories from their networks, but this time they write what they wish the relationship circle would look like. The counselor can direct clients stating, “Now, I want you to fill out another worksheet. In this worksheet, I want you to place the names based on your ideal image of relationship and friendship. I want you to spend a few minutes to think about and write down the names depending on how close you wish to be with each of them. Some might remain the same, some might be placed in an even further or nearer circle, and that is okay.” I would recommend doing this activity after the client and the counselor finish discussing the first worksheet. This way, clients have more awareness of their current social lives and clearer direction for how to improve their relationships with others after completing the second worksheet.

After completing the second worksheet, counselors can talk about the similarities and differences among different groups in the worksheets. The counselor may ask, ”What do you notice about the differences among the friends whom you feel closest to the one whom you considered acquaintances?” or “I saw you put this person as just a friend on the first worksheet, but you moved the person to the closest friend circle in the second worksheet. Tell me what you and the person need to do in order to establish a closer relationship?” Another example question is, “What are the similarities between your ‘TCK friends’ from high school and your ‘college friends’ that you have on the worksheets?” These questions are particularly important to help clients realize the different characteristics of their social network members, which can help them overcome the biases of their new college friends or help them deepen their understanding of themselves. As the participants in the present study experienced, clients might feel
disappointed in student organizations or groups where they feel they do not completely fit in due to their more international mindsets. They might feel discriminated and prejudiced against because of their international backgrounds even in their home countries. Moreover, it is possible that they feel internally frustrated because of longing for their TCK childhood friends (Pollock et al., 2009). Counselors can acknowledge clients’ frustrations, senses of loss, and feelings of isolation to reduce their self-blame or depressed feelings and can help them normalize these feelings.

It is also important for counselors to address racial and cultural identities with clients and how their might impact their process of forming friendships with other students in college. Counselors can revisit the clients’ background information from the RESPECTFUL model to start the dialogue about how the client identify themselves culturally and how it might impact their friendships with others as reflected in their circles. For example, if the client identifies as a Confucian Asian adult TCK but struggles with adjusting to Asian cultures or feeling connected with an Asian student organization, the client and the counselor can discuss the complexities of their identity. This is particularly crucial for Confucian Asian adult TCKs since Asian societies value cohesiveness, and Confucian Asian adult TCKs can struggle to reenter Confucian Asian cultures after returning from living in a non-Confucian Asian country (Kanno, 2000; Perez, 2017). However, clients might feel closer to people from different cultures outside of Confucian Asian countries or even international students. It is important for counselors to remind clients that there is nothing wrong with struggling to form relationships or forming a concrete identity (Bushong, 2013). Adult TCK clients may compare themselves to others and feel like they are inadequate and blame themselves. The
counselor’s job in this situation is to be empathic and reassure clients that these issues are common among the TCK community and these challenges are not their fault.

During the relationship circle intervention, clients and counselors also can explore feelings of disconnection from a certain group and how clients identify themselves in each group. For example, a counselor might point to specific people or groups on the circle and ask, “How do you think others see you?” or “What do you wish for them to know about you?” This is particularly important, since from the frame of self-categorization theory, individuals act according to group norms and adopt group identities (Turner, 2007). Therefore, by starting the dialogue, the counselor can understand what the client needs to feel more connected or welcomed. Individuals can develop significant incongruence when they do not feel they fit in with group norms (Beauchamp, 2018). Counselors might help clients understand that they should not feel pressured to change themselves to adopt the group culture but should instead value the importance of their uniqueness and their values. This might help them find other groups of friends or communities they might feel more connected to, if needed.

Sometimes, counselors have their own agendas and ideal outcomes like the focus on individualism in the previous example. However, it is important for counselors to respect clients’ needs and help them find the most suitable direction to overcome challenges on their own. Counselors can explore Confucian Asian ATCKs experiences with building friendships with an awareness of how they relate to the clients’ international backgrounds. Such conversations may help clients realize their worldviews and ease their culture shock or reverse culture shock. For example, several participants in the present study voiced their sense of loneliness and loss for not having their TCK
community with them in college. Some of their TCK friends and their international friends from various countries might have similar values or characteristics. On the other hand, clients might find that student organizations representing their home countries address different values from the own, meaning more emotional distance. Additionally, with the client’s social goals resulting from the relationship circle intervention in mind, counselors can help clients connect with appropriate student organizations on campus. Counselors also can suggest that clients explore campus and the surrounding community, which can empower students to establish responsibility and confidence (Wilcox, 2017).

**Group Counseling**

Providing group counseling is another way counselors can help advocate for adult TCK college students. It might be difficult to provide group counseling solely for adult TCK college students unless there is a large community of TCKs at an institution. Instead, counselors can lead group counseling sessions for students who have international backgrounds or multicultural backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities and international students on campus. By providing group counseling for students, adult TCK college students can establish their sense of ingroup with other students (Wilcox, 2017). TCKs and adult TCKs tend to have less trust of mental health professionals than the general population (Bushong, 2013; Wilcox, 2017). It is important for college counselors to gain trust from their campus’ TCKs community by providing an empathetic approach to establishing rapport.

**Advocacy**

Counselors can also provide advocacy for clients depending on their needs. These advocacy approaches can include connecting students to other services including tutoring...
or student development offices. Additionally, counselors can provide presentations for college faculty and staff to improve their understanding of TCK college students. Counselors can serve as strong advocates for helping the university provide support for adult TCKs so they can have a smoother transition to college (Long, 2016).

**College Administrators and Students Development Office Personnel**

Many TCKs choose higher education after graduating from high school (Cottrell, 2017). This is because they tend to have more access to education since their parents hold social privileges (Cottrell, 2007; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). However, a high number of TCKs consider changing majors or dropping out of their first college major (Cottrell & Useem, 1999). Similar struggles were reported by participants in the present study. For example, some participants in this study decided to return to their home countries for college. They mentioned the struggles of returning and adjusting to their home cultures due to lacking information and support about their majors and the campus environment. Moreover, a few participants changed their majors, chose to double major during college, or seriously considered changing school. Similarly, Pollock et al. (2017) noted that adult TCKs did not have opportunities to attend a campus tour before enrolling or they unexpectedly found their chosen major was not a good fit for them. Additionally, as participants in this study reported, they had challenges catching up on schoolwork due to language barriers.

It is important to note that TCKs students might not have had enough preparation for college-level academics prior to enrolling in college and they might face language barriers even in their home countries (Pollock et al., 2017). Colleges should provide adequate support for adult TCK college students with available resources such as tutoring.
and language support. Additionally, virtual campus tours or online interviews can help TCKs make more informed college decisions, especially for students who are applying from outside of the college’s country. Many TCKs and their families have limited access to information about colleges prior to their enrollments (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).

Additionally, during their first semesters of college, it would be also helpful for these students to move into student housing early enough to be familiar with their surroundings (Holdren, 2013). Many universities encourage international students to move in earlier than resident students so they can attend orientations. However, this policy often does not apply to adult TCK college students unless they are also international students. Since it is also beneficial for adult TCK college students to have a smoother transition to college life by moving in earlier and having a choice to attend orientation to learn about the campus culture and attend campus tours, universities should open the campus earlier for students with TCK backgrounds. Since universities do not always know which college students have TCK backgrounds, they can give the option for students to disclose their backgrounds during their college applications.

Besides these challenges, colleges also need to be mindful of students who return to their home countries for college. These returnees sometimes are more difficult for colleges to acknowledge. Therefore, college administrators should provide additional support to these students who ended their international mobile lifestyles and returned home. Colleges can provide resources to help TCKs have a smoother acculturation experience when they return to their home countries. These resources can include brochures explaining reverse culture shock, a counseling center with practitioners with varied backgrounds, different ethnic cultural student groups/organizations, and a
multicultural office. Brochures can be offered to students before and after they enter college to offer continuous support. Moreover, some students might not start college right after they return to their home countries. For example, one participant in the present study who decided to return to her home country for college had to wait a couple months until she could start college after finishing high school due to different enrollment periods. College administrators should be flexible and offer adequate support for every student (Wilcox, 2017).

**College Instructors**

In general, the study participants mentioned having positive experiences in college classrooms. Several participants mentioned their enjoyment during classes, especially during class discussions. They found excitement when they were given the opportunity to exchange opinions and learn about the different views of other students and instructors. Hervey (2009) encouraged teachers to provide intellectual stimulation and opportunities for discussion for TCK college students since they have had unique experiences and global mindsets that can bring value to classes.

College instructors can also pay attention to students with TCK backgrounds to ensure they are adjusting in college. It was common among participants in the present study to have some struggles adjusting to the college academic curriculum. College instructors can be open minded and offer support for Confucian Asian adult TCK college students, since some of them might not feel comfortable openly talking about their struggles at college due to the Confucian Asian culture value of respecting authority. This support can include invitations for TCK students to participate in class discussions or to
share their opinions based on their international backgrounds. This would help not only TCK students; other students in the classroom can also learn from their experiences.

Specifically for Confucian Asian adult TCK college students, instructors can acknowledge potential difficulties with acculturation and acknowledge the challenges. These students might not be familiar with how the customs or cultures work in their home countries. As several Japanese participants in the present study mentioned, they were especially surprised and confused with the age hierarchy in school and business settings. Therefore, instructors, who are in positions of authority, can provide support by clarifying expectations for communicating with professors and students in the syllabus. For example, instructors should include their office hours and their preferred ways to be contacted by students (e.g., email, during office hours, after class). Such policies, combined with an approachable presentation, can encourage students to reach out to instructors. Instructors also can also take additional time during the first class to explain the syllabus to avoid confusion. It is important for instructors not to lower expectations for adult TCKs students or any students who might need extra care, but instructors can be mindful of offering proactive support for these students.

Moreover, college instructors can acknowledge the maturity of TCK college students by understanding their unique backgrounds and possibly giving them academic topics to stimulate their intellectual interests. It is important to develop plans for systematic care for minority students (Mizuno, 1997). TCK students, who are categorized as hidden immigrants, should be treated as minority students who require and deserve special attention from college faculty and staff (Holden, 2013; Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Pollock et al., 2017). However, it can be difficult to offer support specifically for
Confucian Asian adult TCK college students. As a few participants in this study said, they tended to be categorized as Asian students without having TCK backgrounds or international students. This is another reason why it has been difficult to establish support specific to this population, since they are hidden and are not acknowledged as minority students in college.

**Systematic Support**

Up to this point, I have discussed how college faculty and staff, including counselors and instructors, can support Confucian Asian adult TCKs and general TCKs in college. I now focus on how colleges can support these populations on a system-wide level. Ideally, campuses should have a multiculturally sensitive system before TCK college students enroll (Jones et al., 2002). Even if they do not have a preexisting support system, campuses can develop policies and structures that are open minded and flexible to promote diversity. A multiculturally sensitive campus system is not only beneficial to college students with TCK backgrounds but also to the general population of students on campus. There are three areas in which I suggest more multiculturally focused resources for colleges to have: enriching cultural student organizations, providing workshops, and promoting a multiculturally focused campus system, including multicultural centers, which I will discuss shortly.

Many of the present study’s participants joined student organizations in college. These groups were usually based on their interests or their cultural identities. The majority of participants were part of student organizations and attended cultural groups allied with their nationalities or cultural identities such as a Japanese organization, a group to learn about Japanese instruments, an Asian American student organization, or a
Chinese students’ organization. As discussed in the findings section, establishing and understanding one’s identity is crucial for TCK students and especially Confucian Asian adult TCKs. In Confucian Asian societies, which value cohesiveness and sameness, individuals with different experiences than the majority, such as those with international backgrounds, are excluded (Triandis, 1994).

Museus and Neville (2012) emphasized the importance of having racial minority college students have access to their own racial cultural groups and organizations on campus as a support. They stressed the benefits of these groups in creating a sense of belonging in an ingroup by having the comfort of shared experiences, leading to a more enriched and fulfilling college experience. Holdren (2013) believed it would be beneficial to give a physical space for each cultural student group including adult TCKs, since these groups and locations ultimately become “home” for the students. This is particularly significant for college students with TCK backgrounds, since they might not have the sense of home as much as other college students because of their highly mobile lifestyles and being away from their parents when they enter college (Bushong, 2013). By providing a physical location they can label as the base of their culture group, they can feel connected and secure in the college even more. If the space is limited on campus, the college also can organize a multicultural center where all students with different cultural backgrounds can gather, including international students, adult TCK college students, immigrants, refugees, and racial/ethnic minorities on campus. This could help adult TCK college students discover their sense of ingroup as they will have a place where students with various backgrounds congregate. Because their cultural backgrounds are complex and cannot be described by one specific culture or ethnicity, minority students tend to
feel disconnected and isolated in White-dominant colleges (Jones et al., 2002). The participants in Jones et al. (2002) expressed great gratitude for the center and requested to have it be a central part of campus like the bookstore or student union.

Another approach is providing a support network on campus. College instructors and other college staff, including counselors, can collaborate to provide support for TCKs. For example, if instructors notice adult TCK students who are less engaged in class, they could check in with the students and can involve the dean of students or college counselors to clarify the students’ needs and provide them suitable resources. Instructors can also use Starfish Early Alert or similar systems to help their institutions engage with students at risk. These systems are typically included in platforms such as Blackboard or Canvas. In these systems, students can track their progress in class and stay on top of their school assignments. Starfish Early Alert involves a brief biography of students, which might help instructors learn the students’ backgrounds and potential struggles they might encounter in the classroom. This is also a great tool for collaboration among different campus offices so that multiple departments can provide suitable support.

Lastly, I would encourage campuses to organize workshops presented by university counseling centers and adult TCK students about the common struggles of TCKs and their unique backgrounds to faculty members and other campus staff. These workshops could not only provide information to campus staff and faculty about this population, they also could provide opportunities for TCK college students to tell their stories. By inviting TCK students to be more involved in college, they may feel more connected to the campus community and possibly consider it an ingroup.
Limitations

There are four areas of limitations in this study: the participants’ backgrounds, the interview questions, the interview procedure, and triangulation. There are three limitations regarding the participants’ backgrounds. First, there was a lack of diversity among participants. Even though Confucian Asian culture is similar across countries, there are some differences. More than half of the recruited participants were from Japan. Even though the findings were consistent among participants, it would have still been important to recruit participants from different nationalities. Though generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research, this lack of diversity in perspectives likely shaped the findings and may limit transferability (see Leung, 2018). Another limitation is the lack of gender diversity among the participants. There were only three male participants. Gender differences in college experiences and the impact of gender on building social networks in college is important. For example, female college students value connection with peers, which provides them more social support than it does for males (Liu et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). On the other hand, males in this study tended to value shared interests or activities instead of emotional connections with others. Yet, these traits were not included as themes in the study because they were not consistent across most participants. Therefore, there is a possibility that this study’s findings were influenced by the higher number of female participants and their perspectives. Third, there was a lack of diversity in participants’ backgrounds. I used social media to recruit participants with varied experiences. I also reached out to an educational institute to increase the number of participants. Many participants came from the same educational institute, and they were business-related TCKs instead of other backgrounds such as military or missionary
based, which might not reflect the diverse experiences of this population and might have impacted the transferability of the findings (see Moore & Barker, 2012).

Additionally, a few limitations occurred during the interview procedure. One limitation was an interview question that asked participants to identify the influence of Confucian Asian culture on their social networks in college. Some participants asked clarification questions or reported confusion before answering this question. Some reported their difficulty with defining Confucian Asian culture, thus it became more challenging for them to reflect on how their social networks were influenced by Confucian Asian culture. An additional limitation occurred during the interviews. A few Japanese participants chose to share their experiences in Japanese at times during the interviews out of convenience and comfort to speak the shared language with me. Their responses in Japanese were very minimal, and I requested that they translate their Japanese sentences into English during the interviews. I also had them review the translated material in the process of the transcript review, but this became a study limitation since Japanese was these participants’ preferred way to express their ideas. Even though the chosen language for the study is a limitation, I doubt it limited the ability of participants to express their opinions during their interviews. Most of the participants were fluent in English, and they did not show much discomfort or trouble with expressing their opinions in their second language. The few participants who were less fluent in English could still explain their opinions with the help of probing questions to clarify the meanings of their statements.

Lastly, there was a limitation in terms of study triangulation. As part of resources to increase the credibility of the findings, I asked the participants to review the themes
that resulted from the data analysis as part of a member check. I received responses from less than half of the participants. Most of them agreed with the generated themes, but it could have been different if I heard back from more participants. I asked participants to review the themes again after I decided to add another main theme, but I did not receive any feedback from participants for the second member check request. The lack of responses during this process may have limited the credibility for the final generated theme.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

Based on study limitations, I now offer recommendations for future studies. This study was designed to deepen the understanding of Confucian Asian adult TCK experiences in college. Further study on this population is important because their numbers are predicted to increase even more in the future due to increased globalization of laborers and businesses, increasing opportunities to study abroad, and the constant development of new technology (Long, 2016; Tanu, 2008). I have five suggestions for future study focusing on this population.

First, as addressed in the limitation section, there was little diversity in gender in the study sample, and gender might impact adult TCKs’ sense of belonging. Males and females form friendships and interact with other peers differently in college (Liu et al., 2020). It was outside of the scope of the sample size in this study to address these gender differences. However, gender differences could be an important topic to help uncover the unique ways that adult TCKs of different genders experience college life.

Second, the lack of diversity among participants can be improved on by future scholars. As addressed in the limitation section, half of participants in this study were
Japanese. Studying Confucian Asian culture and its influence more fully may require participants from more of a variety of Confucian Asian countries.

Third, researchers can focus more on non-White/Caucasian TCKs in future studies. Research on TCKs started decades ago, and the topic and this population has attracted many researchers. There are many studies on TCKs with Western backgrounds who are mostly Caucasian/White. I hope future researchers will follow the present study and focus on non-Western White/Caucasian TCKs to capture the diverse experiences of this population. Confucian Asian college students have been less studied due to the model minority myth (Museus & Neville, 2012). Culture can impact individuals greatly. The participants in this study reported their unique struggles as Confucian Asian adult TCKs in college such as being racially stereotyped or feeling uneasy for their cultural differences compared to White/Caucasian cultures. Researchers can investigate notable experiences of Confucian Asian adult TCKs and non-White/Caucasian TCKs in more depth to learn more about this population and better support them.

Fourth, I would suggest researchers consider the development stages of TCKs in the future study as a few participants mentioned their age appeared to influence their TCK identities. Some participants spent almost half of their life living outside of their home countries, while others spent only a few years. Some left their home countries during childhood, while others left during adolescence. A few participants never lived in their home countries for an extended time. Therefore, future researches can focus on how the age differences and their length of living abroad would potentially impact TCKs’ identity development.
Lastly, there has not been much research in the college environment using self-categorization theory. Self-categorization theory is an interesting approach to understanding social interaction and how people establish groupness in a community (Turner, 2007). Finding a commonality and feeling connected with others are essential for college students (Coyne & Downey, 1991; Hagerty & Williams, 1999). Many participants in the present study shared their sense of connection or disconnection with their peers. It was important for them to have close friends and groups with whom they could rely on and share their interests. Self-categorization theorists understand humans from a collectivist social perspective (Turner, 2007). Since Asian TCKs from Confucian Asian countries typically hold collectivist values, which emphasizes connection with others and living in a sense of sameness, self-categorization theory can help researchers expand their understanding of diverse college students. However, as a potential limitation of self-categorization theory, it may not be suitable to explain the high level of cultural fluidity of Confucian Asian TCKs, since as this study showed this population holds two important identities as Confucian Asian identity and world citizen identity as TCKs individuals. Self-categorization theory can explain this culture identity fluidity using a self-concept approach, but it still lacks depth in understanding how the cultural fluidity potentially influences self-concept and how it might give the long-lasting impacts for TCKs. Therefore, future researchers can focus more on cultural fluidity and mixed identity to address the complexities of identity development and belonging in Confucian Asian Adult TCKs.
Concluding Thoughts

At the end of this study, I reflected on the journey of conducting this research and realized how interesting and meaningful the process was for me. I am truly grateful for all of the participants, who trusted me and shared their very personal stories to increase awareness of this population for me and readers of this study. I learned from each participant about how some of their experiences were different from the findings of existing studies. I felt honored to have been given a chance to expand my understanding of TCKs. I was mostly surprised regarding how participants described Asian cultures and how they also talked about their disconnection with non-TCKs. These comments showed me how their national culture can have a great influence on them regardless of their international backgrounds and how they valued and craved connection with other people. They taught me a great deal about their unique backgrounds and the commonalities that we all share regardless of our backgrounds. I was inspired by their international identities as world citizens, and their desires to make the world a better place gave me a great sense of hope for the future. I hope more studies will be conducted on this population, and I hope this study would be beneficial for the future scholars.
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Appendix A

Call for Participation

Title of the email or website: Call for participants: Looking for Asian adult Third Culture Kids.

Dear [participant’s name, if applicable],

Do you identify yourself as a TCK or did you have an international transitory lifestyle while growing up? If the answer is yes, you might be interested in my dissertation study, titled “Searching for a Home: Examining the Experiences of Asian College Students with Third Culture Kids Backgrounds. The purpose of this study is to understand Asian adult TCKs’ experiences in college environments.

To participate in the study, you need to meet all of the following criteria:

1. You need to be at least 18 years old.
2. You need to identify as a Third Culture Kid and/or have lived outside of your home/passport country for at least one year during childhood or adolescence due to your parents’ or legal guardians’ work-related reasons.
3. You need to have ethnic background of Eastern Asian countries with Confucion cultural influences (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese) and have been raised by parents or legal guardians who value and understand Asian culture.
4. You need to have graduated from college within the past 5 years or be currently enrolled in college with an expected graduation date on or before May 2020. You are not eligible if your program was entirely online (e.g., all of your classes were taken online).
If you are interested in participating and you meet the 4 criteria above, please click the link below. The link will direct you to the consent form for the study and a brief survey. If you have any questions, please contact me at [](#) After completing the survey, I will email you to set up your interview at a date and time convenient for you.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing back from you.

[Link of online survey included here].

Sincerely,

Yuima Mizutani, M.Ed., NCC, LPC
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling & Family Therapy
University of Missouri Saint Louis
Appendix B
Informed Consent

Department of Education
One University Blvd.
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities
Searching for a “Home”: Examining the Experiences of Asian College Students with Third Culture Kids Backgrounds

IRS Approval Number ____________________________

Principal Investigator Yuima Mizutani PI’s Phone Number [REDACTED]

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I can print or save a copy of this consent form for my records. By starting my interview, I consent to my participation in the research described below.

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Yuima Mizutani, M.Ed., NCC, LPC under the supervision of Dr. Phillip Waalkes. The purpose of this qualitative study is to learn about the college experiences of Asian college students with Third Culture Kids or equivalent backgrounds.

2. a) Your participation will involve a video recorded interview conducted by the researcher. The interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
Approximately 10 to 15 participants will be involved in this research. After the researcher finishes transcribing, you will receive a copy of the transcript to verify its accuracy. b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. c) Lastly, you will be invited for member checking. Your involvement in member checking is optional. In this process, you will be asked to read and provide feedback on the main themes and the supportive conceptual units which are created based on the all of the interviews.

3. There are no known risks associated with this research. However, it is possible you may experience discomfort associated with this research in talking about difficult experiences in college and/or as a Third Culture Kid or equivalent.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your contribution to this study will help future mental health professionals and college staff provide more appropriate support to Third Culture Kids. Your contribution also may help inspire future researchers to study this often-underserved population.

5. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. If you want to withdraw from the study, you can contact me at [email protected] or [phone number]. You may choose not to answer specific questions that you do not want to answer during the interview. You will NOT be penalized in any way if you choose to withdraw from the study or choose not to answer a question.

6. By agreeing to participate, you understand and agree that your data may be shared with my advisor and in the form of presentations and/or publications in the future. Your identity will not be revealed and any quotes from your interviews will not be attributed to
you. Additionally, potentially identifying information (e.g., people’s names, names of cities) will be removed from your interview transcripts. In rare instances, a researcher’s study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection). That agency would be required to maintain the confidentiality of your data. In addition, all data will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked office.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may contact my advisor, Dr. Phillip Waalkes at [redacted]. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration at 314-516-5897.
Appendix C

Demographic Data Survey

How do you identify your gender?

How old are you?

Which country are you originally from (i.e., your home country)?

How do identify your race/ethnicity?

What are your parents’ racial/ethnic backgrounds?

How many years have you (or did you) live outside of your home country?

Which other countries have you lived in?

How long did you live in each country (including your passport country)?

Which years did you attend college?

What kind(s) of educational institution(s) did you attend after high school (e.g., college, community college, trade school, 4-year university)?

What is/was or are/were your college major(s)?

Which year did you graduate from college? If you haven’t graduated, what year do you anticipate graduating?

What is your current occupation?

What platform would you like to use for your video interview? Please choose the preferred method from the given options (Zoom, Facetime, LINE, Skype, or no preference.)

Please provide your username or phone number to receive the interview call from me.

What date and time would you like to hold your interview? Please include the time zone.
Please provide your email address to receive a confirmation email
(ymvwf@mail.umls.edu) of your interview time and interview questions.
Appendix D

Interview Confirmation Email

Title of the email: Thank you for signing up for my dissertation study.

Dear [participant’s name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study titled, Searching for a “Home”: Examining the Experiences of Asian College Students with Third Culture Kids Backgrounds. The purpose of this email is to confirm your interview appointment. Based on your stated availability, I would like to schedule an interview with you for [date and time] using [chosen interview platform]. At this time expect a call from [my username or phone number for the chosen platform] at [participant’s username/phone number]. If this method or time does not work anymore, please contact me at ymvwf@umsl.mail.edu.

Also, please see the attached interview questions for your review prior to the interview. Again, thank you for your participation and I am looking forward to talking to you in the near future.

● If you chose Zoom for interview platform, please access [Zoom URL link] at your scheduled interview time.

Sincerely,

Yuima Mizutani, M.Ed., NCC, LPC
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling & Family Therapy
University of Missouri Saint Louis
Appendix E

Interview Arrangements Email

Title of the email: Thank you for signing up for my dissertation study.

Dear [participant’s name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study titled, Searching for a “Home”: Examining the Experiences of Asian College Students with Third Culture Kids Backgrounds. The purpose of this email is to schedule your interview appointment and determine the interview platform. If possible, I would suggest we use Facetime on the [suggesting range of time and dates]. If the suggested online tool and/or time range will not work for you, please choose a convenient time using the link to the online schedule software below. Also, please feel free to email me at  if you have any questions. Finally, please see the attached interview questions for your review prior to the interview. Again, thank you for your participation and I am looking forward to talking to you in the near future.

[Scheduling link]

Sincerely,

Yuima Mizutani, M.Ed., NCC, LPC

Doctoral Candidate

Department of Counseling & Family Therapy

University of Missouri Saint Louis
Appendix F

Interview Questions

Here are the interview questions that you will be asked during your video interview. Please feel free to ask me if you have any concerns or questions before the interview sessions. You can also choose not to answer any question or withdraw from study without stating any specific reason.

1. Which of your experiences in college stands out to you?

2. How was your friend network while you were in college?

3. What, if any, impact did your Third Culture and/or international backgrounds have on your social life in college?

4. What, if any, impact did your Asian cultural backgrounds have on your social life in college?

5. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?
Appendix G

Member Check Instructions

Title of the email: Member checking

Dear [participant’s name],

Thank you for your participation in my study titled, Searching for a “Home”: Examining the Experiences of Asian College Students with Third Culture Kids Backgrounds. Since our interview, I have generated themes from all of the participants I interviewed, and I would like your feedback on them through a process called member checking. This email contains the instructions for member checking. Member checking is a commonly used method to ensure the generated themes accurately describe participants’ experiences. In the attached file, you will find the themes I generated several themes which were created based on the interviews of you and the other participants. Each theme was designed to capture the experiences that you and other participants had. Please feel free to make comments on these generated themes after reading the member checking instructions at the top of the document of member check and return them to me by (Dates: two weeks from the date that I send out this email). If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [email redacted]. Again, thank you for your time and help with this study. I am looking forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely,

Yuima Mizutani, M.Ed., NCC, LPC
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Department of Counseling & Family Therapy
University of Missouri, Saint Louis