"The Gospel is in conversation with cultures. If the Church holds back from culture, the Gospel itself falls silent." Pope John Paul II.

1. **Broadly, what is helpful for teachers to know about the culture(s) of their Chinese students?**

   China is diverse. Complex.

   Important Cultural Expressions: **Education. Trust. (Filial) Families. Reclaiming traditions.**

   **Rationale for the efforts:** Religion is part of the American cultural fabric so it is helpful if not important for the students from China to have some understanding about religion. Just like for Americans to do well in China, some understanding and be comfortable about the system of thought, social ethics, religious beliefs and culture, e.g. Confucianism, will be important.

   **Generally speaking, four groups of North American Chinese students with different levels of readiness for performance in school:**
   - Second/third/and some first generation from Chinese-American families with professional or business background and have established their lives and are more assimilated into the American cultures and in the newly adopted home countries. Strong academic aspiration, support from families and built-up readiness.
   - Children of Chinese families with financial means in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong...etc. who may have attended international schools in China or abroad.
   - Middle- and lower-middle classes of all backgrounds, with aspiration for higher education, but might not have the preparedness and connectedness to the society like the first group. Have potential.
   - Lower or Middle-lower classes in terms of socio-economic families who are not assimilated into and/or established within the American society.

**A. Education**

Education is immensely important in Chinese family culture where parents and families would often make sacrifices so that the kids can get the best education possible. The single most important responsibility of a child is to do well in school. This centrally important part of the parent-child relationship calls for the parent to help the child to succeed in his or her studies and for the child to do the best he or she can to excel in school—much more so than in non-Chinese families.

Chinese families see schools and colleges as the ideal institutions where they put their trust in the teachers, principals, administration, and the educational system as a whole. Such trust and expectation puts a huge responsibility onto the system to uphold their promises and integrity.

Historically, education has been established as the honorable means to succeed in society, often times rewarded with official appointments, high ranks and respect by others. (Important historical context: Civil service, the bureaucratic system for governing a large empire, which was invented by the Chinese around 200 BCE and then copied by the colonial powers in the west—Britain and France—and
then modified and introduced by them to the rest of Europe (including Russia) and their colonial empires in India and America. In China, education was the only way to prepare for the competitive examinations through which candidates placed into the civil service. This is why education became the means to succeed in society—successful examination candidates got into government office, and these official positions came with financial rewards and social respect. Because of this, education has always been connected to the idea of success—书自有千钟粟、书中自有黄金屋…. Even though the Chinese civil service was abolished in 1906, it had been in place for close to two thousand years and so, even now, an individual excelling in academic achievement receives notable recognition in family, community and society. Thus, education has a prominent place in the broader Chinese culture, regardless of region and social economic classification.

After 1800's to early-mid 1900's, a period of humiliation by western colonial powers, culminating in the Opium War and the establishment of treaty ports that granted extraterritorial rights to the western powers on Chinese soil, education became, and continues to be, a way to regain individual honor and cultural pride for the Chinese. There is a not-so-subtle sentiment of not wanting the young to waste time and others' sacrifices. In the Chinese context, education is the chief means by which the older generation gives a legacy to the younger generation. E.g., Instead of giving your child money or houses, you sacrifice a lot to give them a good education. (In China, it is said that on average 70% of family income for children's education.)

Another driving force behind the aspiration for education is technocracy, the belief that social advancement is based on knowledge. This gives those who are in the lower socioeconomic- groups the incentive to study hard so as break out of the poverty cycle.

For immigrant families in the U.S. education is the gateway for the kids to succeed in a new environment by getting the best jobs and the best opportunities. Beginning in the 1950's and 1960's, science and engineering were the skills the US was recruiting into the country, and this started the trend in which Chinese families encouraged their children to pursue these studies. (Also: The 150 years of humiliation by western colonial powers, who had superior force of arms, also taught the Chinese the importance of catching up in science and technology, so these fields were emphasized in education beginning in the early 1900s.) They gave and continue to give opportunities for immigrant families. Because of the available opportunities in many parts of the world outside of China, those who are willing and able to get work will seek migration. For many, the dream for a future with opportunities for their children, education holds priority.

B. Trust

Building trust and mutual reliability - KEY to social relationships.

- Not the contractual culture as in the western legal sense of that word. It is the personal relationship that forms the basis of trust, not signing a piece of paper, e.g. debts are to be paid on the strength of a verbal promise, sometimes even without a written contract. (However, this culture of trust is slowly changing.)

- On-going and cultivated formally and informally, including seemingly small gestures to develop trust, e.g. reciprocate kindness and thoughtful deeds.

- Sharing and regular reciprocation, embracing each other's joyful times AND times of misfortunes - expression of unconditionality signals commitment.

- Professional relationship is to be built by being personable and attentive! Personal
relationship is to be taken seriously in a professional relationship where both parties have to feel comfortable in addressing sometimes personal issues and questions with each other. In the US and in the western cultures, the "professional" relationship carries a boundary that becomes hindrance to productive interactions for most Chinese. (In a culture of trust, professional relationships are founded on personal relationships; in other words, we begin with personal relationships and extend them into professional relationships, rather than keeping the two separate. In fact, the two cannot be separated in Chinese culture—this is because all relationships, both personal and professional, are founded on moral obligation, whereas in the west, personal relationships are governed by moral obligation and professional relationships are governed by legal obligation. In the west, strict boundaries are set in professional relationships, and great value is placed on staying “professional,” which means being detached and disinterested. But setting boundaries of this kind violates the basic assumptions of a trust culture, and for this reason it can sometimes become a hindrance to productive interactions in the Chinese context.)

- **Criticism**, especially open criticism, is considered inconsiderate and perhaps even rude. But also taken very seriously. **Effectiveness lies in the context of caring personal relationship.** For example, written evaluation forms will most likely not be responded as hoped. In-person and with trust, conversations and negotiations will be much more productive.

- Trust can be readily **broken when promises are broken, which are interpreted as signals of disrespect and lack of care.**

C. **Tradition**

Traditions, which were the foundation of Chinese culture, lost some ground in China during the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960’s to 70s. However, in recent years, there has been a reclamation of traditions and the concept of carrying on and cherishing traditions. Some recognize that traditions are important for the passing of the cultural legacy from generation to generation, and can actually be FUN (e.g., Chinese festivals are almost always associated with celebration, as compared with festivals in some other cultures)! For overseas Chinese who live in the US it gives meaning to their identity. The intentionality in the desire to reclaim one's roots actually helps keep the culture alive outside of China. The food culture - which includes the knowledge of ingredients, regional specialties, methods of preparation, presentation for special occasions/festivals, and the subtle understanding and respect for individuals in social orders - plays a significant role in how Chinese socialize and celebrate their diverse identities which cumulates in the continuity of many traditions.

D. **Family**

Chinese families, not exclusively but generally speaking, do uphold the ideal that family bonds are based on the parent-child relationship in which the parents are very protective of their children and the children honor their parents above all others. The family, and extended family, are closely tied. The structure of extended family is much more elaborate than the simple categories of cousins, aunts and uncles. Each role is marked by a specific kinship title that describes how it relates to an individual linking him/her to the maternal and paternal sides, and the different kinship titles imply different levels of closeness and hence moral obligation. Traditionally, this specific and yet big-picture relational family structure indicates the responsibilities and rights of an individual in any given relationship. This is still significant in that though unwritten, the subtle understanding is woven into daily interactions. **That flows into other relationship, e.g. between the teachers and students/parents where the teachers are given the role and respect of "elders" with the role's accorded expectations (in Chinese tradition, a teacher was regarded as a student’s “second parent”). The meaning of**
family is thus further extended.

Children are the center of the families and their education is of prime importance, if not top in priority. It is not unusual for grandparents to be an integral part in raising the children. Extended families are sometimes involved to provide support, not necessarily in monetary terms, in helping to provide support in a child's education, e.g. the child is placed with grandparents to enable him or her to attend a better school away from the parents’ home.

*2) What is schooling like in China? What are some of the biggest adjustments Chinese students have to make to American schooling? Is there anything teachers can do to help students with the transition?

Background:

With the children enrolled in American schools, Catholic schools in this case, is a significant transition for everyone, teachers, parents and students.

Competition for quality education is steep and a daily focus in people's lives in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and many other Asian countries with a significant Chinese population.

China is relatively young in developing a modern and comprehensive infra-structure, including its education system. Parents aspire for their children to have access to high achievement opportunities and the limited high quality education is a necessary path for most if not all for future mobility for career opportunities. The tension is high. For example, about 4 years ago, 9.7 million 12th graders took the national college entrance exam 高考 for a limited number of college and university spots. Checking the statistics, about 65+% enrolled into some type of post-secondary training or education programs and the percentage was around 5% in 1977. Without the breakdown it is unclear what are the percentages for different categories but it is safe to say that there were not 6 million spots for first year students in colleges and universities. Where do students go for post-secondary education, the path for future advancements? Even good students are not guaranteed advancement.

With competition and stress being severe, many parents who have the ability would then send their children to the US, UK, Australia where quality education is accessible and with less stress. But moving into a new system has unforeseen challenges and stress. Many parents are quite clueless about the new social and academic environment. This makes the teachers and the schools the key-holder in turning the desire for success into productive behaviors.

What is schooling and education like in China relative to the general US model:

Academic-focus:
- Curriculum is more content-structured. For example, study shows that Chinese students' math education is more concrete-based and the US's approach is more abstract.
- Retaining information and memorization is emphasized, as opposed to expressing individual opinions.
- Exams are the primary if not sole means in measuring abilities of students' and their level of acquired knowledge. Exams are not necessarily looked at in a negative light. The measures have produced productive results in distinguishing students who turn out to be
successful.
- Teachers do most, sometimes all, of the instructions. Students listen, take notes, and absorb the contents of the lessons

Attitude:
- Primary focus of a child's life - to study.
- Hard work is most emphasized.
- Expected to listen to, pay attention and obey the parents and teachers.
- More guilt-trip treatments.
- Young people are encouraged to be restrained and reserved in their behavior, as opposed to giving free rein to their impulses.
- More on nurturing abilities and be the best, and believe that people will come to you (more introverted.). In comparison, the west is more extroverted and young people are groomed to be extroverted.

Chinese students studying in N. America:
Expectation and readiness of parents and students----
Parents definitely have the desire to do whatever they can to help their children to do well in the new system. They aspire to the concepts of American education with little or no deep understanding of the complexity and need help in re-orientation to achieve the following:

- High school students and their parents would need more engaging re-orientation and coaching while younger students would find it easier to enter into the new environment and pick up new habits and social signals.
- Holistic value development in American school system.
- Encourage their children to be creative and do what they like, e.g. services, art, music and sports, and not because these are resume builders.
- Acquire new insights WITHOUT losing themselves. See themselves as contributing members of the school community in terms of the educational process.
- Students and parents - both need more time to play!
- Students and parents should be informed that play is actually an important part of learning, and not time wasted or time taken away from studying. Psychologists have proved that “play,” in which children make creative applications of what they have learned, is an important step that cannot be missed in the learning process. Perhaps some of these studies should be made available to parents.

*. Please refer to Question 1 regarding relationships. Teachers’ level of comfort in entering the students' lives would affect the outcome of the efforts.

3) Please explain the difference between Mandarin and Cantonese. Does the difference impact how a teacher might teach English to students? How so?

AND

4) What are some things to keep in mind when helping to develop oral English in Chinese students?

* See attached document for some references directly related to the language structures that create confusion for students and teachers.

Background
- The written language is uniform. There are local colloquials but the use of vocabularies and grammar has a standard that everyone understands.
- Over 300 dialects, sub-divided into regions. But vary so greatly that sometimes towns 100 miles apart the dialects cannot be understood by their neighbors.

- Mandarin (which is the English translation of “the officials’ dialect”), now known as pu-tong-hua "the common language" is being spoken or at least understood by most Chinese since the 1920's (it was named the “national language” 国语 in the 1920s by the then government, and then when the Communist government took over in 1949, it was renamed the “common language” 普通话 but both terms refer to the same thing). The standard written language was reformed in the 1920s to make it conform closely to Mandarin. It is taught in all schools across the country thus unifying the written language. It is also taught in Taiwan and Singapore, and now increasingly, in Hong Kong. Cantonese is the dialect of the southeastern province of Guangdong. Most of the Chinese to emigrate to the United States, Canada, Australia, as well as Southeast Asia, during the 19th and early 20th century, came from Guangdong, and this is one of the main reasons it is more widely spoken in overseas Chinese communities. Hong Kong is part of the region where Cantonese is spoken. Cantonese was already important as a commercial language during the 19th century, but after China was closed to the outside world during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, Hong Kong, a British colony, became the only port through which foreign goods entered China. This is reason for the importance of Hong Kong in the second half of the 20th century and also the importance of Hong Kong’s language, which is Cantonese.

- For students whose families are not fluent in English their self-consciousness often creates destructive attitude and barricade to their self-confidence. Reactions from others has also caused children to feel ashamed of their families.

- Teachers and school systems have to examine the overall attitude towards bi-lingual and multilingual students and families whether they are being viewed as gifts to others in their contribution to multi-perspective thinking and experiences, literally bringing the world to the schools. Teachers and schools are in the crucial position to facilitate this growth opportunity for the school and society and treat these individuals as truly part of the "family" and not outsiders.

- Coined by Marshall McLuhan, "The medium is the message," the objective is then setting an environment of desire to grow with a caring spirit. That is the message.

- Teachers and school systems can help the surrounding community reshape their above-mentioned attitude. With this life-giving support from the schools, these students and families will most likely become engaging members of the school and community.

**Skill Development**

- Pronunciation and enunciation - **Phonetics training**! Pu-tong-hua speakers share the similar intonation as in English and should have an easier time to bring their spoken English to a well-functioning level. Other dialects like Cantonese has for example 9 tones instead of 4 and with variant nasal and throat sounds, phonetics will greatly help with the change.

- Attached document on structures of the language teachers to understand students' challenges.
- Watch good TV programs, both for learning about American culture and speaking English.
- Sing-along or joining choirs
- Group reading out loud
- Tell their own stories - invitation to celebrate their experiences is always good!
(Cantonese-speaking children suffer from greater disadvantages because (1) Cantonese is more different from English than is Mandarin, as noted above, but also because (2) speakers of Cantonese are often looked down on by Mandarin speakers as being less civilized, more barbarous because they cannot speak the national language but only a dialect (南蛮; 天不怕地不怕只怕南人说官话, etc.). This results in a widespread “cultural inferiority complex” that can be stressful and damaging—the effects of this are now being studied in Hong Kong, as Hong Kong’s Cantonese-speaking children are trying to adapt to a Mandarin-speaking society. In the American classroom, the teacher should hopefully support children through these difficulties by encouraging them to be proud that they have their own language with a rich linguistic history (Cantonese is one of the oldest of the Chinese dialects, Mandarin is one of the newest).

5) Many of Chinese students are not Catholic. What, in your experience, is most effective when discussing issues of religion and faith with Chinese students?

Those choosing the Catholic schools probably do so for one or combination of the following reasons:

- See schools as ideal institutions where they can put all their trust to teachers, principals, and the system completely. Catholic schools are in the category of private schools and the impression is that private schools are better than the public schools in the US. There is an innate trust that what has been promised and promoted will be delivered. This puts a huge responsibility on the part of the system.

- Preference for and trust in the Catholic Church and schools for imparting relatable values of promoting mind, spirit and all aspects of a person; venerating ancestors/ saints (saints are models of noble personhood and highest standard of spirituality); led by religious (priests, nuns, brothers and others) who are real people who have dedicated to the call to be holy and help the lesser in the society; and parents trust their children to be under caring watch in this environment.

- The resurgence in seeing value education as desirable for their children is one of the reasons parents send their children to American schools. In recent years some parents find themselves embracing their Chinese culture through rediscovering Chinese traditions (that they can actually appreciate and enjoy!) Catholic faith models beautiful embracing of traditions. This is a point in connecting the families to the Catholic faith.

How to make religion and faith meaningful?:

- To be authentic in reflecting the high ideals of Catholic faith.

- For non-Catholic Chinese students questions of faith and religion would require empathy and articulation from the teachers in exploring students's repertoire in understanding human and cultural values.

- Catholic in small letter means universal and the Catholic Church embraces cultures through which we live out our faith. Teachers can help students understand and appreciate the mission of Catholic schools by entering into their cultures. Teachers as missionaries.

- Parents too are prepared to be taught. They will do anything for their children!

- Pre-Oriental and Orientation: 1). Program such as Catholicism 101 (not in an academic
format) planned and presented by a committee of Chinese Catholic community people/parents/students, other students, teachers, principal and religious. Together they can offer and continue to be part of the supporting environment. 2). For parents, a session on the history of the school and the difference between public and Catholic schools. Chinese Catholic families can assist. 3). Encourage and invite parents and students into the above process by helping them understand that America culture has a strong religious presence and it would be for their benefit to have a sense of the spirit of the society, much as for an American to do well in China one has to have some sense of the Chinese culture, e.g. Confucianism.

- Living out faith (living the message) is easier to grasp than verbal terminology.

Help students identify in their own lives that which echoes Catholic believes:

...Believing in something bigger and willingness to sacrifice and pursue something bigger.
...Patience and courage.
...Hope brings unconditional kindness, love and faith.
...Consistency and genuineness in teachers' and schools' behavior delivers the foundational message of the mission of Catholic education.
...Relationship cultivated is to elevate people and not for personal gains.

6) What can teachers do in the first few weeks of class to help develop a rapport with Chinese students and/or their families?

Most if not all my suggestions below might have already been considered and/or practiced by many of the teachers and schools. My primary recommendation is to focus on building relationship and cultural sensitivity as the foundation. Teachers and schools are encouraged to tap into their unique skills, resources and experiences from which they can create effective activities.

Authenticity is key...

Step I - With all students on their awareness of their cultures and family traditions
- Practice "Know Yourself", "Know the Students", and "Know the School and Community" in designing relationship building, formal and informal ways. Good teachers model good learner behavior model.
- Encourage exploration with all students. Show impartiality.
- Using common theme to engage all students (by classroom or by other grouping) in ice-breaking exercises, begin by sharing similarities to reflect their understanding of themselves and their families. Then continue with unique stories. Exercise like this can lessen or mediate the effect of cultural sock and involve all students in learning how to navigate.

Step II - With students from different Chinese cultures:
- Schools to offer teachers and staff training on Chinese traditions, basic differences in structure of language and immigration history - the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed as recent as 1965 and teachers can examine their own evolving impressions towards people of Chinese descent.
- Attend to the students as individuals and avoid grouping for simplicity's sake.
- Effective teachers are good learners and model asking questions and refraining from judgmental comments. Before making a comment, ask oneself what the comment reflects if it is posted to oneself. Judgmental attitude and comments invite counter-productive results.
- Teaching instruction targets concepts and class discussions.
- Teachers directly invite student by name to engage can break the ice for students who are not used to speaking up for reasons of language use and/or lack of common background of the subject matters. See Question 5.
- Chinese New Year is the celebration that embodies the rich history and cultural stories. A committee of Chinese Catholic community, parents and students (not exclusively of Chinese descent) to organize a
celebration.

Contributors:
Yuede Bi, Masters in International Peace Studies, Kroc Institute, Notre Dame
Dr. Alice Cheang, translator, teacher, writer, editor and researcher
Dr. Rebecca Cheung, Educational University, Hong Kong and PhD, Psychology, Notre Dame
Ms. Alison Fong, Toronto Piano Teachers Guild
Ms. Miranda Ma, ND International
Ryan Tang, ’16 ND