

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: *JIAO TONG: A GROUNDED THEORY OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' TRANSITION TO AMERICAN TERTIARY EDUCATION*

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University students are more globally mobile than ever before, increasingly receiving education outside of their home countries. One significant student exchange pattern is between China and the United States; Chinese students are the largest population of international students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2014).

Differences between Chinese and American culture in turn influence higher education praxis in both countries, and students are enculturated into the expectations and practices of their home countries. This implies significant changes for students who must navigate cultural differences, academic expectations, and social norms during the process of transition to a system of higher education outside their home country. Despite the trends in students' global mobility and implications for international students' transitions, scholarship about international students does not examine

students' experiences with the transition process to a new country and system of higher education. Related models were developed with American organizations and individuals, making it unlikely that they would be culturally transferable to Chinese international students' transitions.

This study used qualitative methods to deepen the understanding of Chinese international students' transition processes. Grounded theory methods were used to invite the narratives of 18 Chinese international students at a large public American university, analyze the data, and build a theory that reflects Chinese international students' experiences transitioning to American university life.

Findings of the study show that Chinese international students experience a complex process of transition to study in the United States. Students' pre-departure experiences, including previous exposure to American culture, family expectations, and language preparation, informed their transition. Upon arrival, students navigate resource seeking to fulfill their practical, emotional, social, intellectual, and ideological needs. As students experienced various positive and discouraging events, they developed responses to the pivotal moments. These behaviors formed patterns in which students sought familiarity or challenge subsequent to certain events. The findings and resulting theory provide a framework through which to better understand the experiences of Chinese international students in the context of American higher education.

JIAO TONG: A GROUNDED THEORY OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS' TRANSITION TO AMERICAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

by

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PREFACE

天地交而万物通

*“Heaven and earth, in communication with each other,
and all things in consequence, having free course.”*

-I Ching

The words “*jiao tong*” (交通) are contemporarily translated as “transportation,” “travel,” “transit,” and “transition.” The ancient meaning of the characters, 交, “link” or “mix,” and 通, “connection” or “communication,” is the context under which they appear in the I Ching. There, “*jiao tong*” signified an intersection, a big idea. Both definitions are presented to students who study at some of China’s 交通大学, “transportation” universities, to provide context for institutional mission and acknowledgement of the transport that wisdom can provide (B. Wang, personal communication, March 25, 2016). Both the contemporary and traditional translations hold significance to this study and its meaning. International students embark upon physical transit in pursuit of cultural and intellectual transportation, and encounter countless other transitions.

DEDICATION

My people are a people in transition. For several generations, transition was the result of political exile, war, and other circumstances beyond their control. Most recently, it was for the pursuit of happiness, perhaps adventure, and most importantly: the hope of prosperity in a country cobbled together with similar stories and strange names, the hope that each subsequent generation would fit in.

My charismatic, brilliant, polyglot grandfather died decades before I was born, but his decisions shape me daily. Newly arrived in the United Kingdom from the displaced persons' camps after the Second World War, while learning another language and adapting to an unfamiliar culture, he and my grandmother purchased an encyclopedia set – an exorbitant purchase for a family that could barely afford necessities. He and his children read to one another from those books, fumbling to pluck out the words. A generation later, in yet another country, my parents never made my sisters and I use our own money to purchase books, fostered imagination and resourcefulness in creative ways, and emphasized education above all else. The contrasts between and results of their sacrifices and cultural navigation are likely what fostered my interest in international transitions in the first place. Thank you for your many sacrifices and for doing your best to create successful, difference-making members of society. *As tave myliu. Ich liebe dich. Ti amo.* I love you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

University students today are more globally mobile than ever before, resulting in an unprecedented level of cultural, economic, and intellectual exchange.

International student exchange facilitates personal and academic development, contributes to scholarly environments, enhances campus diversity, and assists with institutional research productivity and perception of academic competitiveness (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Stearns, 2009). For these reasons, more than 4.3 million students around the world currently pursue temporary or degree-seeking study at institutions outside of their country of nationality (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015). Of these, more than 40,000 are American students completing degree study outside of the United States, and countless others participate in short-term study (Belyavina & Bhandari, 2012). More than three quarters of a million international students enroll in U.S. degree programs each year, generating billions of dollars of revenue (Institute of International Education, 2012). Nearly 250,000 students come from China alone (Institute of International Education, 2014). The increase in university students who study outside of their home countries is predicted to continue in the coming years (Stearns, 2011).

By participating in studying away from their home countries, more students than ever are volunteering for a significant transition between countries, cultures, and institutions. Cultural competence in education has increased in importance and value as the ease with which students enroll in tertiary education outside their home countries has increased (American Council on Education, 2002). The United States and China have dissimilar cultures and systems of higher education. Chinese culture

is hierarchical, procedure-oriented, and collective (Hofstede Center, 2015). Over the past two decades, higher education in China has undergone reform and massification, a move that has granted access to millions more students and increased public and private tertiary education institutions (Zha, 2011). Chinese higher education is centralized, marked by authoritative professor-student interactions, with an emphasis on rote memorization and evaluation by examination (Bakken, 2000; Li, 2009; Kipnis, 2011). By contrast, American culture is collaborative, highly individualistic, and indulgent (Hofstede Center, 2015). American higher education is decentralized, and two and four-year, public and private, comprehensive and tailored, non-profit and proprietary institutions of all sizes compete to educate American students (Komives & Woodard, 2003). Comparatively less formal, institutions, faculty, and students all possess the flexibility and autonomy to participate in diverse pedagogical and evaluation methods (Schimdtlein & Berdahl, 2005; Pittella, 2006).

The differences in culture and education systems in China and the United States are important, in that they mean international students who move between the two countries have two dramatically different experiences during their education. A smooth transition between countries and systems of higher education is critical for individual wellbeing and success, as well as for institutional aims such as retention. Understanding students' transitions between higher education in China and the United States will help us to understand the complexities of students who experience both environments, and what it means to their experiences and development. As a result, this study helps educators to address individual and systemic influences on students' transition to better support students through the transition.

Purpose

This section describes the purpose and research questions of this study.

Understanding the transitional experiences of students who have studied in China and the United States will help us to understand how they experience and navigate both environments. The purpose of this study is to examine the process of students' transitions from being students in China to students in the United States. To understand the role of educational and cultural context in students' transition, I referenced Baxter Magolda and Porterfield's (1985) Measure of Epistemological Reflection (MER). The MER was developed to assess and compare the cognitive growth patterns of diverse college student populations, and it includes four domains that relate to the context of education and the role of educational practices in guiding development: the role of the learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Asking questions about these areas provided insight into students' comparative understanding of their educational environments and pedagogy in China and the United States. The study also inquired directly about students' experiences with transition and cultural similarities and differences. Specifically, this study investigated the following research questions:

- 1) How do students understand the roles of the learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation methods? How do students experience pedagogical differences?
- 2) How do students experience transition into a system of education outside their home country?

- 3) Do cultural differences in education influence students' larger transition into a new environment and set of academic and social expectations?

These questions address the relationship between culture, pedagogy, cognition, and the experiences of students who participate in and transition between tertiary education systems in China and the United States. Exploration of these research questions provide the foundation for a new theory about how Chinese international students experience transition into American higher education, and this theory can inform the way educators design programs and interact with students in transition.

Rationale/Significance of Study

This section provides an overview of the practical and theoretical significance of this study. First, international students and students abroad have collectively been referred to as the least studied population of students in transition (Evenbeck, 2014). This absence of inquiry does not follow the trend of students' global mobility; Eagan, Stolzenberg, Ramirez, Aragon, Suchard, and Hurtado (2014) found that the percentage of incoming freshmen who intend to study abroad continues to increase, according to data from the Higher Education Research Institute. Similarly, the percentage of international students in the United States is also predicted to continue to increase steadily (Institute of International Education, 2014). Little work has been done to understand international students' experience with transition between systems of higher education, and existing theories of transition are ill-fitting for this type of transition. As a result, understanding the phenomena that occur during transitions across borders will be increasingly important to supporting students. This study has

scholarly significance in the fields of higher and comparative education and applicability for faculty and staff who study and interact with international students.

Additionally, exploring students' experiences in different global higher education settings, educators can develop an understanding of how each country might differently promote learning and development. College student development theory is largely situated in Western and American-centric language and applicability, but often ethnocentrically fitted to students and contexts outside of the United States (Roberts, 2015). Because student services are designed around understanding of developmental patterns (Komives & Woodard, 2003), this could mean that practices are being fitted to student populations to which they are culturally inapplicable, adversely affecting students' experiences with higher education outside of their home countries. The implications of this study will provide a foundation upon which to shift faculty and staff members' approach to student services scholarship and practice, especially to support students who transition between countries and systems of higher education.

Definition of Key Terms

To provide context for this study, I will define terms essential to understanding the research in this section. Culture, pedagogy, cognitive development, and internationalization are terms with mutable interpretation, so it is all the more important to specify their meaning for this study.

Culture

Definitions of culture are as vast and varied as culture itself. Culture is "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people,

communicated from one generation to the next” (Matsumoto, 1997, p. 5). Cultural-developmental psychologists hold that multiple influences, including biological, social, and environmental, contribute to culture (Goodnow, 2012). Cole and Cagigas (2012) and D’Andrade (1996) described culture as a socially constructed, socially inherited resource. Individuals in society simultaneously contribute to and learn about culture as their participation and expectations change with age (Rogoff, 2003). Culture is an ever-evolving collective knowledge learned and passed between generations. Similarly, Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) and Goodnow (2012) defined culture as ways of thinking shared by all or most members of a group.

This study uses Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov’s (2010) presentation of Hofstede’s (1980, 1984) dimensions of culture as a framework. Hofstede’s theory of cultural dimensions encompasses six dimensions that can be compared across cultures- individualism, power distance, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, time orientation, and indulgence- that will be discussed in the literature review. Hofstede’s dimensions presume culture as nationally demarcated; this assumption has been empirically supported and accounts for the presence of subcultures within national culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). As such, this paper similarly assumes “culture” to mean national culture.

Enculturation, Acculturation, and Liminality

Several terms address how shared beliefs and behaviors are communicated over time as “culture,” including socialization into primary and additional cultures. Enculturation refers to the socialization process of learning one’s primary culture (Herskovits, 1948). Acculturation refers to the process that occurs when individuals

come into contact and share cultures, resulting in changes to one or both parties (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Early conceptualization of acculturation described the process as reciprocal exchange of culture, but more contemporary scholarship acknowledges the overriding direction toward learning and adapting to dominant group culture (Kim & Abreu, 2001). Acculturation differs from assimilation in that it describes a cultural exchange; by contrast, assimilation is the process of absorption into a larger, dominant cultural community, resulting in the loss of cultural practices and identity (Sam & Berry, 2010). Finally, liminality is an anthropological term referring to the interstitial; as applied to culture, it means the ambiguity of navigating between one's first and second cultures (Rapport & Overring, 2007).

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the theory and practice of teaching (Ormrod, 2011). Pedagogy refers to both the methods employed in teaching and the theory motivating practice. Critical pedagogy is the blending of pedagogy with critical theory to dismantle dominant and oppressive practices in education (McLaren, 1998). Areas of pedagogy include tools and practices employed to teach, including instructors, methods of delivering information, such as lectures, activities, in-person and digital interaction, and media, and evaluation methods.

Cognition

Cognition is the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding (Ormrod, 2011). Cognitive development is the process by which people progress intellectually, encompassing the areas of thought, reasoning, and making meaning of experience;

cognitive structural theories examine this process (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Cognitive development is viewed by student services educators as a precursor to growth in other domains (Evans et al., 2010). Literature about cognition addresses intellectual processing using terms such as meaning making, cognitive development, and epistemological growth. Because the present paper addresses cognitive development broadly, this terminology will be used based on scholars' use of terminology in existing studies, and interchangeably by the author when commenting generally about cognitive growth.

Student Affairs and Services

“Student services” and “student affairs” describe positions, resources, and services designed to facilitate student learning and development, complimentary to students' curricular experience (Komives & Woodard, 2003). The positions and resources included vary from campus to campus; on campuses in the United States and China, they have included resident life, academic advising, career services, and counseling support (Li, 2009). The terms “student affairs” and “student services” have similar connotations; the former is used primarily in the United States, while the latter has more widespread global utility. Contemporary writings in the fields of higher education and international education sometimes use the terms interchangeably (Seifert, Perozzi, Bodine Al-Sharif, Li, & Wildman, 2014). This work will do the same.

Internationalization and Globalization

The terms “internationalization” and “globalization” are often used interchangeably by individuals meaning “worldwide,” “cosmopolitan,” “globally

mobile,” and more (McCabe, 2001; Knight, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Stromquist, 2007; Childress, 2009; Stearns, 2009; Hudzik, 2011). Rather, the two words are meant as distinctive but related, especially as they pertain to international education.

Globalization implies economic forces, such as investment, trade, and finance, and also military, environmental, and sociocultural elements (Bernstein & Cashore, 2000; Kenen, 1999; Keohane, 2000; Roberts, 2015; Stiglitz, 2013). Because of the power dynamic that drives certain values or economies to dominate this “global” context, many scholars equate globalization with politically and economically powerful countries exerting dominance over less powerful ones (Friedman & Ramonet, 1999; Stearns, 2009). Stearns wrote that globalization can result in the eventual erosion of less dominant cultures, leading to cultural homogeneity (Stearns, 2009).

By contrast, internationalization refers to a more symbiotic, cooperative, multilateral relationship and process. Knight (2004) defined internationalization as integration of an international dimension into organizational purpose, process, and function. Internationalization allows entities to preserve the uniqueness of their culture while encouraging collaboration.

Issues of globalization and internationalization interact to influence society, including education. Globalization has contributed to increased global mobility and ability to exchange ideas on an international scale (Gürüz, 2011; Stromquist, 2007). However, the precision of using “internationalization” conveys the intent of educators who drive the language used in campus efforts and student interactions (McCabe,

2001; Roberts, 2015). To this end, the American Council on Education endorsed the term “internationalization” as best serving the goal of “integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (2007, p. x). For this reason, this paper frames campus efforts to broaden students’ horizons and contribute to broad discourse on world issues as “internationalization.”

International Students

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) define “international students” as those who are not residents of their country of study, who received their prior education in another country, and who cross borders for the purpose of education. The term “foreign students” defines students by their citizenship, and is inclusive of expatriates and students who are transient for reasons other than their pursuit of education; international students are a subset of foreign students (OECD, 2015). Additionally, Stearns (2009) noted that the word “foreign” today implies political incorrectness, and that use of the term “international” creates a more representative, politically correct title for this population. This study used the term “international students” to describe the study’s population, who have come to the United States from China to pursue tertiary education.

Many international students make up part of a population described in the literature as “sojourners.” Bochner (2006) described sojourners as people who move outside of their home country for a specific, temporary task, including work and

study, with the intention of returning to their home country after completing the task. Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002) described that many international students are sojourners, but a subgroup of international students do not intend to return to their home country, and would not be considered sojourners.

Summary of Worldview and Methods

My scholarly worldview and methods used for this study are explained in this section. This exploration of culture, pedagogy, cognition, and transition is shaped by my scholarly worldview, which is pragmatic with constructivist leanings. Garrison (1995, p. 718) used the term “pragmatic social behaviorism” in his study of cognition to describe learning as contextual, socially constructed, and driven by practical application, a view also prescribed by educational philosopher John Dewey. The term aptly describes the paradigm of the present study. The pragmatic worldview focuses on the intended consequences of research, and encourages researchers to employ multiple forms of data collection and analysis to provide the best understanding of an issue (Creswell, 2009). The constructivist tradition positions reality as multiple and dynamic, requiring understanding of participants, phenomenon, and context (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Creswell, 2009). Constructivist epistemology and pragmatic worldview have both shaped my position as a researcher, as well as the lens through which I have approached, interpreted, and applied this study.

Mertens (2010) noted the importance of philosophical framework to determining research methodology. Because existing scholarship considers questions addressing the “what” of the patterns of development exhibited by university students

in China and the United States, the present study will consider the “how” and “why,” practices that contribute to these patterns and students’ experiences that result. Qualitative methods provide a richness and depth about the way students experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009).

I have applied qualitative methodology, grounded theory inquiry, to address the research questions and develop better understanding of culture, pedagogy, cognition, and students’ experiences with transition. Because culture is both context and phenomenon in the current study, qualitative methodology allows exploration of a “phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). This is the situation for the present study, as the cultural contexts of China and the United States play a deep-seated role in shaping pedagogy and students’ experiences. Grounded theory researchers as appreciative of the research process, intuitive, authentic, and constantly revising and making meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998); this suits me as a researcher. Next, grounded theory encourages flexible interaction with participants in their natural settings, including data analysis; participants in grounded theory studies are invited into a “collective process of discourse and meaning making” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Hearing participants’ voices and experiences is the central aim of this study. Finally, the grounded theory method addresses questions of “how” and “why” questions about process (Creswell, 2013). In this instance, the processes of cultural socialization in post-secondary education and students’ transitions in post-secondary education have been examined.

The research questions of this study focus on how the pedagogical methods in higher education in China and the United States differ, and how students experience transition between countries' systems of higher education. Participants in this study are students with one or more semesters of post-secondary study in both China and the United States. I used criterion-based convenience sampling to recruit participants. Participants took part in semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour in length. Interviews were transcribed and shared with participants for member checking. A subset of participants engaged in cross-transcript member checking of codes, themes, and the emerging theory and model.

Transcripts were analyzed in multiple steps, guided by the theoretical propositions of this case study. I used microanalysis to conduct line-by-line analysis of transcripts to break down and categorize data, followed by axial coding to create categories across transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2009). Finally, I applied theoretical coding to compare the themes to the study's initial propositions to develop theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Scholars of comparative education, faculty with experience in China and the United States, grounded theorists, and study participants provided insight and feedback to triangulate findings from the data and enhance the goodness of the methods. Use of multiple data sources and voices in the data analysis process, including participant interviews, member checking, and external review also allowed for multiple perspectives to address the research questions.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations of this study are presented in this section. This study examined the experiences of students who have participated in post-secondary study in China and the United States, in order to draw connections between the cultures, pedagogical practices, patterns of cognition, and student transitions. Given the highly contextual nature of this study, findings are not generalizable to all globally-mobile students; that is, for all international and foreign students, short-term and degree-seeking, transitioning to and from study in the United States. This study is not meant to provide generalizable findings; rather, the purpose of the study was to develop a theoretical model which can later be tested for fit with other populations and contexts. Next, circumstances specific to students' transitions may be influenced by the context of this study: one large research university near the national capitol. Finally, all of the participants communicated in English as a second or third language. To better seek the essence of participants' experiences, participants received advance copies of interview questions, were welcomed to provide written reflections as a supplement to their interviews, and participated in member checking to ensure that their experiences had been appropriately documented.

Conclusion

The global mobility of university students means that large numbers of students experience transitions between countries and culturally different systems of higher education. Despite the increasing frequency of international student transition, existing scholarship does not address the complexity of this change, nor account for students' experiences through the transition. This qualitative study of students'

experiences and perceptions and resulting theory built a foundation through which to address this phenomenon.

This chapter has outlined the background that led to the development of my research questions. Additionally, I have provided key terms, a summary of methods, and limitations to provide context and clarity for the project. Most importantly, this chapter has described the significance of this study. The subsequent chapters build upon this overview with the literature and methods that provided a foundation for this study, the findings and significance that resulted from eighteen participants' stories, and implications and opportunities for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

To build a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between culture, pedagogy, and students' experiences in higher education, this chapter will first explore each topic within the literature individually. First, I will provide an overview of literature related to culture, focusing on studies of regional cultural patterns and Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions (1980, 1984, 2010), a key component of the theoretical framework of this study. A description of higher education and student services in China and the United States will follow, framed by the cultural and historical influences that have shaped both countries' models. I will then summarize student development theory, including psychosocial, cognitive, identity, and ecological theories, and studies of development as they pertain to university students. Then, I will present literature about international students. Finally, I will identify gaps, critiques, and limitations of existing literature to support the present study.

I approached the literature as a set of sensitizing concepts that were expanded upon throughout the study. Charmaz (2003) described sensitizing concepts as starting points to inform a study and from which to explore a topic. The sensitizing concepts that guided this study include culture, higher education in the United States and China, international students, and theories of student development and transition.

Culture

The study of culture across disciplines including psychology, human development, anthropology, sociology, political science, art, history, and philosophy have resulted in numerous ideas about what shapes and defines culture (D'Andrade,

1996). For the tertiary education environment, Kuh and Whitt (1988) described culture as an interpretive framework through which to understand events and actions. As defined above among the key terms of this paper, this study accepts the definition of culture as “the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, communicated from one generation to the next” (Matsumoto, 1997, p. 5), and shared via socialization. Culture encompasses the human-made aspects of environment, including physical elements such as architecture, rituals, and religious and educational practices, as well as less tangible components, such as values, beliefs, and social norms (Triandis, 2009). Hofstede et al. (2010) described culture as less palpable, a set of values and behaviors commonly understood across members of a cultural group. Collectively, Triandis outlined that tangible and intangible components influence one another to create a “shared theme” of culture (2009, p. 191).

Nation and Culture

The question of culture’s correspondence to nation has been somewhat debated in the literature. Sadri and Flammia (2011) noted that the terms seem to be used synonymously but are not equivalent in meaning. The United States and China are both nation-states that contain a national culture and also numerous distinctive subcultures (Hofstede Center, 2015). For cases like these, to use culture and nation as tantamount might imply that the majority group culture is being used to define other cultural groups (Sadri & Flammia, 2011). However, studies of culture by Hofstede et al. (2010) found that even in less homogenous nations, there are values shared across subcultures that create national cultures not exclusively linked to that nation’s

dominant culture, including in the United States, a nation with numerous subcultures. With this consideration accounted for, Hofstede's dimensions presume culture as nationally demarcated; Hofstede's assumption has been empirically supported and accounts for the presence of subcultures within national culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). This paper similarly assumes "culture" to mean national culture.

Regional Patterns of Culture

Several studies have identified regional themes of culture. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) examined cultural patterns using data from the World Values Survey, which numbers 400,000 respondents in 100 countries. They described two values spectra: traditional versus secular-rational values, and survival versus self-expression values. Traditional values include religion, family, and deference to authority; traditional societies tend to have high nationalism. Secular-rational values place less emphasis on family values and hierarchy, instead placing value on individual preferences and rights. Survival values emphasize economic and physical security, and tend to accompany ethnocentrism and low tolerance; self-expression values prioritize political engagement, social responsibility, and openness to diversity.

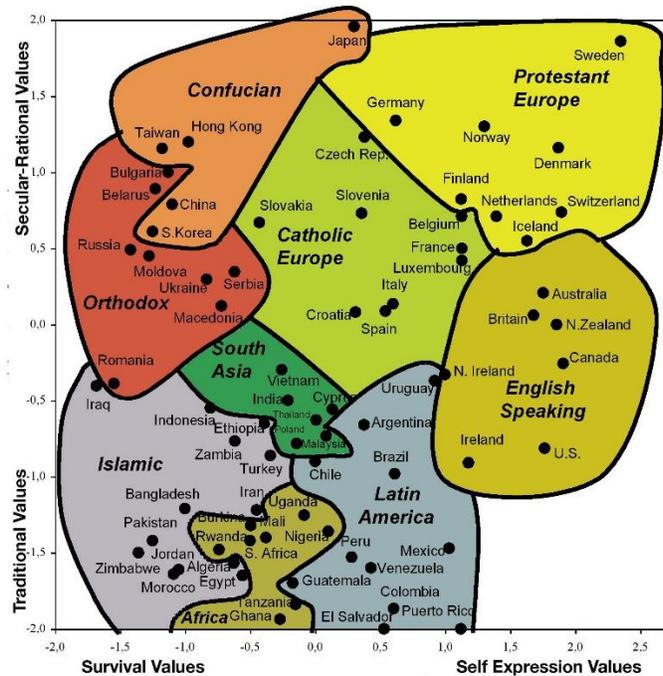


Figure 1. Regional patterns of world values.

Note. Adapted from the World Values Survey, by Inglehart and Welzel, 2015.

Figure 1 presents Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) findings of regional patterns of culture along the traditional versus secular-rational values, and survival versus self-expression values spectra. China ranked as having moderate secular-rational values and moderate survival values (World Values Survey, 2015). This might be expressed as having low religious commitment while adhering to values of family and authority, as well as prioritizing economic and physical security (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). The United States ranked as having high self-expression values and moderate traditional values. This might be expressed as having moderate nationalism and high levels of political engagement, social responsibility, and openness to diversity.

Similar patterns in regional values have been observed in other studies. In 1991, the Wharton School of Business started the Global Leadership and

Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study, to examine societal similarities and differences between cultural values, as well as how these relate to people's ideas of "good" leadership (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007). Based on the work of Hofstede (1980), the World Values Survey (2008), and others, the GLOBE team identified ten culture clusters: Confucian Asia (including China), Southern Asia, Latin America, Middle East, Nordic Europe, Eastern Europe, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Anglo (including the United States). In a country-specific examination of desirable leadership traits, Chinese people preferred group-oriented leaders, whereas Americans preferred participative leaders (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007).

Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions

As the study of cultural and cross-cultural psychology has progressed, scholars have developed frameworks through which to evaluate cultural differences. Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions (1980, 1984, 2010) is one such framework and will be used to guide this study. Anthropologists Inkeles and Levinson (1954) speculated about cultural patterns and loosely predicted categories through which culture might be comparatively viewed. Pursuant to this work, Hofstede (1980) was the first to conceptualize and empirically support culture as a self-contained concept. While employed by multinational corporation IBM, Hofstede collected quantitative data between 1967 and 1973 about the values and behaviors of company personnel in forty countries. He replicated his initial work in several subsequent studies to include participants from seventy-six countries. From the data, Hofstede and colleagues first identified four themes or "dimensions" of national culture, which Hofstede et al.

(2010) define as “an aspect of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures” (p. 31) that interact to present unique aspects of culture. Subsequently, using the Chinese Values Survey, quantitative data from twenty-three countries, Bond and Hofstede (1984, 1987) identified a fifth cultural dimension of time orientation, particularly relevant for comparisons of the East and West. Finally, Minkov and Hofstede (2012) used World Values Survey data to support a sixth dimension of culture, indulgence.

Framing culture through Hofstede’s dimensions allows for comparison of countries’ cultures based on uniform categories. In their current form, the six dimensions are power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, long term orientation, and indulgence (Hofstede Center, 2015). The following paragraphs present Hofstede’s dimensions of culture, discuss the positions of the United States and China within each dimension, and provide examples of how each dimension is observable independently and with other dimensions in Chinese and American culture. Each dimension will be discussed as it pertains to pedagogy and higher education. The Hofstede Center provides a country comparison tool which positions countries along each dimension on a scale of one to 100. A quantified depiction of how China and the United States compare along Hofstede’s dimensions is shown in Figure 2:

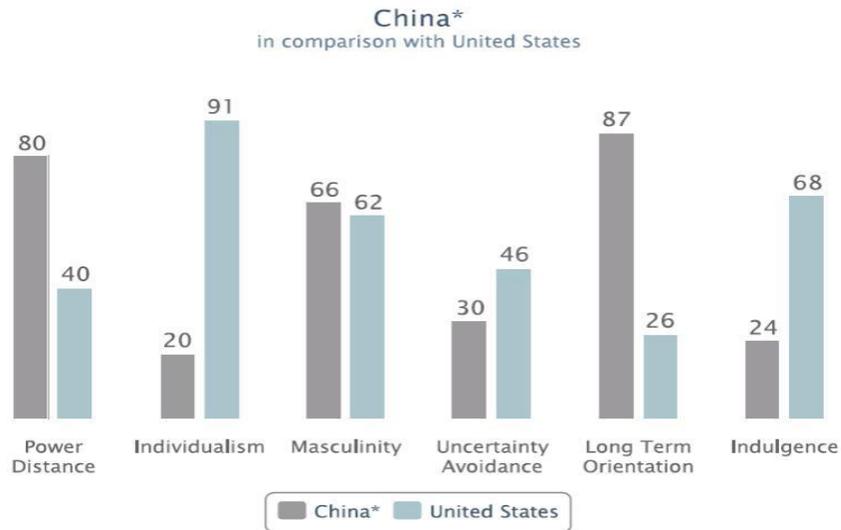


Figure 2. Comparison of China and U.S. on Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

Note: Adapted from Hofstede Center, 2015.

Power distance. Power distance refers to the degree to which less powerful individuals within a culture expect and accept unequal power distribution. In cultures with a high power distance, hierarchic social structures influence decision making, whereas in lower power distance cultures, power distribution is more even, and decision making more democratic. As a cultural dimension, power distance expresses cultural attitude towards societal decision making and power inequities (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010). The dimension of power distance is measured through the way that people perceive distribution of power rather than actual hierarchic social structure, as this determines cultural values through social norms (Hofstede et al., 2010).

China has one of the highest power distance scores in the world. Describing Chinese culture on the dimension of power distance, the Hofstede Center wrote that “people should not have aspirations beyond their rank” (Hofstede Center, 2015).

Individuals are highly influenced by hierarchy and authority; as a result, a dichotomous superior/subordinate relationship exists in family and professional structures. This clearly defines individuals' roles in society, but provides little defense against abuses of power. Paradoxically, individuals' awareness of abuse of power may be diminished because members of high power distance cultures tend to have great optimism about leaders' capacity for leadership (Hofstede Center, 2015). These beliefs and practices contribute to the Chinese high power distance score.

The United States is on the low-middle end of the global power distance spectrum. As a result, there is a cultural emphasis on equality and individual rights alongside a political "hierarchy established for convenience" (Hofstede Center, 2015). Political democracy, for example, is designed to promote individual choice of elected officials who govern society (Altbach, 1998). Even higher-ranking members of hierarchy and information sources are fairly accessible to individuals, and individuals possess the ability to participate in decision making and information sharing. The degree to which individuals in the United States are able to express opinions through media and social activism are examples of participation in lower power distance culture.

Uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the level of structure or ambiguity that is tolerated by a group, and the subsequent beliefs and structures that are created to avoid ambiguity (Hofstede et al, 2010). Cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are referred to as highly structured or "tight" societies, marked by clear policies, laws, and strict processes. "Loose" cultures are generally more adaptable with less clearly defined policies and processes. The tightness or looseness

of culture is determined by society members' comfort with regulation or ambiguity, as well as perception of social norms related to these (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Chinese culture exhibits moderately low uncertainty avoidance. The Hofstede Center (2015) notes that uncertainty avoidance varies in different areas of society; for example, individuals are concerned with rules and "Truth," though the Chinese written language is character based and can be interpreted to have different meanings. True of cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, Chinese tend not to be outwardly emotionally expressive (Li, 2009; Hofstede Center, 2015). Kipnis (2011) notes that the low uncertainty avoidance in China may shift, as change in political and economic climate in China has required the Chinese to be adaptable and comfortable with change and ambiguity.

The United States has a globally moderate level of uncertainty avoidance, though slightly higher than China's. Americans tend to be accepting of new ideas, adaptable to new experiences, and tolerant of beliefs and practices; the First Amendment of the United States Constitution is an example of these values made into policy (Bird, Mackin, & Schuster, 2006). Individuals do not require high levels of structure or rules, and are somewhat emotionally expressive.

Individualism. Individualism is the degree of interdependence maintained among members of society, and the emphasis of individual versus group identity and rights (Hofstede et al., 2010). Individualism is paired opposite of collectivism. Members of collectivist cultures believe that individuals are more malleable than the social world, whereas members of individualistic cultures believe that it is more plausible for the social world to bend around the individual (Hong, 2009).

Individualistic cultures emphasize personal activities, goals, and desires, while collectivist cultures value greater consideration of societal implications of behaviors (Brislin & Kim, 2003). Collectivist cultures often place higher emphasis on the family unit and larger community, as well as higher consideration of self in the context of society, whereas individualistic cultures prioritize care of self and family (Hofstede et al., 2010). Studies have suggested cultural divides between Eastern and Western countries, with Eastern countries generally being more collectivist (Brislin & Kim, 2003). In his early study of culture, Hofstede (1980) used quantitative data collected from IBM employees around the world and found a significant relationship between collectivist culture and low affluence and social mobility. There is also evidence that more developed countries exhibit higher levels of individualism, whereas less developed countries adopt a more collectivist approach.

Very low levels of individualism are demonstrated in Chinese culture (Hofstede et al., 2010; Kipnis, 2011). As a collectivist culture, community relationships in China take priority over the possibility of individual gain. Responsibility to one's family and community is held in high regard. The reward for "unquestioning loyalty" in collectivist cultures is shared care by other members of groups, including family and business units (Hofstede et al., 2010).

American culture is one of the most individualistic in the world (Hofstede et al., 2010). People are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families, and are expected to be independent, initiative-taking, and self-reliant in professional interactions. Rewards are earned by asserting individual competence; as a result, individuals tend to be competitive and place value on individual merit. This

mentality contributes to the tendency of Americans' relationships outside of family units to be somewhat superficial for longer periods of time than in collectivist cultures (Hofstede Center, 2015).

Assertiveness. The balance or prevalence of traits associated with motivation composes the cultural dimension of assertiveness (masculinity) versus modesty (femininity). The dimension is connected to the perception of gendered behavior, with assertiveness parallel to superiority and modesty parallel to enjoyment. Modesty shows in cultures that value feelings, the nurturing of relationships, and care for the quality of life, whereas assertiveness presents in competition for rankings, resources, and power. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

China and the United States have similar scores of moderately high assertiveness. Both cultures are competitive and success-oriented. Individuals in both cultures sacrifice leisure time to invest in professional pursuits to merit money and power; Americans in particular have been noted by cultural outsiders to "live to work" (Hofstede Center, 2015). The importance and prevalence of high-stakes testing in education, employed in both the U.S. and China, is an example of cultural assertiveness. Students' educational potential is largely determined by success on pre-university examination, and their outcomes determine access to elite higher education (Li, 2009; Kipnis, 2011).

Time orientation. Hofstede (1980) first referred to time orientation as "Confucian Dynamism," a dimension of culture that encompasses the consideration of chronology and future orientation as it relates to individual behavior. Time orientation was added to Hofstede's early conceptualizations of cultural dimensions

as a result of the Bond Chinese Values Survey, which found patterns not explained via the first four dimensions (Hofstede et al., 2010). Cultures with low scores in this dimension emphasize tradition and tend to be averse to change. Higher scores, or long-term orientation, mean that individuals tend to be pragmatic and view change as highly dependent on context. Long-term cultures also emphasize preservation of resources as an investment in the future. Hofstede et al. (2010) noted a regional tendency of Western cultures to be lower scoring on this dimension, while longer-term orientation is found in Eastern cultures.

China has one of the highest national time orientation scores in the world (Hofstede et al., 2010). This means that the culture is pragmatic, perseverant, and able to adapt tradition to modern conditions. Long-term orientation can be seen in Chinese society in the approach to education; education is valued perhaps above all else as a means of family and community advancement for the future (Kipnis, 2011).

The United States has a globally-average score on time orientation. As such, Americans are respectful of tradition while perceptive of new and evolving information. Technology development and access to information, particularly via the internet, are examples of American time orientation in action. In the business world, Americans desire expedient results and measure performance quarterly (Hofstede Center, 2015).

Indulgence. Cultural level of indulgence refers to the amount to which individuals submit to desire and immediate gratification. Indulgence, or open fulfillment of desires, is the paired opposite of restraint, regulation and denial of

desires, in this cultural dimension. Cultures with low levels of indulgence tend to be more pessimistic and more governed by social norms.

China has one of the lowest indulgence scores in the world, consistent with East Asian regional grouping on this dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010). This means that there is societal emphasis on controlling one's individual desires. Deep forethought prefaces major decision making, including decisions about education, career, and relationships (Li, 2009; Kipnis, 2011). Additionally, families plan and save for children's educations for years in advance, making significant financial sacrifices for the longer-term goal of education (Kipnis, 2011). However, contemporary examples provide evidence that China's low indulgence rating is changing. Hong (2009) shared an example of a young man who bid more than seven times China's per capita income for a "lucky" license plate number. Chinese university students are a large segment of the luxury goods market (Shao, 2014). The historic conservative spending and modest expression of wealth by the Chinese seems to have shifted for the university student generation.

By contrast, the level of indulgence exhibited in the U.S. is among the highest in the world (Hofstede Center, 2015). This is exhibited in the increasingly consumer-oriented process through which American students select a university (Swartz, 2014). The amenities provided and expected on American campuses have expanded to meet students' need for wide and immediate gratification through activities, recreation, housing, and dining options (Grofum, 2014; Swartz, 2014). However, the Hofstede Center (2015) noted the unique ways in which this dimension of culture interacts with others to present "contradictory attitudes and behaviors" in American society. For

example, there is an incongruent tendency to “work hard and play hard,” to value being high achieving and free spirited, and to both decriminalize and forbid substance use.

Dimensional interactions and shifts. Even within quantifiable dimensions of culture, culture remains an evolving entity. Dimensions combine and interact to present as different cultures. Additionally, major events and movements can cause a collective shift in beliefs and practices, and subtle shifts in ideology over time can modify culture. For example, the Hofstede Center (2015) cited 9/11 as an event that shifted Americans’ level of uncertainty avoidance, as subsequent political action increased security monitoring and structuring of processes. China’s level of assertiveness has increased in recent years. This is attributed to two major influences: an increasingly competitive market economy and a population boom that has necessitated competition for resources- particularly higher education (Kipnis, 2011; Li, 2009). As China’s market economy has grown, self-expression and extraverted behaviors have also become more acceptable (Hong, 2009).

Dimensions also interact differently in various cultures. Despite the fact that the U.S. and China exhibit similar levels of assertiveness, China’s low individualism score means that the Chinese are assertive but deferential to community and family (Hofstede, et al., 2010). In order to sustain a political democracy such as the United States, moderate power distance and individualism are required. Upon reading about China’s low uncertainty avoidance score, typically marked by high levels of community tolerance, one might be surprised to learn about the hostile climate for the LGBT community in China. This is another example of how dimensions interact.

Chinese culture exhibits high power distance and high time orientation, so regard for traditional values might contribute to lower exhibited tolerance. Similarly, despite relatively low uncertainty avoidance scores and high individualism, church attendance in the U.S. has increased over the past century, possibly due to time orientation (Hofstede Center, 2015).

Hofstede's dimensions of culture provide a framework through which to interpret and compare national cultures. Positioning and understanding China and the United States along the dimensions illustrate the link between values and behaviors observable in political, economic, and interpersonal situations. The dimensions also connect to patterns and norms in educational practices to provide hearty examples of the ways in which culture manifests in higher education environments.

Culture Shock

“Culture shock” refers to the psychological disorientation experienced by people navigating a new, unfamiliar cultural environment. The term was first used by Oberg (1960), who defined culture shock as “anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 177). When people experience a knowledge system that is different from the one shared by members of their home culture, they experience uncertainty and confusion (Hong, 2009). Oberg (1960) theorized that culture shock occurs in four sequential stages: euphoria, irritation, adjustment, and biculturalism. Individuals experiencing cultural euphoria focus on the similarities between cultures, as well as positive feelings related to the exotic and exciting nature of cultural differences. Cultural irritation occurs as small problems become large obstacles, and individuals enter a period of crisis and judgment related

to the new culture. Next, cultural adjustment is a period of navigation and development of cultural cues, which increases the predictability and control individuals have when interacting with a new culture. Finally, biculturalism refers to an individual's ability to inhabit both the original and new culture while understanding the strengths and challenges associated with each. Individuals move through the stages of culture shock at various speeds, ranging from a few months to several years, and not all individuals achieve biculturalism (Oberg, 1960). Culture shock can be alleviated as people acquire the knowledge, customs, and expectations of the new culture (Hong, 2009).

Studies of culture shock and expatriate experiences have confirmed the themes found in Oberg's original theory (Ferraro & Briody, 2013). No studies seem to explicitly examine the process of culture shock experienced by international students on campuses in the U.S. Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) studied the culture shock of male international students on a Canadian university campus and found that social interactions moderated students' experiences during each stage of culture shock. Studies of culture shock have been built into studies of international students' acculturation processes, described later in this review of literature.

Higher Education in China

From childhood, Chinese students' access to and experiences in education are highly guided by their family and government (Yang, 2011). Since the Han dynasty (200 BC to 220 AD), the Chinese education system has been highly centralized and valued (Zha, 2011). Present-day government officials perceive education as a means of encouraging uniformity, and still exert significant influence on the Chinese

education system (Postlethwaite, 1988). Private education was abolished in the mid-twentieth century. While private education has slightly rebounded in the past two decades, the majority of institutions remain large, public entities (Hayhoe, 2011). Despite the “massification” of higher education in recent years, access to university study remains extraordinarily competitive, and students must compete nationally with exam scores to gain entry (Zha, 2011). Zha (2011) noted that government determines university access, and less than twenty-five percent of Chinese students earn places at institutions of higher education.

Government influences the family value of education while also controlling the access to and policies and practices within the education system. Chinese parents have a global reputation for their level of “educational desire,” the aspiration and support of their children’s tertiary education (Kipnis, 2011; Wang, 2011; Zha, 2011). Tertiary education in China is critical for building social and economic capital, and families place intense pressure on the academic success of their children (Kipnis, 2011).

Chinese education is based on the idea that students must first learn via rote memorization; later, on their own, they will be able to apply these memorized concepts and thereby learn additional information (Kipnis, 2011). Zhao (2013) stated that misinterpretation of Confucian teachings- combining the values of filial piety, respect for one’s elders, with the Confucian importance of education- resulted in rote memorization practices in Chinese education. As a result, imitation is believed to be the heart of social order, reflected in the hierarchical organization of Chinese society (Bakken, 2000). Chinese teachers and parents emphasize the ability of children to

memorize, including classic essays, as early as primary school. “Success” on exams means rote memorization (Kipnis, 2011). It is believed that this memorization facilitates children’s content knowledge and creative synthesis, as memorization builds the structured foundation necessary for children to be nurtured to create (Kipnis, 2011).

In the Chinese classroom, instructors are seen as the sole and ultimate authority (Li, 2009; Kipnis, 2011; Zhang, 1999). Courses are conducted in a lecture format with limited active interaction between professors and students (Zhang, 1999). As Kipnis (2011) noted, “If the student is to learn by imitating the teacher/leader, then debate and questioning become irrelevant” (p. 91). The inability to question professors was also noted in Li (2009), “In China, we students follow the professor... I cannot turn against my professor because it can be very costly” (Li, 2009, p. 212). Grouped with peers during late secondary school based on their primary area of academic strength, students attend class and socialize within siloed groups. In this model, because students generally remain with the same small group of peers, students’ contact with new ideas and opinions is constrained (Zhang, 1999).

The vocational and social trajectories of students in China are determined through a strict examination process where precision is valued (Kipnis, 2011; Moriguchi, Evans, Hiraki, Itakura, & Lee, 2011; Postlethwaite, 1988; Zhang, 2008). Exams are weighed heavily for success in courses and in life, including the major examinations required for vocational specialty testing and ultimately for university admittance (Kipnis, 2011; Ryan, 2011). Testing tracks students into areas of study

during early secondary school, and students subsequently focus on courses related to their specialty (Li, 2009; Zhang, 1999).

Although students' vocational pathways are largely controlled by examinations and government need, the level of access of Chinese students to tertiary education has increased dramatically over the past century. Part of the change in access resulted from education reform and expansion of types of Chinese universities. After the 1949 revolution, Chinese higher education was organized after the Soviet model, and universities offered niche academic program specialties in sport, agriculture and forestry, art, medicine, business, engineering, politics and law, and military studies (Zha, 2011). "Normal" universities were historically teacher training universities, though many now offer other academic majors (CACUS, 2016). Comprehensive universities offer a wide range of academic and research programs (CACUS, 2016).

Zha (2011) described the pyramid model with increased opportunities for tertiary study that resulted from the massification movement since the 1990s. The contemporary pyramid model reflects an increased number of comprehensive universities, second-tier institutions, and private universities. A select number of universities designed by the Chinese Ministry of Education to prepare students for global issues are at the top, followed by a large number of universities to provide tertiary education to the professional work force, and a large base of vocational schools to educate laborers (Zha, 2011). In addition to the types of Chinese public universities, the number of private universities has increased over the past two decades (Butrymowicz, 2012; Zha, 2011). The increase of private education, which

is less academically competitive than state institutions, has increased students' access to tertiary education, but tuition at private institutions is higher than at public universities (Butrymowicz, 2012; Zha, 2011).

Student services are a relatively new addition to Chinese universities, and their breadth and importance have been determined by governmental needs (Li, 2009). In a study of student services professionals and their preparation, Li (2009) noted that student activities are designed by government officials and prescribed without accounting for students' developmental needs; the Activities are organized by university staff under the direction of the Communist Youth League Committee.

In the past decade, staff positions have been created to support faculty with student activities, career counseling, and wellness programs. Because of the stigma of socioemotional and mental health issues in China, counseling and wellness services had long been ignored; this changed as a result of governmental pressure to address and reduce the dramatic number of student suicides (Li, 2009). Career counseling is viewed as the most important student service because of the role of employment in maintaining political stability, and as a result, is still largely performed by faculty (Li, 2009). In the Chinese education system, students test into academic or vocational specialties in secondary school (Postlethwaite, 1988; Zhang, 1999). Cheng (1998) referred to the process as "two-way selection" (p. 23), which replaced strict job assignment as the result of social demand. However, opportunities to explore career opportunities or change majors remain low to nonexistent (Zhang, 1999; Li, 2009). Additional areas, including residence halls and orientation

programs, are slowly gaining traction, largely adapted from practices on American campuses (Li, 2009).

Higher Education in the United States

The American higher education system affords countless ways through which to participate. More than seventy percent of Americans pursue higher education in some form after secondary school graduation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The American system has a philosophical foundation of merit-based advancement and an egalitarian system; founded in the English tradition of education for the elite, American higher education has evolved to include one of the highest emphases on open access to tertiary study in the world (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 2005).

Higher education in the United States is moderately decentralized, which means that federal regulation and funding exert influence while affording a high level of governance to institutions with varied funding structures and accreditation processes (McGuinness, 2005). The makeup of institutions of higher education is also varied, including online distance institutions serving thousands of students, two-year vocational and preparatory “community” colleges, and four-year public and private institutions of sizes from a few hundred to many thousand students (Lyons, 1993).

Decision making is also highly decentralized within institutions, and administrators, faculty, and even students share power. Decisions about curriculum are often held by the state and institution level, and decisions about content and pedagogy are determined by faculty (Altbach, 2005). Describing the balance required by a decentralized model, Schmidlein and Berdahl (2005) wrote that higher

education in the United States is simultaneously autonomous from and accountable to federal oversight and institutional constituents, including faculty and staff, students, alumni, and governing bodies. Because of the decentralized decision making and governance of American institutions of higher education, it is difficult to make generalizations about American educational practices.

The teaching and learning process in the United States varies “from student to student, from institution to institution, from discipline to discipline, from one scholar or teacher to another, and from one level of student development to another” (Schimdtlein & Berdahl, 2005, p. 71). Broadly, American pedagogy emphasizes content and creativity, discussion, debate, and peer learning (Pittella, 2006). Pittella wrote that the goal of American educators is to provide opportunities to inform, consider, and define the place of knowledge in students’ lives, including through “an atmosphere of scholarly dissent and ethically charged argument,” (p. 211), “provocative, open-ended, subject-relevant questions” (p. 217), and “lively and meaningful participation by students” (p. 218). As such, students in American institutions of higher education have a great deal of autonomy and decision making. Content area evaluation somewhat influences students’ ability to pursue areas of study, but students are largely free to choose their majors.

Student Services in American Higher Education

The field of student services emerged in the mid-twentieth century to support and supplement the curricular component of higher education in the United States. Student affairs grew to accommodate the diversification and increased size of the student population, notably as a result of the enrollment of post-World War II

veterans and women in higher education, as well as the expansion of needs that this enrollment increase encouraged. For example, increased enrollment contributed to increased resources and attention to career counseling and student development (Komives & Woodard, 2003). Additionally, post-war national directives encouraged institutions of higher education to promote civic engagement and global citizenship. As universities became venues for not only academic preparation but career and citizenry training, educators began to speak more about holistic education of the student. Today, functional areas in student services include academic advising, enrollment management, career services, counseling, fraternity and sorority life, international student services, study abroad, student activities, leadership programs, multicultural affairs, residence life, service learning, student activities and unions, student conduct, wellness, recreation, athletics, and more (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

Student services can assist students' learning and development (Komives & Woodard, 2003; ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Evans et al., 2010). Sanford's (1962) longitudinal study of collegiate women demonstrated that the college environment influenced learning and development beyond simply learning course content. This revelation reframed student services practice and helped to inspire other scholars' work, creating a foundation for the area of college student development theory. Scholars of student development have shaped an entire discipline around the academic, social, emotional, and environmental climates that best inspire meaning making in college students (Evans et al., 2010). As the study of college students expanded, educators further assessed students' personality, performance, and

interaction with the collegiate environment, and expanded the scope of student services to vast administrative and interpersonal aspects of student life (Komives & Woodard, 2003). New areas of student services emerged to support and sustain opportunities for growth, bolstered by theories about university student development.

Student Development Theory

Student services in higher education have continued to expand, accompanied by a growing body of literature about how students develop and what influences this growth. Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) identified four components of theoretical knowledge about student development for student services practitioners: “who the student is in developmental terms, how development occurs, how the college environment can influence student development, and toward what ends development in college should be directed” (p. x). Research specific to college student development began with theorists Sanford (1962; 1966; 1967), Heath (1968), Chickering (1969), and Perry (1968). As a result, these early theories became central to the profession, and the construction of student services was guided by this body of knowledge. Though dated, these early student development theories remain among the first taught to student services personnel in graduate preparation programs. The field references some theories specific to university students and shares other theories with psychology, sociology, counseling, social work, family science, and organizational development (Komives & Woodard, 2003; Evans et al., 2010). The study of student development has grown exponentially, and can be categorized into the areas of psychosocial, cognitive, ecological, and identity development (Evans et al., 2010).

Cognitive development theory. Cognitive development is the process by which humans progress intellectually, encompassing the areas of thought, reasoning, and making meaning of their experiences (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Cognitive growth is catalyzed by “cognitive dissonance,” or exposure to conflicting ideas that cause internal debate, evaluation, and reconstruction of meaning (Evans et al., 2010). The term was developed by Festinger (1957), who found that exposure to contradictory information and values causes humans discomfort and effort to resolve the contradiction, which is achieved by adapting knowledge and behavior. Psychologist Nevitt Sanford elaborated on the process, citing an “optimal mismatch” of challenging and supportive environmental stimuli as the ideal catalyst of cognitive growth (Sanford, 1967).

To progress developmentally, students require an optimal blend of enough challenge to spur internal processing and catalyze movement, yet enough support to provide stability, encouragement, and safety during the wrestling with new or conflicting information. Evans et al. (2010) cited ways that classroom discussion can be structured to promote cognitive growth; stimuli include emphasis of critical thought and debate and interaction with diverse others through peer group discussion and collaboration. Pizzolato (2003) explored developmental catalysts outside of formal classroom environments, noting that students exhibit higher levels of self-authorship when forced to solve complex problems related to family and financial situations, for example. Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnston, and Wang (2012) studied the self-authorship development patterns and catalysts for students across various racial and ethnic groups. Pizzolato et al. (2012) found that patterns of social interaction

influence students' ability to develop cognitively and demonstrate self-authored thought, and that culture may contribute to which experiences influence students' self-authorship development. For East Asian students, for example, experienced greater dissonance when making decisions that related to or affected the lives of others, as opposed to decisions that only related to their own lives (Pizzolato et al., 2012).

Perry's theory of cognitive development and expansions. The student development theory perhaps most frequently cited by college student services practitioners is Perry's (1968) theory of cognitive development. Perry (1968) conducted a series of interviews with men and women at Harvard and Radcliffe at the end of each of their years in college in the late 1960s. Perry relied on the interviews with Harvard men to illustrate his theory and form a descriptive model of the way students viewed their experiences. Perry's theory of cognitive development (1968) structures the cognitive development of college students in nine stages of progression from absolute to contextual thinking, holding that students' level of reasoning remains consistent regardless of the content with which they are presented. The degree to which students progress through these positions is determined by each individual's contact with their environment. As an interactionist, Perry held that students gain adaptive reasoning skills and increase in their ability to make meaning of experiences as a result of dissonance from these interfaces (Evans et al., 2010; Perry, 1968). Students begin as dualistic thinkers, marked by dichotomous classification of knowledge and authority as absolute and nonnegotiable, and grow to understand knowledge to be changing and situational, and sources of knowledge to be

equally viable and credible sources to change one's view (Perry, 1968).

Understanding students' thought patterns and information processing, as well as what experiences help to structure intellectual growth for individuals, allows scholar practitioners to design intentional spaces and interventions (Evans et al., 2010; Strange & Banning, 2001).

A common critique of Perry's theory is the uniformity of the population on which it was developed. Representative of the majority of university students at the time, Perry's work was conducted with a group of white, male students, most of whom possessed a high socioeconomic status and access to elite education (Evans et al., 2010). The higher education environment and student population have changed significantly since the development of Perry's theory, so scholars have sought to address how the theory may or may not apply to various student demographics. As a result, a number of scholars have expanded or adapted Perry's work by working with various populations of college students.

Several scholars have examined the developmental patterns of women students. In the late 1970s, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) undertook a study of 135 women and identified five stagelike epistemological perspectives of "knowing." First, they identified that some women adopt a perspective of silence, during which they feel subject to the decision making of external authority. Next, women believe they are capable of replicating but not generating knowledge during the stage of received knowing. The perspective of subjective knowing follows, and is marked by a significant period of undulation between relying on others and self to construct knowledge. Procedural knowing, the

next stage, involves empathetic care to connect knowledge with others, combined with using impersonal ways to evaluate information. The final perspective observed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule is the period of constructed knowing, which integrates subjective and objective thoughts and feelings to convey a woman's authentic voice. *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986) was the first major theory to focus on the developmental patterns of women.

In the early 1990s, Baxter Magolda (2001a) completed a five-year longitudinal study of fifty-one women and fifty men, seventy of which completed the study. Baxter Magolda sought to identify differential patterns between the way men and women made meaning of and described their experiences. As a result, she established a four-stage model and observed gendered patterns in the first three stages. In the first stage, men and women view knowledge as certain; women seek to receive knowledge from others, while men view knowledge as something to master. The second stage marks a period during which men seek knowledge impersonally and women seek to make interpersonal connections. Next is a stage where men and women view knowledge as uncertain. Men preference their own individual thinking, whereas women equally value the ideas of self and others. In the final stage of Baxter Magolda's model, contextual knowing, there is a convergence of gender patterns where both genders accept knowledge as contextual. Baxter Magolda's (2001a) theory was the first to capture gendered patterns within a single theory of development.

Zhang (1999, 2008) and colleagues (Zhang & Hood, 1998; Zhang & Watkins, 2001) examined cultural influences on educational systems and tracked the resulting

cognition patterns between groups of university students in the United States and China. Using Perry's theory of cognitive development (1968) as a theoretical framework, Zhang (1999, 2008) developed a survey to collect quantitative data about the cognitive development patterns of first through fourth-year students in China and the United States. Using the same data, Zhang and Hood (1998) identified that Chinese students studying in Chinese universities seem to progress in a different developmental direction than their American counterparts; specifically, Chinese students exhibited higher scores of dualism and American students exhibited higher relativism scores in their fourth year. Zhang and Watkins (2001) applied the patterns observed to implications for Perry's model. They observed that Chinese university students begin as more relativistic, contextual thinkers earlier in their academic career, and develop toward dualistic thought; by contrast, American students are more dualistic thinkers early in their career, and become relativistic as they approach their final year of university study. These studies indicate a relationship between culture, pedagogy, and developmental outcomes. Differences in cultural context and educational environment contribute to different developmental patterns for university students in different countries.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow offers a theory that describes humans' basic needs for survival, which is often applied to university students for its chronological approach (Komives & Woodard, 2003; Evans et al., 2010). Maslow (1943, 1954, 1970) employed a naturalistic research cycle of iterative observation, participant interviews, theory development, and repetition to a group of adult men and women in the United States. The iterative methodology used by Maslow's while

developing his hierarchy of needs was similar to the grounded theory process described by Glaser (2004). Maslow (1943, 1954, 1970) asked participants a series of questions about motivation toward achievement and found that people were motivated by five categories of successive needs. The five categories in the model are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, usually depicted as levels of a pyramid to reflect the level of importance of each need. Maslow (1943, 1954, 1970) asserted that until humans' basic physiological needs, including food, water, and shelter, were achieved, people could not be motivated to pursue security, social relationships, and self-esteem. According to the theory, progressively meeting each category of needs was the only way to achieve independence and self-actualization, the theoretical apex of human development in Maslow's model. Maslow's model presents humans' needs in order of their necessity, but does not account for what happens when needs go unmet.

Although Maslow's theory is widely used in the social sciences, higher education, and student services in the United States, the theory has limitations in its application to international students' experiences. Hofstede (1984) criticized Maslow's hierarchy of needs as ethnocentric for its participants and highly Western approach to theory. Specifically, Maslow's hierarchy values individualistic concepts such as autonomy, independence, and self-actualization, whereas collectivist values such as family, community, and interdependence are not listed (Hofstede, 1984). Hofstede (1984) cited Maslow's American lens as researcher, coupled with having Western and American participants, as reasons for the intrinsic bias of the hierarchy.

Transition theory. Student development theory includes integrative philosophies on students' transitions. Student transitions can be personal, interpersonal, or related to on and off-campus events that shape students' experiences and development (Komives & Woodard, 2003). Perhaps the most frequently cited theories of transition applied to student development are Schlossberg's (1995) theory for counseling adults in transition, and Bridges' (1991) transition model. Schlossberg's theory provides a lens and language through which to categorize types of transitions and to situate individual coping resources in the context of the transition. Transitions can be categorized as anticipated, for which students expect and can reasonably prepare for transition, unanticipated, for which students experience unexpected events, and non-events, when students predict something will happen but it does not occur. Schlossberg described that individuals can take inventory in four areas to determine their ability to navigate a transition: self, situation, support, and strategies. This inventory helps individuals to "move in, move through, and move out" of a transition event. The major critique of Schlossberg's theory is that, while it provides language to describe transition processes and an understanding of what social and emotional inventory helps individuals to cope with transition, the theory does not describe or predict progress through a transition.

Bridges' (1991) transition model describes three stages of change, as well as the feelings and needs exhibited by individuals during each stage. The first stage in Bridges' model is letting go of the circumstances preceding change. In this stage, individuals mourn the loss of their former situation and seek education about the changes to come. During the second stage, the neutral zone, individuals are

ambivalent to both the past and future, content to wait before learning more about the change. As a result, they require encouragement and reminder of the change.

Finally, individuals enter their new beginning as the final stage of Bridges' model. In this stage, individuals exhibit renewed energy and commitment, and require stimulation from their new environment to successfully manage the transition.

Originally written as a guide to organizational changes for corporate America (Bridges, 1991), the model has been prescribed in higher education as a framework for understanding students' individual and group dynamics through change.

However, the context for which Bridges' model was designed limits its applicability to other situations, including international students' transition. This lack of applicability contributed to my decision to develop an alternate framework for transition.

Student success theory. Student success theory is the integrative area of student development that considers influences on students' persistence through university, as well as the developmental and experiential outcomes that result (Komives & Woodard, 2003). Tinto (1975) was among the first to model variables that contributed to students' persistence in university. He collected quantitative data at one large northeastern university and used factor analysis and structural equation modeling to identify significant contributors to students' persistence. In Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2000) studies, he modeled several pre-university and university variables that significantly influenced students' persistence. Significant pre-university factors included students' demographics, family support, financial aid, and secondary school, and significant university factors included classroom experiences,

co-curricular and learning support, wellness, and social connectedness. Tinto (1975) and Astin (1985) found that students' active engagement with campus life, i.e. through student involvement, were more likely to persist. Museus (2014) presented four critiques of Tinto's theory: first, that Tinto's model disproportionately advantages white male students; second, that it places the onus of success on students rather than institutions; that it oversimplifies the complex components that make up classroom, co-curricular, social, and other influences, and; Tinto relied on students' self-reported perceptions. Despite these critiques, a number of scholars have supported contributors to students' success in the literature. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) reviewed hundreds of studies of influences on student success and affirmed that pre-university variables and academic and co-curricular engagement influence persistence. Terenzini and Reason (2005) synthesized previous models of student success to conceptualize a model of influences on students' persistence and success; the model includes pre-university variables, university organizational context, students' individual classroom and co-curricular experiences, and students' peer environment. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that students who were involved outside of the classroom were more likely to persist and have positive experiences and outcomes. In summary, studies of student success have demonstrated that there are numerous pre-university and university contributors to students' experiences and persistence.

Trait personality and the “big five” theory. In the 1970s, National Institutes of Health scientists McCrae and Costa studied personality traits of a large national quantitative data set. Using factor analysis, they identified five personality

categories shared across human demographic groups. The way individuals exhibit various levels within the five categories form their personality. The categories of McCrae and Costa's (2005) "Big Five" personality trait theory are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Openness to experience is the degree to which individuals seek new stimulation. The degree to which one is organized, disciplined, and dutiful is referred to as conscientiousness. Extraversion is the level at which one seeks social interaction, exhibits energy, and displays positive emotions. Agreeableness describes individuals who tend toward easy-goingness, cooperation, and exhibit empathy for others. The last trait, neuroticism, is the degree of ease with which one expresses negative emotions and impulsiveness. According to the theory, behavior is expressed based on individuals' levels on the five traits. For example, an individual with high openness to experience, low conscientiousness, high extraversion, high agreeableness, and low neuroticism, or some combination of these, would likely exhibit resilience and favorably experience a large transition such as study abroad.

Ethnocentrism in student development theory. Limited worldviews and populations were used to generate popular theories of student development. Despite critiques to this effect, the insulated nature of the student affairs field has allowed even limited theories to become shared and generalized (Evans et al., 2010). Sampson (1989) acknowledged a major challenge to student development theory is that a Western worldview is frequently assumed in the development and application of theories. He recommended cross-cultural investigation and deconstruction of widely-accepted theories as a guard to this assumption. Foundational theories of

university students' development have been largely formed from dated observations of white, male, middle-class participants (Evans et al., 2010). Hofstede (1984) critiqued Maslow's (1943, 1954, 1970) theory for positioning individualistic desires at the apex of human needs development. Few studies have tested university student development theories on diverse populations of students, especially outside of the United States. In studies of Chinese university students, Zhang (1999), Zhang and Hood (1998), and Zhang and Watkins (2001) repeatedly demonstrated that Perry's theory of cognitive development could not be replicated. Zhang (1999) found that Chinese university students moved from relativism toward dualism along Perry's model. Student development theories have been repeatedly critiqued for the limited populations with which they were developed, and the wider populations to which they are applied. The limited studies in which theories have been tested on populations different from those with which they were developed show low generalizability for the theories across cultures.

International Students

Several questions help us to better consider the position of international students: who are they? Why do they seek education abroad? Why do institutions invite them? In 2014, international students in the United States numbered more than 886,000, over 4% of the population of students enrolled in higher education. China is the primary country of origin for international students in the United States, composing 31% of the international student population (Institute of International Education, 2014). Students at all levels of study are represented; 45% of international students are undergraduates, 40% graduate students, 9% short-term students, and 6%

professional students. Their geographic and institutional destinations and courses of study are highly varied, with business management, engineering, math and computer science, social sciences, and physical and life sciences attracting the largest numbers of international students.

International students are a population in transition and experience change in numerous areas of their lives by participating in study outside of their home countries. In addition to understanding a new culture and, in some cases, language, international students must navigate academic environments and meet fiscal and academic expectations while adjusting socially and emotionally (NAFSA, 2001; Stearns, 2011). Upon completing study in the United States, many international students must navigate a second adjustment as they return to their home countries, where many face social and vocational issues (NAFSA, 2001; NACADA, 2015). International students experience social, academic, emotional, and vocational adjustments as they transition to life and study in the United States, as well as during their re-entry transition to their home countries.

Why International Students Study in the United States

International students' reasons for opting to study in the United States are as varied as campuses reasons for inviting them (Stearns, 2009). However, students' rationales for seeking tertiary education in the United States can be reduced to two key reasons: degree worth and relative opportunity. First, American higher education has retained a favorable reputation around the world. This is predictably true of Ivy League campuses, but Stearns (2009) wrote that even a number of institutions with mediocre recognition in the United States were listed highly in rankings published in

China. The reputation of American higher education derived from association with American political power and economic success, as well as from longstanding competitiveness in fields such as science, engineering, technology, business, and the humanities. As a result, prestige associated with obtaining a degree on an American campus has outweighed the benefits of students seeking education locally, for those who can afford it (Stearns, 2009).

Second, international students may see the cost-benefit analysis of an American university education as worthwhile because opportunities to attend college may not be available locally due to extremely competitive admissions (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Stearns, 2009). For example, in China, even after rapid growth and massification in higher education over the past two decades, spaces at universities are only available for 15% of the college-age population (Li, 2011). A large number of students who are both academically qualified and possess the means to finance tertiary education are not provided for (Stearns, 2009). Because of the costs of tuition, fees, and living expenses, education abroad is an extravagance (Shao, 2014). However, students turn to foreign university systems, even with comparatively high tuition costs, as a reputable means of degree attainment.

Why American Campuses Invite International Students

U.S. institutions also benefit from inviting international students in three key ways: financial, academic, and multicultural. The first benefit of inviting international students to study is financial. In the 2013-2014 academic year, international students contributed over 27 billion dollars to the economy (Institute for International Education, 2014). Of this, nearly 20 billion dollars were spent on higher

education tuition and fees (NAFSA, 2014). Second are the academic benefits. Stearns (2009) wrote that the academic caliber and intellectual competitiveness of international students appeals to American campuses. International students' level of academic preparation contributes to the scholarly environment and assists with institutional research productivity and perception of academic competitiveness (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Stearns, 2009). Finally, international students contribute to campus diversity and the multicultural education of their peers. Gurin (1999) and Helms and Cook (1999) wrote about the learning that results from intercultural interactions on university campuses. Numerous studies have associated structural diversity, or the number of individuals from a variety of backgrounds on campus, with desirable student learning outcomes. Hu and Kuh (2003) used data from over 53,000 respondents to the College Student Experience Questionnaire and studied the effects of interactional diversity experiences on White students and students of color at over 150 colleges and universities. White students and students of color experienced significant self-reported gains in the areas of general education, vocational preparation, personal development, intellectual development, and diversity competence as a result of experiencing interactional diversity (Hu & Kuh, 2003). In their recommendations for engaging White students in diversity competence, Sallee, Logan, Sims, and Harrington (2009) recommended intercultural relationship-building as a key component of enhancing competence. Because the literature reflects numerous gains for all students as a result of intercultural interactions, institutions devote ample resources to recruiting a racially and ethnically diverse student body,

including international students with the hopes of facilitating social and academic integration (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001).

International Students' Transitions

Extant literature has explored some aspects of international students' transitions to higher education, including the roles of social and emotional adjustment, acculturation processes, patterns of engagement, and physical environments. The literature suggests that international students must manage academic, social, and general adjustment as they transition to a new country and higher education environment.

At a large public university in the American southwest, Yan and Berliner (2011) conducted a quantitative study of the role of individual level factors in Chinese international students' acculturative stress and coping mechanisms through their transition process, and found that certain pre-acculturation factors, including age and expectations for time abroad, seem to influence students' ability to cope and manage stress. Yan and Berliner's (2013) follow-up to the study qualitatively categorized students' adjustment barriers into two broad categories: personal and sociocultural issues. Shupe (2007) administered a survey about cultural adaptation to 206 international graduate students. Using path analysis, Shupe determined that work-related, social, and cultural adaptation were predictors of participants' level of psychological well-being. Bang and Montgomery (2013) also studied coping and acculturation of Chinese international students. They used quantitative Q methodology to explore the process of acculturation experienced by Chinese

international students. The study identified that confidence, appreciation, and optimism were three resultant factors of acculturation (Bang & Montgomery, 2013).

Studies of cultural adaptation have examined the process of transition between cultures for sojourners, including international students. Berry (2006) described the importance of coping strategies to the process of acculturation. In a study of sojourners' cultural adaptation, Bardi and Guerra (2011) administered five instruments of cultural values and coping mechanisms to 292 participants from 42 countries. Using path analysis, they identified complex relationship patterns between participants' cultural values and coping; for example, cultural traditional values connected to the ability to cope through religion. Bardi and Goodwin (2011) used path analysis on the same data set to depict two paths through coping. They found that automatic, environmental influences not directly engaged by the sojourner, and involved, specific efforts made by the sojourner, were both influential in the coping process.

Pre-departure experiences and characteristics have been linked to international students' adjustment. In a study of Chinese international students' and academics' adjustment to Singapore, Tsang (2001) used path analysis to explore the role of seven personal characteristics to the adjustment of 91 faculty members and 210 students. Tsang (2001) found that participants' prior international experience did not influence their adjustment; participants' pre-departure knowledge, language competence, self-efficacy, extroversion, association with locals, and social support, each had a significant positive effect on participants' adjustment and performance in their new setting. Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, and Pace (2014) used semi-structured interviews to

investigate the role of place attachment in international students' adjustment to campus and found that international students discussed comparisons of physical infrastructure, environment, and climate, as well as individuals' connections of emotions and social experiences to places, as influential to their transition.

Finally, studies have examined differences between the experiences of domestic and international students. Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) administered surveys to 294 domestic and international students three times over six months to evaluate patterns in students' adjustment to campus. They found that domestic students adjusted academically, socially, and generally at higher levels than their international student peers. By contrast, international students adjusted academically and socially after six months, but still exhibited significantly lower levels of social adjustment. Lehto, Cai, Fu and Chen (2014) conducted focus groups on an American Midwestern campus to understand similarities and differences of social connectedness between international and domestic students. They found that international students experienced less social connectedness outside of formal structures, such as classrooms or facilitated interactions, than their domestic student peers. Although international and domestic students indicated similar willingness to interact across cultures, international students faced a greater amount of challenge to do so because of the added unfamiliar structural and cultural layers they face. Using quantitative analysis and data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, which collects data from first-year and senior students, Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) explored similarities and differences in patterns of campus engagement between international and domestic students. Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) found that

international students were more engaged in educationally-purposeful activities than their American peers, and experienced larger gains in academic challenge and student-faculty interaction. By contrast, American students spent significantly more time socializing and relaxing desired outcomes of college. International and domestic students' outcomes and time spent on activities became more similar by their senior year (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

Summary of Literature

The review of literature connects the topics of Chinese and American culture, higher education, student development, and international students. Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of culture provide a framework through which to position culture in China and the United States. China and the United States have dramatically different cultural values and behaviors as measured on Hofstede's dimensions. Using this framework and comparison puts into context the description of higher education and student services in both countries, as well as the developmental theories and studies of students in Chinese and American higher education.

Existing literature suggests that Chinese and American students on campuses in their respective home countries exhibit different patterns of development (Zhang, 1998, 1999; Zhang & Hood, 1998; Zhang & Watkins, 2001). Student development theories were honed on homogeneous populations of American students, meaning that their applicability and the campus practices designed as a result do not appropriately reflect nor serve all students, including Chinese international students. Similarly, existing theories of transition discuss individual and system-level influences in students' transition, but not the link between them, providing an

opportunity for the present study. Theories of transition do not describe students' progress through transitions, and related models of organizational change were developed on American organizations, and thus not necessarily culturally transferable to international students in transition. Finally, this study is informed by literature about international students, the globally-mobile students who experience both contexts.

As a population, international students have been severely underrepresented in student development theory and understanding of their experiences and needs (Evenbeck, 2014). Culture shapes higher education policy and practice, and higher education is an environment for students' learning and development. Students in China and the United States move in different developmental patterns (Zhang, 1999). Given the differences between culture and education systems in China and the United States, might the dissimilarities complicate an already complex transition for the international students who move between them? The literature demonstrates a need to explore how students experience transition between countries' systems of higher education. Despite the number of students who study outside their home countries, studies of these students' experiences and transitions are largely limited to quantitative explorations of variables that influence students' adjustment. The voices and experiences of the students themselves have been neglected in the literature. Existing studies of international students and existing frameworks to conceptualize transition both leave significant gaps to fill. Together, pieces of the literature review demonstrate the connection between national culture, higher education policy and practice, and student development, as well as the need to further explore this

connection to develop theory that reflects Chinese international students' experiences with the process of transition to American university life.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine the process through which culture, pedagogy, and cognition shape students' experiences with transition between national systems of higher education. In this chapter, I identify the research questions and the paradigmatic frame and researcher role in approaching them. Next, I describe the methodology and methods used in the study, including the participants, procedures for data collection and analysis, and steps taken to support the goodness of the research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of possible limitations of the study and a description of the pilot program that preceded this study.

Research Questions

This study considered how culture influences environment, pedagogy, students' development and perceptions, and in turn, students' experiences with transition between systems of higher education. It investigated several research questions using qualitative methodology: From a student's perspective, what are the roles of the learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation methods, influences known to affect cognition (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda & Porterfield, 1985)? Are different pedagogical practices used with students of different ages or levels in higher education? How do students experience transition into a system of education outside their home country, and how, if at all, is this supported by institutions? How do students experience differences in pedagogy? How does this influence their transition into a new environment and set of academic and social expectations? These

questions address students' perceptions of pedagogical methods, students' comparative perspectives of higher education in the United States and China, and students' experiences of transition between them.

These questions address the larger topic of the relationship between culture and pedagogy, important for understanding the experiences of students who participate in and transition between tertiary education systems in more than one country. The practical significance of this inquiry is to inform educators and students and design programs that assist with students' transitions and prepare students for differences in pedagogy and expectations. This study provides empirical evidence to encourage more inclusive design of student services, faculty praxis, and genesis and instruction of student development theory, each of which have a heavily Western or American-centric lens, despite serving an increasingly diverse and mobile student population.

Paradigmatic Frame

It is important to understand the role of the researcher, position, and paradigm to further support decisions about methodology and methods. A paradigm is a framework or philosophy that proposes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to explore, and how to conduct inquiry (Creswell, 2009). The pragmatic philosophy serves as an overarching paradigmatic frame, and is flexible enough to include social constructivist perspectives.

To accommodate this integration of paradigms, it is important to understand that the two philosophies are not mutually exclusive (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The pragmatic lens can accommodate constructivist influence because the two

perspectives share several integral commonalities (Creswell, 2009). Among these shared views are that research is contextually grounded in social, historical, political, and other environments, and as such, multiple worldviews and methods converge to construct knowledge. Garrison (1995, p. 718) used the term “pragmatic social behaviorism” in the study of cognition to describe learning as contextual, socially constructed, and driven by practicality, a view also prescribed by educational philosopher John Dewey. This term aptly describes the paradigm of the present study.

Social Constructivism and Pragmatism

Social constructivism approaches inquiry with the assumption that reality is socially constructed. As a result of being socially and experientially based, reality and knowledge can take multiple, subjective forms, but with shared elements across individuals and cultures (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Researcher subjectivity also influences the construction of knowledge, so from a constructivist perspective, the process of data interpretation remains ongoing and incomplete (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Pragmatists use methods that best address an issue and research questions, and is cited as an ideal philosophical framework for mixed methods research (Creswell, 2009). Early pragmatists rejected the idea that inquiry was able to access “truth” by use of a single method, aligning their views with constructivists (Mertens, 2010). Pragmatists approach research by thinking about the practical implications of a study; they seek to make a difference in practice as a result of inquiry. This is apparent in pragmatic axiology, where research ethics are determined by the utilitarian value of

the consequences of research. Similarly, Mertens (2010) described the ontology of pragmatism as intersubjective, with effectiveness and difference making as the criteria for judging research. Pragmatic epistemology positions the researcher-participant relationship as flexible, based on the needs of both and whether the relationship addresses the research.

As a pragmatic social behaviorist, I value lived experience and socially-constructed realities as central to my understanding of a phenomenon. The pragmatic component of my researcher identity means that the goal of my research is to reshape student services practice. Because pragmatic scholars have historically leaned on quantitative data to guide their efforts, I specify that I am both pragmatic and a social behaviorist. The combination informs this study in a very specific way. The purpose of this study was to better understand students' transition between countries and systems of higher education, the significance of which is to inform educators and guide development of student services using the emerging theory. The pragmatic lens serves my intention for this project to link student development theory to practice. The social behaviorist lens is at the heart of this inquiry.

Researcher role

Describing the position of the researcher in a contextual study, Mertens (2010) expressed that the researcher's goal is to understand multiple social constructions that combine to make meaning and knowledge. Understanding that the relationship between culture, pedagogy, and students' experiences is highly contextual, the major ethical concern of the study is to take care not to hold a "culturally chauvinistic" approach (Paton, 2012). Kipnis (2011) warned of the similar danger of scholars from

outside a cultural tradition in studying and writing about these traditions, and recommended focusing on observations and facts without making assumptive connections between intent and tradition. Awareness of how facets of researcher experience and identity may influence intentions for study and work with students is helpful in seeking to represent the stories of culturally diverse participants and avoiding this chauvinism. This self-awareness and desire for authenticity are traits found in grounded theory researchers (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Despite my desire to explore and present participants' stories as authentically as possible, my experience and background cannot be extricated, creating potential biases. It is possible that my upbringing and education have created a bias of viewing Western or American practices as normative. My formal education has been entirely in Western educational systems, and has included little exposure to education systems in other countries. The majority of literature in the field of student affairs and college student development has been cultivated through the study of American students, and this may reinforce the tendency to view or refer to existing theories as "normal," and other patterns as "deviant." My position as researcher means having a responsibility to recognize different cultural contexts and patterns of cognition as equally valid. By pursuing this study with a critical pedagogical lens, I hope to continually recognize and refute cultural bias in myself and others.

Recognizing this responsibility, my theoretical viewpoint is situated in cultural psychology. Cultural psychologists refute the long-held and Western-centric premise that human development is uniform across cultures (Shweder, 2000). Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) assert that this approach is important for moving beyond

assumptions and generalizations about racial and ethnic groups to develop and understanding of culturally-contextual stimuli and developmental patterns. This study recognizes the way in which culture provides the context for cognitive development and seeks to understand the varied patterns and experiences associated with cultural variation.

Methodology

As described above, the paradigmatic worldview guiding this study is pragmatic with constructivist leanings. The pragmatic worldview focuses on the intended consequences of research, and multiple forms of data collection and analysis, including a mixed methods approach, helps to provide the best understanding of an issue (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative study refers to nonmathematical interpretation of concepts, relationships, and explanations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Existing scholarship has identified that students in China and the United States differ in patterns of cognition, and has cited differences in the educational environment in both countries as a contributor to the development of such patterns (Zhang, 1999; 2008). To deepen our understanding of this phenomenon, the present study considers the “how” and “why,” practices that contribute to these patterns and students’ experiences that result, and using qualitative methods provides a richness and depth about the way students experience the phenomenon. Because all methods have limitations, biases and limits that are inherent to one method can be lessened by supplementing the data with additional sources; this cross-referencing is part of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative inquiry can be used to elicit understanding that is otherwise difficult to explain, including about thought

processes, emotions, and experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This aligns with my worldview as a researcher, as well as the research questions and aim of this study.

Grounded Theory Inquiry

Grounded theory inquiry refers to the process of collecting, analyzing, and formulating theory from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result, grounded theories provide both theoretical insight and directions for action. Specifically, this study followed the approach to grounded theory first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which is distinct in its use of constant comparison as a process of developing theory. Grounded theory allows for students' narratives to be heard while encouraging patterns and themes to emerge and shed light on possible links between culture, pedagogy, and students' experiences with transition between Chinese and American higher education systems. Participants' reflections were used to develop theory about Chinese international students' process of development and transition.

Participants and Procedures

In order to provide a comparative perspective of tertiary education systems, participants completed a minimum of one semester of study in the United States and one semester of study in China. A combination of theoretical and snowball sampling was used to identify a total of 18 participants for this study. Theoretical sampling is used to seek participants who maximize opportunities to discover concepts, providing purposeful sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because participants fitting participation criteria may be connected as a product of their shared experiences, snowball sampling is used to reach additional participants by relying on participants and other gatekeepers in the community (Creswell, 2013). I relied on my contacts in

the institution's Chinese international student community and student services personnel to assist with identifying additional participants.

Participants engaged in semi-structured, one-time, in-person interviews of approximately one hour in length. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were kept confidential, and to protect participants' identities, students indicated whether they wished to use their given name, American name, or a pseudonym. In advance of the interview, participants received a statement of informed consent and a copy of the interview protocol. The informed consent form gave participants the option to share a redacted version of their interview transcript with other participants for member checking, as well as the option to participate in a second interview to participate in cross-transcript review, follow-up questions, and a review of the emerging theory and model. Following the interview, students approved the narrative descriptions found in chapter 4.

After initial interviews were completed and transcribed, I contacted the participants who expressed interest in reviewing interview transcripts and the emerging theory as part of member checking. Seven participants completed a second interview and cross-transcript member checking. Participants' interpretations supplemented my observations and memos during early data analysis, particularly for the grouping of codes into themes. I employed the circular method of grounded theory data collection and analysis described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) in order to allow for story and theory to emerge and evolve. During the second round of interviews, participants conducted cross-interview interpretations, in which they assigned meaning to other participants' transcripts and reviewed my list of codes for

saliency. I provided transcripts with identifying details removed to participants, asked them to identify parts of the transcript that they find resonating, meaningful, or important, and included their feedback into the codes and categories. Lastly, I provided new versions of the theory and model to each of the seven students who completed a second interview and asked them whether their experiences and observations aligned with the model; their suggestions guided the emerging theory and model to its present state.

Interview Protocol

Questions that address participants' backgrounds and comparative experiences in two educational systems, as well as inquiries about the roles of educational context and practice, serve as the foundation of the interview protocol, which is provided in Appendix A. Questions in the interview protocol were influenced by my experience as a practitioner working with students in transition, including international students, and by the domains in Baxter Magolda and Porterfield's (1985) Measure of Epistemological Reflection (MER). The protocol was refined in discussion groups through the Graduate Global Fellows program (GGF). The MER was developed as an instrument to assess diverse college student populations and provide a new mechanism for the comparison of cognitive growth patterns (Baxter Magolda & Porterfield, 1985). The MER uses a social constructivist lens, where learning is situated in context and occurs through socialization, to assess cognitive development in a manner most reflective of participants' approach to thinking (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

The MER centers on six domains, selected for their empirically demonstrated influence on students' cognitive growth: decision-making, the role of the learner, the role of the instructor, the role of peers, evaluation, and the nature of knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 522). Of these domains, four focus on the context of education and the role of educational practices in guiding development: the role of the learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Thus, these domains can be used to explore culturally-situated educational practices and provide a perspective on comparative developmental patterns.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe that interview questions often evolve during grounded theory data collection to allow the researcher to follow participants' experiences and meaning. Throughout the first round of interviews, I discovered that there were several salient areas which I had not accounted for in my first interview protocol. I developed a second set of questions for late first-round and the entire second round of interviews to explore participants' pursuit of needs and positive or negative moments that stood out the most among their experiences. The follow-up interview protocol is included as Appendix B.

Analysis

Described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as "the interplay between researchers and data" (p.13), data analysis in grounded theory studies is designed to elicit description and conceptual ordering, providing a foundation for the emergence of theory. This interplay allows for extraction of a story from the data in order to organize and conceptualize ideas. This study used microanalysis, followed by open,

axial, and selective coding, to understand the process through which culture, pedagogy, and cognition relate to students' transitions in systems of higher education.

Microanalysis and coding are data analysis processes that break down and reintegrate information to assist with theory forming (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2013). Because the grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis can be less linear than other methods, and this study specifically uses the constant comparison method, the process used in this study is pictured in figure 3.

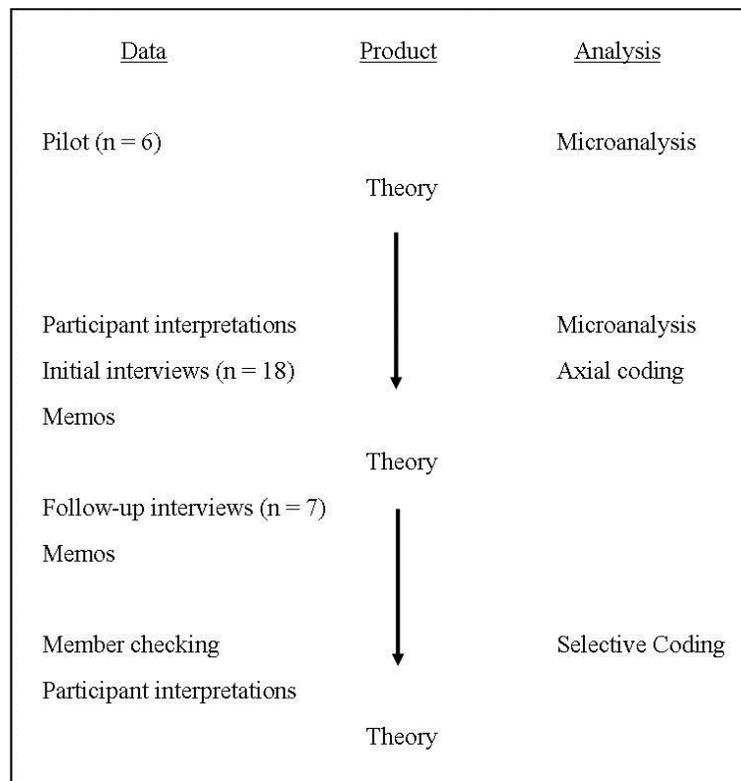


Figure 3. Constant comparative approach to data collection and analysis.

First, microanalysis involves detailed line-by-line analysis to “open” the data and generate initial categories and possible relationships among them. I reviewed transcripts line-by-line using microanalysis and extracted 3440 codes. After conducting additional interviews, I used axial coding to look for answers to the “how”

and “why” research questions. Axial coding allows for further development of categories, subcategories, and relationships between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Morse (2008) described the difference between categories and themes: categories are collections of similar codes sorted together and used to ascertain characteristics of a study, whereas themes are the “meaningful essence” (p. 727) of the data. After deriving 40 categories from the codes, I used axial coding and began to observe relationships between categories and themes running through the narratives. Then, after performing axial coding, I began member checking and interpretation.

Finally, selective coding was used between steps to develop theory. Selective coding gives explanations for themes observed in the data, and is critical in grounded theory analysis because it allows for the refining of codes and integration of codes and additional data to build and rebuild theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that grounded theory includes well developed categories, statements of relationship to collect them and form a theoretical framework, and an explanation of related phenomena. The “product” at the end of data analysis, the emerging theory and model, reflects this definition. I arranged categories to form theoretical assertions about Chinese international students’ developmental and transition process as it relates to culture.

Criteria for Goodness

While the specific and contextual nature of qualitative inquiry means that exact replication is not possible, it is possible to take steps to ensure the study’s credibility and transferability. Additionally, the iterative nature of grounded theory inquiry can involve participants throughout data analysis and development of theory,

adding to the care and goodness of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Mertens, 2010; Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined criteria for quality in qualitative research, including the need to acknowledge assumptions and researcher biases. I reflected on my biases as a researcher in the discussion of researcher positionality and description of researcher-as-instrument. Great care was taken to adhere to participants' meanings, rather than to prescribe my own meaning to their narratives. I involved participants thoroughly, using multiple interviews, member checking, cross-transcript reviews, triangulation, and participant reviews of the theory and model. I built a solid relationship with many of the participants, which allowed them to be authentic and encouraged them to be involved over time. The iterative nature of grounded theory allowed me to follow where the participants led, and the result is a theory and model that truly depicts their transitional experiences.

Other steps to encourage goodness in qualitative research involve checking multiple sources for consistency of data, also called triangulation, and using thick description and member checking to encourage detailed and accurate depiction of information (Mertens, 2010). After each interview, I completed thick description through memoing. I also conducted member checking to invite additional participant feedback and preserve their voices. Yin (2009) recommended the holistic analysis of data sources, including documents, interviews, observations, and artifacts, in case study. In this study, interviews, observations, and memoing provided multiple sources for more holistic analysis. Seven participants reviewed their transcript and took part in member checking of codes and themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Mertens, 2010). Finally, I shared the list of codes, categories, and themes with two other

grounded theorists as peer reviewers to support my interpretation of the emerging theory and model. These steps added to the goodness of the study.

Limitations of the Study

Before applying this study to guide practice, theory, and future inquiry, there are several limitations to consider. The study is intended to provide insight into some Chinese international students' transition to American higher education. The population to which this study might apply is massive and steadily increasing, but this study was conducted with only eighteen participants and on one campus; it is not meant nor able to be generalizable. Additionally, because of the resources required to study abroad, the socioeconomic status of this population may also make them unique. Because this study examines students' experiences in the United States and China, its applicability and generalizability may be limited to understanding of these two cultural contexts. However, this study has the potential for transferability to other campus settings and student populations.

Campus context and procedures are two potential limitations of this study. It is possible that the proximity of campus to a major city, the prevalence of cultural events and culture-based student organizations, and the significant percentage of students of Asian and Chinese descent may have influenced the experiences and perceptions of participants in this study.

Next, while I tried to honor the voices and meanings of participants throughout data collection and analysis, I did so in a language that was not their first. Participants' use of English as a second or third language is a potential limitation of the study; the effort required to translate participants' thoughts from their native

languages, level of comfort with the interview protocol and interviewer, and the ability of experiences to be “lost in translation” all relate to this limitation. Efforts were made to address this limitation, including attention to question wording, providing interview questions to participants in advance to allow time for participants to become familiar with the question language and topics, and member checking of transcripts to ensure accurate presentation of participants’ thoughts and experiences. Allowing participants to respond with the breadth and depth of their first language might yield different information and insights.

This study relied on students’ memories and perception as data sources. I conducted no more than two interviews with participants, during which they recalled and reflected on up to four years’ worth of experiences. Participants used their memories and perceptions to describe and compare pedagogical practices and recall their experiences up to three years prior to the interview. As a result, the ability of participants to accurately remember and depict environments and experiences may have limitations. The natural progression of age and self-awareness of participants might cause them to reflect differently on their experiences over time. Where possible, language and question order was used to maximize participants’ memory recall (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). As a result, longitudinal studies of similar phenomena, during which participants can reflect on progressive experiences closer to the events, might yield different findings. The iterative nature of grounded theory inquiry allows participants to revisit data and findings throughout the process, and this may bolster their interaction with the data and emerging theory. Finally, I was surprised by some of the directions that the interview conversations went, and by

the experiences that seemed to hold the most meaning for participants. This indicates that use of the semi-structured interview protocol may have been a limitation, and makes a case for use of more open, unstructured methods.

Social desirability, the desire for participants to respond in a popular way or manner perceived to be desired by the researcher, may also have influenced participants' responses (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000). Morris and Peng (1994) found that Chinese explain events in terms of their situational causes, and Americans explain events in terms of the human actors. As such, the way that Chinese international students frame their perspective and responses may be inherently related to culture and cultural desirability. I was aware of this possibility during data collection and analysis. Because cultural values are by nature related to what is socially desirable, there is not a culturally-valid measure of social desirability that is independent of cultural values (Smith, 2009). Relationship building with participants, and development of a participant group through gatekeepers and the network of the international community of which I am a member, helped to address this limitation.

Pilot Study

In the spring of 2013, I conducted an exploratory qualitative study to inform this project. I had two goals: to pilot an interview protocol and to explore participants' comparative experiences in two countries' systems of tertiary education. In addition to achieving these initial goals, the pilot study helped to develop additional research questions, expanded the interview protocol to take these questions into account, provided the opportunity to consider and compare countries' cultural

dimensions, and helped to consider and address potential limitations of the larger study.

Six participants completed interviews, provided feedback on interview questions, and participated in member checking of codes and themes in the pilot case study. Participants were international students who had completed undergraduate degrees in China and were enrolled in graduate study in the United States at the time of interviews. Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of culture were used to derive commonalities between participants' countries to further connections between culture and pedagogical traditions. In addition to sharing several cultural dimensions, the participants' home countries were among the top five countries of origin for international students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2012). Though the experiences of participants from outside of China may not fully be relevant to the dissertation study, the pilot was a solid exercise in developing an instrument, learning alongside participants, and building a better understanding of dimensions of culture, pedagogical traditions, and how these may have contributed to students' experiences.

The pilot study explored the academic routine and expectations in participants' home countries, as well as how participants compared these components to their experiences in American higher education. Using an instrument roughly based on domains of cognition conveyed in Baxter Magolda and Porterfield's (1985) Measure of Epistemological Reflection, the pilot study addressed the domains of learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation as culturally-situated facets of higher

education. These domains provided a foundation for exploring students' experiences and reflections on pedagogy.

Six participants in the pilot study provided recommendations for interview content and language and reflected on the themes that emerged. Some questions were revised to use clearer language or terms, based on participants' suggestions. To address the limitation of the use of English as a second language, participants helped to clarify some terms to better address this limitation; for example, they encouraged use of the term "classmate" instead of "peer," and omission of the phrase "indicator of learning." They also made recommendations for the data collection process, including distributing interview questions in advance of the interview, and allowing some reflection time between interviewer questions and participants' responses. Survey methodology coursework provided information about question ordering and removing leading questions or language from the protocol.

Five themes emerged from the interviews and linked culture to pedagogical practices. These themes included the role of memorization as signifying "learning," the role of authority and hierarchy, the timing of thought and speech processing, the importance of education for improving one's future, and challenges of acculturation. Four of the five themes connected clearly to pedagogical practices, dimensions of culture, or both. The first two themes, the role of memorization as "learning" and the role of authority and hierarchy, demonstrated the strong connection between culture and pedagogy. These themes were highly evident in all six of the participants' reflections. Hierarchy and authority are valued in cultures with high power distances, including those of the pilot participants. The next theme, timing of thought and

speech processing, provided insight into the differences that students observe when transitioning between countries and educational systems. Several participants described the contrast between their classroom contributions in their home countries, where they were expected to produce carefully considered contributions (if encouraged to speak in class at all), versus in the United States, where they viewed students' sometimes rapid and inarticulate statements with disbelief. Participants' feelings of responsibility to honor their peers with quality contributions may be attributable to cultural positioning as collectivist versus individualistic cultures. Additionally, several participants expressed feeling that their contributions were an extension of self, which is consistent with the emphasis on reputation in Chinese cultural time orientation (Hofstede et al. 2010).

Next, participants repeatedly referenced the expectations that shaped their desire to pursue higher education, as well as the importance of education in the context of their lives. This theme, education for future improvement, demonstrated the role that cultural values played in expectations for education. For example, both Chinese participants expressed that Confucian values meant that a great familial emphasis was placed on lifelong learning. Education was important not only for the sake of learning but for the achievement of educational achievements, including degree attainment and career opportunities. The importance of familial and societal expectations is again reflective of collectivist orientation and high power distance (Hofstede, 1980). Finally, the fifth theme of acculturation and transition was less expected. Given the contrasts between Eastern and Western educational practices

cited in the literature, students' challenges during the transition from one country and tertiary education system to another are conceivable.

Though students' transition between countries was not initially a focus of the pilot or present study, transition and acculturation were clearly salient parts of several participants' experiences and provided further insight about the practical implications for this research. These narratives helped highlight the relevance to transitions for international faculty and study abroad participants. Participants' reflections on their transition as both student and instructor were very interesting; some students faced significant challenges when navigating the system as first-time teaching assistants, citing cultural differences in expectations about instructor-student interaction in particular. As a result, questions about the transition to American higher education and pedagogical practices and advice to international students experiencing transition were added to the protocol. The five themes yielded from the pilot study provided insight about the influences of culture on pedagogy and cognition, highlighted opportunities for further exploration, and assisted with instrument development and honing.

In addition to the pilot study, other experiences, such as participating in the Graduate Global Fellows (GGF) program and completing coursework about the cognitive and social dimensions of survey design, helped to further hone the interview instrument. Combined, these experiences confirmed that this topic provides great opportunity for innovative study, and that grounded theory inquiry is appropriate to address the different types of questions included in this dissertation study. After the pilot study, members of the 2014 Graduate Global Fellows program

further examined the interview protocol, helped to organize research questions by quantitative and qualitative approaches, and helped form some early “propositions” for case study. The GGF group was comprised of six graduate students and two faculty members from varied disciplines, with shared interest in international education and cultural psychology; among them were three international students. The group identified and addressed limitations of the interview protocol. GGF members inquired about whether the type of institution at which participants were enrolled could account for differences in their experiences. For example, students who completed their undergraduate coursework in large lecture halls might be surprised by the intimacy of smaller seminar classrooms, independent of cultural differences. As a result, the group recommended adding a question about the types of institutions at which participants had studied in each country. The group speculated about how gender roles and expectations may influence students’ experiences to varying degrees depending on culture and country, and encouraged a question about how students perceived the role of gender in shaping students’ experiences and expectations for formal education. The group also reflected on students’ ability to understand pedagogical practices and intentions, and encouraged the use of triangulation to get a more complete picture of classroom practices by country.

Finally, GGF members reviewed listened to the study’s broader scope and sources of inspiration, including the limited cross-cultural applicability of popular theories of cognitive development and studies demonstrating varied patterns of cognition by Chinese and American college students (Zhang, 1999; 2008; Zhang & Watkins, 2001). The GGF group was invaluable in helping to disentangle the study’s

many research questions, sort the questions into approaches to inquiry, and situate them in a broader context. They helped organize ways to address culture, pedagogy, and cognition, and supported the proposed methods explore pedagogical practices and students' experiences by culture.

The pilot study and subsequent feedback from participants and other scholars have greatly helped to structure and clarify this research design. Additionally, it provided an early opportunity to begin developing and applying a review of literature. The process of receiving and implementing feedback helped to create and refine research questions and an interview protocol, and has helped identify and address some limitations of and approaches to the topic. Having an early opportunity to collect data and reflect on the topic and research questions was helpful for more thoughtfully structuring the dissertation study.

Conclusion

Past studies of culture and developmental patterns do not address how and why students develop and experience transition as they do, demonstrating a need for related qualitative exploration to add substance to these phenomena. Existing quantitative studies, including those by Zhang (1999, 2008) and Zhang and Watkins (2001), established the variability in Chinese and American university students' patterns of cognition. However, these studies did not account for the process of how these differential patterns of cognition came to exist. Additionally, the studies did not examine what students experienced when transitioning between and attending universities in China and the United States. Few other studies explore the developmental patterns and experiences of international students. This study uses

grounded theory inquiry to address “how” and “why” questions and give attention to the knowledge gap by exploring Chinese international students’ experiences through the process of transition to American higher education.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study explores Chinese international students' experiences with transition to American university life, including academic and social expectations, pedagogy, and cultural influences on students' transition. Several themes emerged from participants' narratives. Chapter 4 presents a description of each participant, the themes that emerged, supported by excerpts from participants' narratives, and the theory I developed as a result.

Participant Descriptions

Short narrative descriptions of each participant are included below, and a table of participants' academic information is included as table 4.1. All 18 of the participants are Chinese international students who have engaged with the tertiary education environment in China and the United States. They came from cities and post-secondary institutions all over China, including Shanghai, Beijing, and nine provinces and administrative regions. Most of the students came to the United States as part of either a direct exchange program between a Chinese university and American university or through a joint degree program between Chinese and American partner institutions.

All of the participants attended one large, public, selective research institution in the Mid-Atlantic region. Most participants are in their third or fourth year of study; two students are in their second year. Seven are women and eleven are men. Participants' academic majors varied and include communication, business administration, economics, engineering, natural science, and computer science. Half of the participants' degree programs are in the "STEM" (science, technology,

engineering, and mathematics) fields. The prevalence of STEM and business degree programs among the participants is consistent with national trends for Chinese international students (Institute of International Education, 2014).

Some students had previous exposure to the United States, American culture, or the English language in immersive ways. While for most participants, studying abroad was their first time traveling to the United States, a few had previously visited or studied in the U.S. Two students had visited with their families for leisure, and one participant spent time during secondary school as an exchange student.

A few students had family members whose experiences influenced their study abroad perceptions and preparation. One participant had an uncle living in an American city different from the university's location; having a family member in the U.S. was influential to the student and his parents during his decision to study abroad. Another student's father had studied abroad in London, United Kingdom. His father shared fond memories about his experience and encouraged the student to go abroad. Finally, one student's mother was a faculty member in English language and culture in China. Consequently, the student spent time with native English speakers and learned about American culture, including the American National Basketball Association, during his childhood in China.

Many participants talked about their living arrangements in the U.S. and campus and community involvement. Of the thirteen students who talked about their living situations and described their housing and roommate arrangements, six lived in on-campus housing and seven lived off campus. Two students resided with American students, seven had Chinese international students for roommates, and three shared a

residence with both American and Chinese students. One student resided with his family off campus. Approximately half of the students talked about their involvement with student organizations, on and off-campus employment, laboratory research, and short-term study abroad programs. Specifically, students were involved with academic organizations (6), laboratory research (2), culturally-based clubs (1), sport clubs (1), and music ensembles (1). Four students had participated in off-campus internships and one was employed on campus.

Students spoke about their plans for after studying abroad and/or graduation, as well as whether they planned to remain in the U.S. or return to China. Five participants expressed their intent to return to China to seek employment. Two shared plans to return to China to seek employment or remain in the U.S. to attend graduate school. Two planned to pursue employment in either China or the U.S., and two shared openness to either work or attend graduate school in China or the U.S. Two participants intended to pursue graduate study in the U.S., and, contingent upon employer sponsorship, three expressed their intent to seek jobs in the U.S. One student planned to seek employment in the Middle East.

Amy

Amy is a junior business administration major from Shanghai. She pursued an exchange program in the U.S. to live in an American city and meet people from different cultures. Both of her parents attended university in China. Amy has studied English for twelve years and has a good command of the language. She is soft spoken and quick to laugh.

Outside of class, Amy enjoys traveling to visit friends from China who study in other American cities, including Boston and New York. She also enjoys going to the gym. She lives in an on-campus residence hall, where she has met a number of her friends. Amy has friendly acquaintanceships with American students, but spends more time and discusses more serious topics with other Chinese international students. She goes to meals and attends campus events with her Chinese and American peers. After graduation, Amy plans to return to China to work or attend graduate school.

Bruce

Bruce is a junior physics major from Changzhou, Jiangsu Province. He completed two years of study at a comprehensive university before coming to Maryland as part of a 2+2 exchange program. His English language skills are solid; he modestly describes his language level at “about eighty percent,” and says his language and confidence have improved a lot in the past two years.

Bruce’s friends are American and Chinese students, and his campus involvement includes participation in a short-term study abroad course, performing in the university’s jazz club ensemble, and working in a physics research lab. He has also traveled independently all over the United States. Highly motivated toward his long-term academic goals, he spoke frequently about his focus on grades and research progress to be the best candidate for graduate schools when he applies next semester. Bruce hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in physics at an institution in the United States after graduation.

David

A junior electrical engineering major from Sichuan Province, David is participating in a two-year exchange with his home university. David became interested in study abroad during his first year of university, and he chose the U.S. because it would allow him to see many different cities, regions, and people. His parents, who attended university in China, were somewhat reluctant for David to study abroad, but support him and look forward to his summer visits. Several of David's friends from China also study abroad in the same American city, but at different universities, and the group meets sometimes. He hopes to attend graduate school in a different region of the U.S., and is particularly interested in schools on the west coast.

Outside of classes, David is interested in robotics and computers. He is not involved with any clubs or organizations on campus, but spends a lot of time studying and socializing with other engineering students. David's friends are almost all engineering students, and many of them are Chinese international students.

Iris

Iris is a junior business administration major and Spanish minor from Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. She studied at a normal university before coming to the United States as an exchange student, but traveled to the U.S. with her parents in high school. After graduation, Iris would like to work in the United States at a large business firm, and her parents, who attended university, are supportive of her dream. Iris has a wide social network that includes close American friends, including her three roommates, with whom she frequently discusses topics ranging from politics

and race (one of her roommates is Black and two are White), to drinking culture and television series. She also has a core group of best friends, who are Chinese international students, and a large number of Chinese-American friends. Iris is an officer in Asian American Student Union, her first formal involvement with a campus club. She also recently started a part-time job on campus in a customer service role. She said this job greatly improved her English language skills, which are quite fluent and peppered with appropriate colloquialisms.

Jesse

Jesse is a junior mechanical engineering major who came to the United States through an exchange program from his hometown comprehensive university in Shanghai. He talked about the strong influences his parents and grandparents have had on his life and education. Jesse's parents both attended university in China, but his grandparents did not attend university. Jesse spoke about the lessons of thriftiness and practical wisdom imparted to him from his grandparents, as well as the academic wisdom his parents shared.

Jesse's rigorous degree program requires him to spend a lot of time studying. Outside of academics, Jesse enjoys cars, watching movies, playing computer games, and playing sports at the gym. His best friends are Chinese international students who also study engineering. His tight-knit group of friends share academic and social interests and spend time together on and off campus, including traveling together during breaks. After graduation, he is "open to graduate school or work in the U.S. or China, but probably in China."

Joseph

Joseph is a junior mechanical engineering major from Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. After graduation, Joseph would like to find a job as an engineer. He attended a comprehensive university in Guangzhou for his first year of university before his family moved to the United States. When the family arrived in the U.S., Joseph enrolled at a community college for one semester, then transitioned to a four-year university. Joseph resides locally with his family and commutes to campus.

Joseph described having a difficult adjustment to the language and practical demands of American university life as a result of his comparatively abrupt arrival in the United States. He was nostalgic about Chinese culture, but acknowledged his family's immigration to the U.S. as positive for the family's economic wellbeing.

Mariah

Mariah is a junior communication major from Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Interested in intercultural communication and international relations, Mariah hopes to apply these interests to employment in a business setting after graduation. She would like to move to the Middle East, hopefully to a diverse city like Dubai. Mariah participates in several cultural and academic groups on campus, and enjoys exploring the local community and learning about the world. Mariah's friend group is composed of American and international students from many different countries. She has a few Chinese friends, but mostly spends time with Americans.

A few years ago, Mariah made the difficult decision to convert to Islam, an experience that challenged her family and community, most of whom are not religious or spiritual. Despite their initial difficulties understanding her viewpoint and conversion, Mariah's family is now supportive of her faith. Mariah describes her faith development as influential to decision making in many other areas of her life, because she has become "accustomed to always [moving] outside of (her) comfort zone." This inclination to move beyond the familiar extends to Mariah's decision to study in the United States and her longer-term plans to live outside of China.

Ming

Ming is a senior business administration major from Ningbo, Zhejiang Province. Ming is fascinated by ideas and innovation, and he is especially interested in the entrepreneurial aspect of business administration. Ming's interest in studying abroad relates to his long-term hopes for developing startup companies with investors from around the world. He came to the U.S. through an exchange after spending two years at his comprehensive university in China. Ming's parents both attended university, and his father studied abroad in London; his parents are supportive of his studying in the U.S. After graduation, Ming plans to enter the work force, and he is open to employment in either the U.S. or China. In the longer-term, he will attend graduate school to earn an MBA. Ming has a main friend group of about ten people, a "bunch of guys from everywhere, some Chinese guys, some American guys," with whom he discusses ideas and socializes. Ming is also involved with a club in his academic college, and enjoys traveling and going to the gym.

Patrick

Patrick is a sophomore applied mathematics major from Qingdao, Shandong Province. He is interested in investments and plans to apply for a second major in finance. Additionally, he is preparing to take the actuarial certification exam, independently from his academic course load. After graduation, Patrick plans to attend graduate school or seek employment in China or the United States. He is involved with a campus leadership academy, a language exchange tutoring program in which he assists Chinese language majors, and club basketball. Additionally, he is part of a living-learning community that houses globally-conscious students. Through this community and the club basketball team, Patrick developed an extensive network of friends including American and international students from all over the world.

Patrick attributes his global mindedness and exposure to American culture to his parents, who are university professors. Because of their profession, he spent the first twenty years of his life living on the campus of a Chinese university of science and technology. His parents are supportive of his being in the U.S. for the short or long-term. Patrick speaks confidently in nearly unaccented English. Patrick's mother teaches English and intercultural studies; consequently, Patrick has had native English speakers as tutors since he was in primary school. He spent his junior year of high school studying abroad in Boston, Massachusetts. His time in the U.S. as a high school student partly inspired his return two years later for tertiary studies, but he attributes both decisions partly to his love for American culture, specifically basketball.

Ray

Ray is a senior animal science major from Beijing. He completed two years of study at an agricultural university before coming to the U.S. through an exchange program to complete his degree. Ray's exposure to laboratory work sparked his interest in genetics, and he is exploring related graduate school options. Ray's English language skills are strong, and he is confident using the language. He is equally open to building a life and career in China or the United States. Ray cites his family as being highly supportive and somewhat influential in his academic and personal decision making. Ray's father attended university. His parents wish for Ray to return to China following completion of his undergraduate degree, though he believes they will be supportive of his attending graduate school in the United States.

He approaches his academic and co-curricular pursuits with an infectious level of enthusiasm and curiosity. Ray completed a short-term study abroad course, conducts research in an on-campus biology lab, and travels with friends. His energy is also apparent in his social life, where he is the connector and initiator of gatherings. He described bringing several Chinese international students to their first outings at bars and house parties, and forging connections between his American friends and Chinese international student friends. Perhaps most representative of his joyful, exuberant personality is his rationale for choosing "Ray" as his "American" name: "I chose 'Ray' because this word is a piece of the sunshine, a 'ray of sunshine,' and I want people to remember me in this way to be bright and happy."

Ron

Ron is a senior finance major from Guangzhou, Guangdong Province who came to the U.S. for a one-year exchange program. He was attracted by the ability to study at a highly-ranked business school in an eastern American city. Although Ron struggled with culture shock and homesickness for his first semester, he has since adjusted to American culture and feels much happier. He attributes this to time, openness to trying new things, and sharing experiences with other Chinese international students. He is involved with a campus business investment club, which is composed of students from diverse backgrounds. After completing his exchange program, Ron plans to return to China and eventually work in the financial industry.

Ruolan

Ruolan is a junior accounting and finance double major from Beijing. Despite her academic focus on the quantitative aspects of business, her major interest is serving as a business professional and translator for international transactions. As a result, she is open to working in China, the U.S., or both locations after graduation, and hopes that her work will provide opportunities to travel. Her family is supportive of this goal.

On campus, Ruolan is involved with an academic honorary organization. She has a diverse group of friends, including international, Chinese, and American students. Her roommate, who she met through shared courses in the business school, is American. Maintaining connections to and sharing her culture is important to Ruolan, and she likes to share pictures, celebrate holidays, and cook Chinese food for her friends.

Sheldon

When Sheldon was a high school student in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, he traveled to the U.S. for a family vacation with his parents. Visiting universities was not the primary purpose of their travels, but after seeing the beautiful campuses in three east coast cities, Sheldon told his parents that he wanted to return to the U.S. to spend a year as an exchange student. Now, as a junior biology student, he has fulfilled this dream.

Sheldon has a dynamic, excited personality, and is passionate about absorbing as much knowledge and experience as he can. Because of his willingness to try new things, he has participated in community service, attended sporting events, and traveled locally – all through American friends who encourage him to join in. Sheldon also has a lot of friends who are Chinese international students, and he tries to serve in a similarly encouraging position. He is not sure what he would like to do after graduation; if he attends graduate school, he would like to study in the U.S., and if he works, it might be in China.

Steven

Steven is a formal, polite, senior business administration major from Shenzhen, Guangdong Province. He came to the U.S. after spending two years at a Chinese comprehensive university because he wanted to experience a competitive American university and learn about business culture to prepare him for his future career. After graduation, Steven plans to return to China to work in an environment where he will use his English language skills and international experience.

Most of Steven's friends, including his roommates in his on-campus apartment, are other Chinese international students. He is friendly with a few American students. He is also in touch with a few students who he exchanged messages with prior to arriving at the university that he met through "We Chat," a popular Chinese social media platform. He is involved with a business school organization and has held an internship.

Vivian

Vivian is a junior biology major from Shanghai. She chose her major because of a long interest and talent in science and mathematics, and she is particularly interested in human biology and medicine. Vivian studied at a comprehensive university before coming to the U.S. through an exchange program. After graduation, Vivian wishes to study medicine in either the U.S. or China. Both of her parents attended university, and they would like her to return to China after finishing her degree.

Though she is not formally involved with any clubs or organizations, Vivian enjoys attending speakers and concerts on campus. She hopes to find a laboratory research program or summer internship related to her major. Her friend group is composed mostly of Chinese international students. She also socializes with students from her residence hall floor and classes.

Wenxin

Wenxin is a junior international business major from Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. Wenxin's parents, who attended university, were not initially in favor of her studying abroad. They believed that staying at her Chinese comprehensive

university would be better for her professional connections and success, and they wanted her to be nearer to them. Wenxin's parents finally gave their approval if she went to a top university with name recognition in China. She says that the university she chose did not fulfill those requirements, but the strength of her academic program was enough to meet their approval. After graduation, Wenxin is interested in working for a large multinational company after graduation either in China or the United States.

Wenxin has held two off-campus internships, and is also involved with a student advising group within her academic college. Most of her friends are Chinese international students. Wenxin experienced a lot of frustration early in her time abroad because her American class project group mates wouldn't listen to her ideas or allow her to contribute. She believes that this discouraged her from trying to talk to and befriend Americans, but she says that her number of friends from other cultural backgrounds has grown.

William

William is a senior computer science major from Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. He is job searching in anticipation of his approaching graduation and has had some interviews with American companies. He hopes to receive an offer of employment and sponsorship to remain in the United States. Experiencing American culture and sights was important in William's decision to study abroad, and he has traveled, attended sporting events, and perfected his use of American English slang words. William shares an apartment near campus with one Chinese and two American students. William's parents encouraged his decision to study abroad and are

supportive of his plan to work in the U.S. William’s uncle lives in Boston, and having a relative nearby who has already experienced moving from China to the U.S. was reassuring to William and his parents.

Ziyu

Ziyu is a junior economics major and mathematics minor from Shandong Province. She started her degree at a comprehensive university before participating in an exchange program. She chose her areas of study for their practical utility and because of her academic strength in math. After graduation, Ziyu plans to return to China and pursue work in the business or government sector.

A soft-spoken, composed woman, Ziyu has studied English since primary school, but does not feel confident using the language in daily interactions, including in social and academic settings with her American peers. Most of Ziyu’s social network consists of other Chinese international students, although she has begun to connect more with American peers with whom she shares a major and several courses. Ziyu is not currently involved with clubs or organizations. She spends her time outside of class exploring local cities, going to movies, and trying new restaurants.

Table 4.1
Participants

Name	Academic Standing	Gender	Major	Hometown
Amy	Junior	Woman	Business Administration	Shanghai
Bruce	Junior	Man	Physics	Changzhou, Jiangsu Province
David	Junior	Man	Electrical Engineering	Sichuan Province
Iris	Sophomore	Woman	Business Administration	Guangzhou, Guangdong Province
Jesse	Junior	Man	Mechanical Engineering	Shanghai
Joseph	Junior	Man	Mechanical Engineering	Guangzhou, Guangdong Province
Mariah	Junior	Woman	Communication	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

Ming	Senior	Man	Business Administration	Ningbo, Zhejiang Province
Patrick	Sophomore	Man	Applied Mathematics	Qingdao, Shandong Province
Ray	Senior	Man	Animal Science	Beijing
Ron	Senior	Man	Finance	Guangzhou, Guangdong Province
Ruolan	Junior	Woman	Accounting and Finance	Beijing
Sheldon	Junior	Man	Biology	Fuzhou, Fujian Province
Steven	Senior	Man	Business Administration	Shenzhen, Guangdong Province
Vivian	Junior	Woman	Biology	Shanghai
Wenxin	Junior	Woman	International Business	Suzhou, Jiangsu Province
William	Senior	Man	Computer Science	Nanjing, Jiangsu Province
Ziyu	Junior	Woman	Economics	Shandong

Findings

Overview

Several themes emerged from participants' narratives. Students seemed to experience a series of negotiations throughout their transition from Chinese to U.S. higher education, including their practical, academic, and social adjustment. They described their expectations prior to study abroad ("It will be difficult and awesome"), and their evolving needs upon arrival ("Before I can think about that, I gotta do so much else first"). They also reflected on differences between "The Chinese way and the American way" and their responses to challenges and triumphs ("Testing my skills and I feel more confident"). Finally, some students spoke about the convergence of their experiences through their transition ("I am Chinese, but I also have an American life"). Together, these themes informed the emerging theory and model of Chinese international students' transitions.

Students' experiences and thoughts before coming to the U.S. were often similar. Participants cited similar reasons for studying abroad, including: the desire to be immersed in American culture, to meet and learn from new people, to travel, and to broaden their horizons. They wanted to learn about and experience American

culture, develop connections and exposure to American business practices, and to expand their horizons through the immersive experience of studying abroad.

Participants used language such as “get to know Americans and their culture,” “meet people with completely different lifestyles,” “have a new experience,” “enrich my life,” and “make new friends.”

Some participants spoke about their campus involvement. Some shared their experiences with campus involvement in the U.S., including in academic organizations, internships, laboratory research, and student organizations. Many students, however, did not participate in campus or community activities or events.

All of the participants spoke about differences between the classroom environment in China and the U.S. to be particularly challenging. They described the American classroom emphasis on verbal participation as “a big difference,” “difficult,” “impossible,” and “uncomfortable,” and discussed expectations related to assignments, grading, and academic integrity.

Participants also discussed their social experiences in two ways. Some students described spending time primarily or exclusively with other Chinese international students, some of whom they had known prior to studying in the U.S. Ray shared his beliefs about what he described as “the bad circle” phenomenon, stating that some students “choose to live together, and in this way, maybe in all their years, these groups of Chinese students will keep living together, study together, with no way to make American friends or accept local culture.” Other students talked about their diverse friend groups, having American students as “my best friends,” and spending time with “guys from everywhere, some Chinese guys, some American

guys.” Students in the second group also talked about attending off-campus parties “like an American student,” “going to the pub to meet people,” and refusing to be like their peers who “sit in the lounge playing computer games and never go outside.” Students seemed to seek groups of Chinese and American friends, participate in campus and community life, and use these interactions as opportunities to expand their cultural understanding, or socialize exclusively with Chinese students and participate less in campus activities.

“It will be difficult and awesome”: Expectations prior to study abroad

In many cases, participants developed ideas about the environment they would enter, as well as what their experiences would be, prior to going abroad. They acknowledged possible challenges, and expressed various combinations of joyful anticipation and nervous uncertainty. Each participant mentioned their pre-departure thoughts and feelings as part of their transition to study in the United States. Some had previous experiences in the U.S. that informed their expectations, some focused on what they hoped to see rather than what they might actually experience, and others seemed to have no clear expectations, merely a broad perception that their time abroad would be “difficult and awesome.”

Prior family or personal experiences seemed to inform students’ expectations of American culture and life. Two participants developed expectations as a result of family members’ experiences. William’s uncle lived in Boston, so William and his parents consulted his uncle for input on reputable American universities and potential cities in which for William to study. Ming’s father had studied abroad and shared fond memories. As a result, Ming anticipated having a similarly positive experience.

Some participants' previous travel experiences informed their pre-departure expectations. Patrick, Iris, and Sheldon had traveled for a year or longer to the U.S. for leisure or academic programs before participating in study abroad. They talked about their previous travel in only positive ways. Based on their first visits, Sheldon perceived Americans as "smiling," Iris described them as "friendly," and Patrick noted that they were "so helpful." Patrick described the United States as having "so much green space" and "the most beautiful campuses," and Sheldon said the United States was "beautiful."

Participants who had previously visited the U.S. also described how their travel informed their return for study abroad. Having already observed American culture first-hand, students' focus pre-departure seemed to be on the tangible aspects of American culture, especially sport, tourist attractions, and cities. Patrick and Iris, who had both traveled to the U.S. prior to studying abroad, talked about how their early experiences shaped their perceptions and excitement about returning the United States. Their reflections represent several participants' shared emphasis on tourism as a benefit of studying abroad. Speaking about her thought process prior to arriving in the U.S., Iris shared,

All I could think about is, I'm going to go to these cities, I'm gonna see so many new things. The opportunity to travel back to Boston, New York, D.C., visit some friends during the break, it was something I really looked forward to.

Iris was interested in American culture and had traveled to the U.S once previously with her family. She looked forward to studying abroad as an opportunity to see

more of the country by visiting cities and friends during her school breaks. Prior to arriving in the U.S., her thoughts were on her potential opportunities for recreational travel, rather than the practical details of her upcoming experience. Sheldon, who had also visited the U.S. previously, similarly shared he “couldn’t wait to start traveling” around the country once he arrived at university.

Other students expressed interest in tangible experiences and social interactions with American students. Patrick shared the connection he developed to basketball during his first visit to the U.S.:

At first, it sounds a little bit silly, but at first I just wanted to play basketball. That was a big reason. When I was a kid, I was pretty tall, and I played pretty well, so I always wanted to play basketball. I was also interested in American culture.

Patrick was keenly interested in American culture and experiencing specific aspects of American life, particularly to play recreational basketball with American students. He was also interested in socializing with young Americans, a desire that was expressed by other participants. Several participants mentioned tangible social experiences they wished to experience during their time abroad. Iris wanted to experience “American nightlife,” Bruce was interested in “attending sporting matches,” and Ray mentioned “going to a fraternity party” as social experiences they wanted to experience with American students.

Participants’ pre-departure expectations also included realistic consideration of the challenges that they might face as newcomers, as Ray described, in “a country that doesn’t belong to them.” Ray said,

When people go abroad, they're going in a country that doesn't belong to them, so that makes them have more challenges. Their lives are gonna seem not that convenient. If they can practice to change their lifestyle, change their comforts, then they can make friends... The reason why I came here is to have the American-style experience, the American friends. I want to enrich my life.

Ray described wanting an "American-style experience," and he acknowledged the challenges of actively seeking new, uncomfortable experiences to "enrich his life." He would be entering an unfamiliar environment in which his lifestyle, comforts, and friends would change, acknowledging that his life in the U.S. would "seem not that convenient" and "have more challenges." Similarly, Vivian expressed,

Before I came, I knew there were going to be a lot of different things that I couldn't expect. The classes were going to be different, the life, the personality of people, everybody talks about the food is so different...I chose to go to the U.S., so I knew it was going to be different. It's not that bad. I also knew it's a big city, so there's probably going to be some Chinese people and Chinese food. I knew it was going to be difficult.

Like Ray, Vivian anticipated challenges related to the many differences between Chinese and American culture and lifestyle, including academic and social aspects of life. She also felt comforted that, by studying near a large city with a Chinese community, she would also have access to familiar things. Later, she went on to say that she decided to face any challenges by "forcing" herself to have a good experience. Students expressed the need to embrace these differences as part of the

immersive, challenging experience of studying abroad. They used phrases like Vivian's "necessary challenge," Ming's "natural differences," and Ray's "not that convenient" to describe the dissonance they expected to experience when going abroad.

A few participants, including Mariah and Patrick, did not talk about challenges they anticipated prior to studying abroad. They perceived the United States in a highly positive light and expected to have a very positive transition experience. Mariah shared,

[In China] I was used to some people saying things to me, talking about me for being a Muslim. I know that in the U.S., it's a lot more tolerant of different religions. Also, a lot more people have a religion in the U.S. than in China, so it would be a more normal thing. Of course there will be some things I have to learn, but I think Americans are very welcoming. People are very helpful, it's okay to make mistakes, so many different people are in the U.S. so you have to learn from each other.

Mariah's positive perception of religious freedom and diversity in the United States was a major focal point in her pre-departure expectations, and she anticipated that she would fit into her new environment more than she had in China. The possibility of difficulty or discomfort was no different than what she had experienced during her religious conversion process. Mariah's parents supported her studying abroad because they also hoped she would find acceptance and peace with her religious conversion.

Patrick also had very positive perceptions and expectations of the U.S. before arriving, which were largely informed by his mother, a professor of English language and culture who shared her favorable perception of the U.S. with Patrick. One aspect of American universities and that Patrick was pleased with was the amount of students' agency in the major choice process:

If you're not meeting (Chinese university officials') grade expectation, they can transfer you to a major you don't like, and you have very little chance to change your major, so I think it would be really bad for me not to be able to choose what I want to learn.

Patrick looked forward to the academic liberty of choosing his own major, which was not part of the Chinese approach to tertiary education. The link between Mariah and Patrick is their pre-departure emphasis on positive aspects of studying in the U.S., a departure from other students' attention to potential challenges. Both also talked about the freedom and flexibility they anticipated in the U.S. that they didn't encounter in China.

Finally, a few participants used neutral "I didn't know what to expect" language. Students described their expectations for moving to the U.S. as "a lot of surprises" but "normal to move to a new country," meaning they normalized the challenges they anticipated as typical for such a large life change. Along these lines, William succinctly shared his anticipation that the U.S. was going to be "different," but "awesome." William said,

I didn't think too much about it. I had some ideas for what the campus would

be like, but didn't know very much what to expect. I knew it was going to be different, but I was too happy. I was just thinking it is going to be awesome. William and Bruce spoke vaguely and neutrally about their pre-departure expectations. Though they did not speak about specific adjustments for their transitions, both spoke about vague, broad changes and understanding, similar to the language used by other participants in reference to their pre-departure expectations. Bruce explained that he had to "prepare to make changes... you need to be open to understanding." Others imagined what their study abroad experiences would be like, but seemed to have neutral, balanced expectations.

“Before I can think about that, I gotta do so much first”: Balancing practical needs and social desires

Before participants could focus on their aims for studying abroad, including social and intellectual pursuits, they first had to manage the practical aspects of their transitions. For many students, these arrangements started to take shape before they arrived in the U.S. Securing on or off-campus housing, navigating transportation, adapting to food, and seeking medical care were some of the experiences students shared. Students' physical and practical needs sometimes trumped their ability to immerse themselves in the social and academic components of campus. Vivian summarized, "I was interested in meeting people, trying new things, trying the nightlife, but when I arrived, it was like, 'Before I can think about that, I gotta do so much first.'"

Students expressed many uncertainties related to whether and how they were able to secure resources to meet their physical needs. Unlike their American peers,

international students could not bring items to meet all of their practical needs from the other side of the world. Because of the uncertainties related to their physical needs, their first actions upon arrival in the U.S. were to gain access to food, housing, and resources for their physical health. For example, Steven described how finding food and mapping his surroundings, “the basic things,” were among his first priorities:

So many students who came from China told me about the food, so I was really worried that I wasn't going to find food I like. American food is good, I like it, but I didn't know that, so I was trying to find good food, and I wanted to make sure I knew how to go from my place to classes, where is the [student union] and the gym, things like that. Yeah, the basic things were most important in the beginning.

Other students also expressed concerns about American food, such as when Ray said, “I heard American food is so sweet,” and when Iris said, “just in case, I knew I could find Chinese food in this big city.”

Students also talked about the challenges of finding housewares, obtaining identification, and completing paperwork in an unfamiliar environment. Steven described “running everywhere to ask questions, being sent to another place” for errands to receive his student identification, set up his student accounts and housewares. Sheldon had made housing arrangements prior to his arrival, but expressed uncertainty related to the details about his living arrangements beyond securing a residence:

I knew I was living on campus in the dorm, but I didn't know about the furniture, what I was gonna need. I didn't bring the cooking supplies, bed supplies, in my backpack, so I needed to find those things. But then a lot of people said we're going to [home furnishings store], so it was a relief that I can find everything I need there.

Sheldon was concerned about not knowing what supplies he would need for living in the residence halls, and his inability to transport housewares from home. He described finding what he needed, a task that would have been simple at home, as “a relief,” demonstrating the importance of the experience. Navigating paperwork and practical errands in an unfamiliar environment provided an additional challenge to students.

Students' experiences with medical issues and care provided examples of the difficulties that could arise from navigating practical challenges. Vivian became ill soon after arriving in the U.S. and described feeling isolated, partially due to language limitations:

I got sick in my first week and I had to figure out how to get medicine. I could not go out to meet people, and I was so sick and lonely. I didn't know the words for my sickness. I realized I can say so many things in English but don't know how to say the details of how I felt. I kept looking up the words and talking with my friends to ask how to say the symptoms and the medicine. Some medicines they don't have here.

Vivian described two challenges from being ill. First, she had to navigate a new system of medical care and customs, including not knowing whether the remedy she

would have sought at home was a medicine that existed in the U.S. Second, she struggled to find the words in her third language for what she was experiencing. In addition to her practical medical needs, she was forced to forgo social opportunities because she “could not go out to meet people” and felt “lonely” as a result. Thus, her experience illustrates two points: the practical importance of health care to her transition, and the influence that prioritizing practical necessities could have on early opportunities to socialize. Iris’s feelings when trying to get new eyeglasses were similar to Vivian’s:

When I broke my eyeglasses, every thought I had was, “I don’t know how I’m gonna get that.” It was a mystery. I needed [eyeglasses] for everything. In China, I would know how to find that... I didn’t practice that in English before.

She knew how to find a replacement in China, but seemed daunted by the additional challenge of obtaining new eyeglasses in an unfamiliar country in a language she was less comfortable speaking.

Iris’s and Vivian’s stories also illustrate a point expressed by several participants: the immediate practical importance of language skills. Vivian struggled to find the correct English words for symptoms and medicines, and ultimately relied on Chinese friends to help her find the words to navigate medical care. Iris’ challenge of finding new eyeglasses was partly because of needing to communicate with an eye doctor, a situation for which she “didn’t practice that in English before.” Other participants reflected on their early experiences with language in the U.S. and talked about initially feeling shy and lacking confidence with their language skills. Ziyu

said, “I’m really shy, and I can’t speak something right away.” The additional time it took her to process and respond in her second language caused her to feel shy about conversing in English. Though Ruolan had studied English since primary school, her training did not prepare her for Americans’ use of slang and rapid speech. As a result, she did not feel confident using her English language skills in social settings.

The importance of language can be further illustrated by comparing quotes from Joseph and Patrick. Joseph moved to the U.S. with his family and struggled. Language skills became Joseph’s primary need. At first, Joseph struggled with even basic communication, which made him reluctant to go into the world. Joseph said:

Really my English was not at all good, like I couldn’t understand if people were speaking quickly. I was really depressed. I didn’t want to go anywhere because I felt like I couldn’t do anything. It was really hard that I couldn’t understand a lot of people.

By contrast, Patrick grew up with native English-speaking tutors to help him develop his language skills and had a very different experience. When he arrived and was immersed in an English-speaking environment for the first time he felt “it was a little fast, but I understood most of it.” He described feeling confident and having “not too much of a hard time with transition.” The challenges Joseph faced and affirming experiences Patrick had, both related to their language skills, demonstrated the importance of language as a practical tool for students’ transition to the U.S.

“The Chinese way and the American way”: Comparing Cultural Contexts

Participants made frequent comparisons between their Chinese and American universities, peers, and societies, including observations of the cultural differences,

academic expectations, and social practices. Several participants described their observations and perceptions of differences between the two countries as “the American way” versus “the Chinese way” of doing things, and noted the ways they navigated these differences.

Cultural differences. Participants responded to questions related Hofstede’s dimensions of culture and the comparative scores of China and the United States on each dimension. When I asked participants what they thought about the key differences between Chinese and American culture, several students spoke about their perceptions of formality, stress, and relaxation in the two cultures, especially for university students. Participants described the ways that American students seemed to spend their free time as “carefree” and “relaxed,” and noted that Chinese students did not seem to express the same level of relaxation. Students repeatedly described Americans as “casual” and “informal,” which was represented in participants’ observations of American students and professors. Participants’ perceptions of American informality were reinforced by the ease with which Americans seemed to meet new people, and the ability of Americans to form short-term social relationships.

Ron, Amy, and Ray were among participants who described the U.S. as comparatively casual. Ron was surprised by the level of relaxation his business school peers exhibited, despite valuing their grades and having multiple demands on their time. He described the differences he saw between his Chinese university peers and American students:

I was surprised by how relaxed Americans are in general. Sometimes students

are a little bit stressed, but most of the time they still have time to relax, be with their friends, and do a lot of activities on campus. I think they also care about their grades, but maybe they don't show if they are stressed. Chinese don't show that much of being relaxed. There is more pressure on Chinese students and Chinese people because it is much harder to get a job in China... My RA kept saying, "Relax, you should relax, man," and I said, "I am relaxed!" I was really relaxed, just acting like normal, and it made me worried that I missed something, culturally.

Ron's perception of Americans as "relaxed" seemed to relate to the way American students spent their time. He was surprised by how his American peers had the time and attention to simultaneously care about their grades, social lives, and co-curricular involvement and be only "a little bit stressed." Ron described his lack of relaxation as typical of being a Chinese university student, stating, "Chinese don't show that much of being relaxed." He believed that Chinese students face more pressure to achieve academically and get a good job, affording less time for social and co-curricular pursuits.

Amy described the communication style of American students and professors as casual, while she saw interactions in China as more "formal and strategic." When Amy compared her observations of Americans to her experiences in China, she shared:

The U.S. is definitely more casual. Professors are more casual, but so are the

students. When you go in the business world, it is so important to have connections in China. You have to have family connections or a professional network. It's a lot more formal and strategic.

To Amy, the word “casual” seemed to imply interpersonal interactions and the ability to build professional success on one's own. In China, students relied on connections with faculty and peers to build social capital for their future professional success. Interactions between professors and students in the U.S. did not seem to carry the same weight.

As participants shared their experiences, they indirectly portrayed low individualism, meaning they connected their experiences to interactions with and implications for the people around them. Low individualism is consistent with Hofstede's (2015) scoring of Chinese culture. Specifically, students referenced hesitation to participate in class out of respect for classmates' and instructors' time; similarly, they made decisions with the greatest positive community impact. Students believed that the Hofstede individualism scoring for Chinese culture is accurate.

Hofstede positions China and the United States as similar on this dimension of culture. Participants' expressed a high tolerance for change and ambiguity. By participating in study abroad, students knowingly and willingly participated in a major change with many uncertainties. This is consistent with China's low uncertainty avoidance score on Hofstede's dimensions. Participants shared experiences that are indicative of short and long-term orientation. For example, several talked about the importance of forming lasting, meaningful friendships and romantic relationships. A few participants discussed their relationship patterns as

opposite of the American “hookup culture” they observed. Ray’s observations focused on how being more casual meant differences in Chinese and American social relationships. Ray perceived Americans as making friends easily and having many “casual” friendships, while his Chinese friends had fewer, but more lasting relationships. He connected this to Chinese students’ long-term investment in relationships, as opposed to Americans’ emphasis on short-term utility.

Americans want to make more friends in different cultures. Americans make a lot of new friends easily. They go to a party, they go to the bar, and they always meet new friends. But most of the Chinese friends I know want to make more Chinese friends. One reason is because most of them will come back to China after they finish their education here, so they know if they make more Chinese friends it will help them more when they go back to China. If they make more American friends, it will not help them a lot later.

His reflections support other participants’ reflections on the importance of developing a social network, as well as the differences between American and Chinese students’ approach to relationships. Moreover, Ray identified a possible reason for the different approaches to forming relationships. He highlighted Chinese students’ interest in building long-term relationships that will have professional and social utility in the future. Comparatively, it seemed that Americans formed relationships with ease, but in a superficial, short-term manner. Jesse and Patrick talked about the importance of tradition and how they respect the wisdom of their parents and grandparents in their decision making. Patrick said that, although he values tradition

and the wisdom of others, he “has to find [his] own way of what is ‘normal.’” Their reflections demonstrate long-term time orientation.

Finally, students provided examples of Hofstede and Bond’s (2005) recently-added dimension of indulgence, the degree and timing to which desires are gratified.

Iris said:

Americans probably think that Chinese students are rich. They are mostly right. Even if we aren’t rich, it is very important for a lot of Chinese to show their wealth by having designer clothes, designer purse, special brand of car if they have a car.

Iris’s assessment of the desire to possess and display luxury goods, “even if [they] aren’t rich,” illustrates high indulgence. Because of the expense of tuition, living expenses, and flights home, education abroad is a highly indulgent experience for Chinese students. More than half of the participants spoke about extra travels during their time abroad, including additional short-term study abroad. Many also talked about their ability to immediately access the material goods and experiences they desire. This level of indulgence is atypical according to Hofstede’s (2015) assessment of China, which positions China as having a very low level of indulgence. However, contemporary accounts of Chinese international students’ spending habits indicate students’ displays of wealth (Shao, 2014).

Students’ reflections affirm Hofstede’s assessment of China’s power distance as being much lower than in the United States. When asked to appraise the scores themselves, students said the power distance scoring accurately reflects their experiences. Participants described their interactions with professors and other

authority figures in China as “formal” and “hierarchical.” Students described their comparatively low levels of access to faculty within and outside of the classroom, ranging from an inability to ask questions in class to not having office hour consultation.

Student-faculty interactions. Several students described their faculty interactions and seemed surprised or confused by the comparative level of informality exercised by American professors. Much of this surprise seemed to relate to the use of titles and professors’ willingness to participate in casual conversation with students. Students used the words “casual,” “friendly,” “low power distance,” and “informal” to describe their American faculty. Participants’ American faculty engaged in casual conversation with students and took interest in their wellbeing, and Chinese faculty had little interaction with students outside of delivering in-class lectures. In China, faculty required students to address them by their formal titles and family names, whereas American faculty preferred to be addressed by their first names. Amy was surprised by this difference:

My professor said, call me by my first name, and I was so surprised, because in China you say the formal title and the last name. When he said that, it was like talking with a friend you have known for a long time. It was casual, but a lot of American professors are very casual, very friendly. At first, I thought that was . . . I was so surprised.

Patrick similarly expressed,

I would say it would be much more formal in China. We pay a lot of respect

to teachers throughout our history and our culture, so students in China are supposed to respect their teachers in a lot of ways. Some of the professors in the U.S. ask to call their first names, but in China you greet them formally to show respect. Absolutely.

Amy was surprised by the expectation of her professor “talking like a friend you have known for a long time.” She was accustomed to more formal, distant relationships with her instructors, and was surprised by their “very casual, very friendly” rapport. Patrick talked about the amount of respect shown to educators as a profession in China, and shared a Chinese proverb that compared teachers as equally influential as parents in students’ lives.

The desire to be respectful seemed to pose a challenge for participants, who equated level of formality with showing respect for professors. Talking about her hesitation to call professors by their first name, Wenxin shared, “I want to show respect for their position and knowledge.” Ming initially felt uncomfortable with the relaxed, personal nature of his interactions with a professor, and talked about his wish to address professors in the formal manner he had used in China. He described:

I always wanted to say “Doctor” to my teachers at first. My advisor was asking me questions about China, my life, during our meeting, and I felt a little uncomfortable. I know now that it’s so relaxed. We can talk about life and also talk about ideas and classes. I like how it’s a mix. People (in the U.S.) are so helpful.

Over time, students seemed to learn how to align their respect for faculty with the level of collegiality exhibited by Americans. Gradual interactions with his faculty

helped Ming to balance a sense of respect with friendliness. He described initially being very formal with his advisor and professors out of a desire to be respectful, but learned over time that responding to their warmth was respectful.

Classroom expectations. All 18 participants spoke about differences between academic expectations in China and the U.S. Their most illustrative examples related to grading and assignments, academic integrity, and class participation. At students' Chinese universities, course grades were largely based on a single exam. Emphasis on a single exam was a pattern in participants' academic lives; secondary school entrance, secondary school course grades, the national university entrance, and university course grades were all based on high stakes exams. Dissimilarly, in participants' American courses, their grades were based on multiple evaluations, including exams, homework, papers, and other assignments. Ray described the importance of exams for admission to secondary school and university, as well as in individual courses. Of his courses in China, Ray explained:

In my two years in Chinese university, every class only had one final. No midterm, no quiz, no attendance, so for Chinese, if you do good on the final, you can get an A. If you want to go to a good Chinese university from high school, the only thing you need to do is the one final exam to the university exam. If you fail that, you cannot go to university, no matter how good you are before that. So it's the same with Chinese universities: all the classes have only one final, no midterm.

Like Ray, other participants compared the multiple tests, assignments, and papers from their American courses to the single exam grades with which they were

more familiar in China. Many students talked about the “pressure,” “focus,” and “importance” of a single exam for their courses in China. Any homework assignments served as tools to facilitate feedback and learning, but were not given or incorporated into formal grades. Ray said, “There were only a few homeworks, but they were ‘fake’ homeworks. Even if they were graded, they don’t count in the final grade, because only the exam counts as a grade.” Patrick described similar structure:

[In China] we also have homeworks and stuff, but it won’t count towards your grade. It’s for you to get a sense of how you know the knowledge, and help you to prepare for the final exam.

Participants described the role of homework assignments in courses in China as ungraded tools to help students prepare for the end-of-term exam. By completing homework assignments, students could self-assess their progress and determine how to invest their time and effort to ensure their preparation for all courses.

Conversely, participants’ American courses required homework completion as a graded assignment for instructors to assess students’ progress. Mariah described grading in her American university courses as “collecting many grades” to assess students’ progress throughout the term. These differences help to explain the salience of homework expectations in students’ academic transition experiences.

Students noted differences between Chinese and American expectations for academic integrity, including cheating and plagiarism. Some participants’ lack of familiarity with American academic integrity expectations seemed to relate to differences in assignments. For example, the same academic integrity expectations for homework were not in place in China because many students’ homework

assignments had been optional and ungraded. David also talked about different approaches to academic integrity in the U.S. and China:

There is a very different view of (academic integrity) in China... I know you can't copy the homework, you have to put works cited for the materials you refer, and in China, the process of how you state somebody else's idea is different.

David said there was a different approach to the concept of academic integrity in the U.S., including the expectation to cite information sources and complete work independently. Students who had not previously written term papers were unfamiliar with the expected citations. Patrick shared, "In China, we don't write papers in high school, so that part of plagiarism, we don't normally have contact with that." In China, professors do not require students to cite sources of information, and students are able to freely work together to complete assignments.

Other students described learning about academic integrity from orientation, faculty, class assignments, observing other students, and occasionally through peers upon their arrival in the U.S. In many cases, learning from peers helped the students to navigate complex situations, synthesize information they had received from other sources, and understand cultural differences. For example, Ray described,

When I came to class, when I tried to ask some American friends, "Hey, can I look at your assignment," he said, "Um, no, but I can help you with that, but you can't copy this assignment," because if I copy his, he will also be in trouble. That's a way to keep these things from happening. The system in

China is so different... because of no system to control that in China, many of them will have these bad habits.

Ray's reflection demonstrated the progress he made in understanding academic integrity, as well as the role his American peers had in shaping his understanding. Though Ray had received information during orientation about cheating and plagiarism, he did not fully understand the difference between Chinese and American expectations about academic integrity until he asked American classmates to look at their class assignment, a practice he had often done during his two years at a Chinese university. His classmates explained the university's academic integrity policy and why copying the assignment would be problematic. Their intervention helped Ray to understand the different academic expectations in China versus the United States. Showing his growth and understanding of academic integrity expectations, Ray reflected that "the system in China is so different," and referred to his previous behavior as "bad habits," demonstrating that he had reflected and understood the significance of academic integrity in American university life.

Finally, there also seemed to be differences in academic integrity expectations for exams. Though several students said that cheating on a course final exam would "never" be tolerated, Patrick and Ray shared an interesting opinion of institution-level academic integrity in China. They asserted that Chinese secondary schools will alter students' exams or not submit grades that reflect unfavorably on the school. Patrick said schools "want to have a high rate" of success on the national exams and sometimes took steps to remove students who would "drag their rate down." He described,

As for the integrity on exams, I do know a lot of people cheat. For some exams, when schools are trying to get better achievement, they turn a little bit of a blind eye to that, for the classes. Not for the major exams. But if it's better for the whole, these are not major exams, so they don't care about the true grade for things like that.

Patrick's reflection provides insight into institutional and individual-level perspectives on academic integrity in China. He mentioned individuals who had cheated on exams, and institutions that had "turned a blind eye to that." He said that the difference was for the "major exams," such as the national university entrance exam and professional qualifying exams, where cheating was not acceptable.

Participants provided several examples in which institutions and faculty had ignored cheating and plagiarism or participated in the behavior themselves. Consequently, students developed different expectations for academic integrity in China than what they found was expected of them in the U.S.

In addition to the assignments, some participants observed differences in the ways teachers administered grades. Participants seemed to perceive American professors' grading as more lenient, or "easy." Ziyu compared teachers' grading philosophy and the subsequent average grades in her Chinese and American courses:

In China, a really good grade is maybe an eighty-five to ninety. The average is lower than that. The grades are out of 100. Ninety-five is like, wow, really good. In the U.S., some classes have an A-minus as the low grade. I think in some classes, there is not a lot of variation in the grades, and some teachers

give higher grades to a lot of students. A lot of classes have a curve, and I didn't see that very much or ever really in China.

Ziyu perceived that Chinese professors assessed grades more stringently than her American professors. As such, the average scores were lower in China, as were students' perception of "good" grades. American grading practices such as "curving" exams seemed to add to the perception of American grading as more lenient. Ziyu's observation was similar to Jesse, who said "I think it's possible in some classes for every student to have an A," which he indicated would rarely happen at his Chinese university.

Differences between Chinese and American expectations for classroom participation were also discussed. In China, class time was reserved largely for the lecture, and students asked questions sparingly out of respect for the professor and other students' time. This differed greatly from participants' experiences in the U.S., where many of their courses included grades for participation. Ziyu shared her experience and difficulties participating in class:

It's a big difference. I'm really shy, and I can't speak something right away.

In many of my classes, the participation is important so the teacher knows you understand, but I understand and can't speak. It's really hard.

Ziyu described expectations for in-class verbal participation as a "big difference" between her courses in China and the U.S. She understood verbal participation to be an indicator to professors that students understood the course material, and was frustrated because she did understand, but had trouble speaking in class.

Wenxin became comfortable with the idea of verbal class participation; yet, her language skills limited her ability to react and respond quickly. She explained:

Well, I know it's normal to ask questions in class, but it takes me a long time to think of what I am going to say, and sometimes the discussion already changed to another topic. Maybe somebody said what I was trying to say. I think it's a lot harder for me because English is not my first language, so I try to follow the discussion and also make something to say in time. The discussion in [online classroom platform] is much better because I have enough time to read, think about the topic, and plan the response.

Wenxin took “a long time” to process class discussion and formulate her thoughts, partly because English is not her first language. Interestingly, Wenxin preferred the digital discussion boards, which offered her ample time to consider course content and respond to a conversation.

Ziyu and Wenxin's accounts are similar to several other students who described themselves as “shy” and “uncomfortable” with verbal participation. Joseph described verbal class participation as “the hardest thing” about American university courses. Though Ray described himself as “pretty comfortable” speaking in class after two semesters of practice, he said, “For some questions, I still really think about it. If I can find an answer by myself, I don't ask.” Participants' narratives indicate their deep discomfort with speaking in class, even after time and practice. Their discomfort seems to relate to language confidence and differences from their home country's pedagogy. Students' willingness for and comfort with verbal class participation seemed to be two separate challenges.

Participants also gave examples comparing American and Chinese students' different approaches to class participation, as well as speculation about the reasons for the differences. Some motifs included fear, students as consumers, wasting time, and respecting others through in-class participation or lack thereof. During Ray's discussion of class participation, he reflected on differences between American and Chinese in-class expectations, including for class participation. He stated,

This is so important: American students and people do not fear anything. If I raised my hand, I thought, "Oh, this question might be too simple to ask the professor, to let the professor explain. People will think me stupid to ask this question, and I will waste these students' time." But American students will not think this way. They think, "I paid for this class. I have to know. The professor needs to have time to answer my questions." I think that's a big difference between China and the U.S.

Ray compared his hesitation to raise his hand in class to his American peers' comparative eagerness to speak. He attributed the difference to Americans "not fearing anything." Ray's statements about American students' approach to speaking in class also may reflect a view of American students as consumer-minded. Ray connected American students' having "paid for this class" to their belief that faculty "need to have time to answer" them. Similarly, when Amy talked about the "casual" nature of American student-faculty interactions, she remarked that students on American campuses have "a lot of power" compared to students at Chinese universities. Participants seemed to assert that Americans possess a sense of

entitlement as consumers of higher education, thus privileged to ask questions in class.

Students' comments also suggest their hesitation to verbally participate in class is related to respecting others. Ray described that students in China want to respect the time and intelligence of their professors and classmates, and asking questions would waste their time and possibly insult their intelligence. Wenxin expressed concern that by taking the time to craft a comment, she would "waste" valuable class time. Bruce said that professors "have more important things to do" than answer students' questions. Ray also expressed concern that his peers or professors would "think me stupid" for asking a question. This concern suggests that in addition to showing respect, Chinese students' hesitation to speak in class relates to not being seen as less competent or an inconvenience for asking a question.

Social practices. Students' social experiences and observations were another point of comparison for participants. Students observed differences in social patterns and expectations between China and the U.S., as well as observations about overall social climate in both countries. Many students talked about American drinking culture; they perceived that Americans consumed alcohol more frequently than their Chinese counterparts. Participants mentioned alcohol consumption at "bars," "pubs," "fraternity parties," and sporting events when they talked about their perceptions of Americans' social lives. Jesse compared Chinese and American university students' approaches to alcohol consumption, stating,

Every time they talked about what they did, they said, "I was so drunk, I drank this much, I went to this bar, everyone was so drunk," and I didn't see the

point of that. In China, you go out at night, and sometimes there is drinking, but most of the time you go to a restaurant, you go to an activity, you hang out together. It isn't as much focused on getting drunk. It's not that big of a city, but I think here there are some things to do, but people still just want to get drunk. I don't understand that.

After listening to the stories and plans of Americans in his residence hall, which seemed to center on being drunk, quantity of alcohol consumption, and going to bars, Jesse decided that his perception of American socializing did not align with his personal preferences, and he decided to forgo going out with the others. Students like Iris, Ruolan, and Ray, also described American university students as consuming more alcohol than their peers in China. Ruolan remarked, "There is no drinking age in China, but students drink much more here. We don't party as much like here." Ruolan also talked about differences between Chinese and American evening entertainment and social patterns. She shared,

Some Chinese students get bored because we are used to having much more entertainment. The stores and restaurants are open really late. There is so much to do, especially in big cities. Here, there is nothing to do but party at night, even in the city... For Chinese students who are accustomed to having things to do, we would just stay at home now.

Ruolan made a connection between differences between American and Chinese nightlife and Chinese students' boredom. She suggested that because students from China are "accustomed to having things to do," the fewer late-night options available

in American cities cause Chinese students in the United States to become bored and “just stay at home now.”

Some students reflected on broad social topics, particularly diversity, in China and the United States. A few participants, including Mariah, reflected on the diversity of the United States and their American university community. Mariah had navigated the social implications of her religious conversion in China, the openness and diversity of the U.S. was a welcome social difference. She shared,

It’s easier to be who you are [in the U.S.]. A lot more people here are religious. It’s common to have all types of religions, there are a lot more types of race and ethnicity, and people are used to seeing that and talking about that. In China, there are some ethnic groups, but they live mostly in special parts of China where that group comes from; you don’t see them really everywhere. Also, hardly anybody has a religion, maybe Buddhism spiritualism, but you don’t talk about a religion. In the U.S., it’s easier to talk about that because everybody talks about that.

Mariah spoke about the comparative level of religiosity and religious tolerance she perceived in the United States. In the U.S., she observed more religious, racial, and ethnic diversity, whereas in China she perceived that “hardly anybody has a religion” and “ethnic groups” lived in “special parts of China.”

Mariah also observed that Americans seemed to discuss diversity more openly. Because of the diversity and openness to discussing difference that she perceived in the U.S., Mariah felt more “open” to practicing her religion and “being herself.” Ray and Iris also noted this difference. Iris talked about her roommates

“two White, one Black,” and stated that she and her roommates often talked about race relations and political issues related to race. Ray compared the racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. with the lack of diversity in China, and noticed that his American peers spoke much more about diversity than his Chinese peers. Their experiences indicate a perception of diversity and conversations about difference in the U.S. that may have been absent during their time at Chinese universities.

Participants compared and contrasted China and United States along many cultural, academic, and social practices. The students spent a lot of time observing, evaluating, and participating in practices different from those they had known in China. Some of the cultural contrasts were challenging or perceived as negative by the students, while other participants spoke positively about the useful and affirming experiences they experienced in the U.S. Students’ observations and experiences in China and the U.S. that shaped their comparative understanding of “the Chinese way and the American way” was a significant theme of participants’ narratives. When students spoke about “the Chinese way and the American way,” it seemed they were reflecting on their accumulated observations of Chinese and American culture.

“Testing my skills and I feel more confident”: Responding to challenges and triumphs

Participants described instances where they had interacted with American culture in ways that helped them to feel more or less confident. As a result of their experiences, students sought out future experiences that either helped them to feel challenged or secure. The experiences students sought formed a pattern of behavior.

Some of students' affirming moments included being invited to social events, successfully navigating practical challenges, and performing well academically. For example, Ming described feeling socially and academically confident after some of his American peers sought his advice about financial investments. The experience encouraged him to build a group of friends with whom he shares startup company ideas. Ray and Iris both participated in a residence hall global scholars' living-learning community, which provided formal programs and informal opportunities allowing them to interact with American and international students. Iris explained that interest in learning about world cultures was a prerequisite for participation in the living-learning community, so her peers in the program took interest in Iris's story and were forgiving of language and cultural missteps, which helped her to feel more confident. Sheldon's friends from his residence hall were the foundation of his social network and introduced him to other students, which helped him to feel more socially comfortable and confident.

Students described challenges related to language, cultural, social, and academic issues, especially earlier in their transitions to American university life. Some of participants' difficult events included struggling with the English language, being socially excluded, and feeling academically overwhelmed. Ron, for example, struggled with homesickness when he first arrived in the U.S., so he sought other Chinese students with whom he shared a culture *and* a similar experience of culture shock. When Joseph's family came to the United States, he enrolled at a community college. Because his being in the U.S. was related to his family moving and not his choice to be an international student, the challenges he faced were difficult and

frequent. The linguistic and academic challenges he faced affected his emotional state:

There were some times when I didn't understand anything my professor said.

I sat there listening for the whole class and understood only a few words.

Then I went home and felt so bad, and I had to work really hard to read the book and try to learn that way. It was really hard, really hard. I was so

discouraged, really stressed, and really depressed. It was a very hard time.

Because of his limited English language skills, Joseph struggled to understand his instructors and peers. To supplement what he missed from the lectures, he read textbooks over and over to learn vocabulary and concepts. Though his grades improved over time, his emotional struggle seemed to outlast his academic challenges. Joseph went on to share that as a result of his early challenges, he still struggles with confidence and building friendships.

Language skills seemed to play an important role in participants' academic and social experiences during their transition to American university life. Language influenced Ziyu's academic performance because she felt "shy" and "uncomfortable" in class and was reluctant to verbally participate or ask questions. David did not feel comfortable socializing with American students because of the language barrier. Ron described his struggle with culture shock and language challenges, "I had such a bad culture shock. I think I made a lot of mistakes, didn't understand some things, I was really shy." Because Ron felt homesick, overwhelmed by his new environment, and reluctant to speak English after making "a lot of mistakes," he sought other Chinese international students who he felt could better relate to his challenges. Similarly,

Ruolan attributed her hesitation to build friendships with Americans to her lack of confidence using “informal,” colloquial English language.

Other students described challenging social interactions, especially with American peers. Several participants described feeling excluded and rejected by American students with whom they hoped to build social connections. Wenxin looked forward to building relationships with her American classmates. However, when her professor assigned her to a group for a class project, the other students excluded her:

I had a lot of challenges in a group project. I was in a group of all Americans, and it was so bad. I was in the group, but they just ignored me. Is it because my English is not that good? I don't think it's that they don't like Chinese students. I felt so bad, I was trying to say an idea, or let me help with that, and they didn't listen to me at all. They just did the whole project, and I didn't say anything. After that, I felt more shy.

Wenxin was disappointed when the students in her group “ignored” her, even after she tried to share ideas and pleaded, “let me help with that.” Wenxin wondered if her group mates’ treatment was related to her English language skills or her being a Chinese international student. Finally, Wenxin allowed her classmates to finish the project while she quietly stood by, hurt that they did not permit her to participate. As a result of the project, Wenxin “felt more shy” and said she feels hesitant to attempt building friendships with Americans. Most of her friends are other Chinese international students.

Despite the challenges students faced, participants also described small victories and large triumphs that provided them with affirmation and reassurance. For some participants, their academic performance was a tangible measure of their transition success and the progress they had made. After his hard work and a period of uncertainty about his standing, David's academic performance helped to affirm his growth. He said:

I wasn't sure of how I am doing. I just worked so hard. When I got my grades, it was a good experience, really helpful for me to see the progress I made.

David seemed to view his academic performance as a gage for "how I am doing." For this reason, when he received his grades and found that he was doing well, it was an affirming experience. By demonstrating his academic competence, David knew he could pull his weight in informal study groups, which were also the foundation of his social interactions. David socializes primarily with other engineering students, so his academic success also helped him to feel socially confident. The "good experience" of performing well in the classroom helped him to do well outside of the classroom.

The ability to successfully navigate practical challenges and build relationships was a frequent topic that helped participants to measure their progress through the transition. Many students' affirming experiences came from outside the classroom, including through travel and social experiences. Several participants talked about traveling in the U.S. Travel was an experience that tested and affirmed students' language, social, and practical skills. Amy described the way that visiting a friend helped her to feel more confident. She shared:

Traveling is a big way for me to feel confident. When I went to visit my friend in Boston is an example. In order to travel to Boston, I had to take a train and a bus, and I figured that out, I was speaking only English to people and her friends. I realized it wasn't just my friends who understand me, so my English is okay. Yes, it's the way that travel tests my skills that I feel more confident.

The practical skills Amy needed to visit her friend in Boston helped her to feel confident about her transition to the U.S. She had to navigate multiple types of transportation and speak English to many people, including a number of people she did not know. Upon realizing that people understood her speaking English, and that she had relied on her practical skills to travel across the country, Amy felt "more confident." Other participants also mentioned travel as a confidence builder. Bruce described planning a trip for his friends, Ray talked about "building his social network" by traveling to new cities, and William mentioned feeling affirmed after traveling for professional interviews. It seemed that travel was a common way for participants to practice language skills, test practical skills, and develop their confidence.

Participants also cited relationship building as an affirming experience. Building friendships with Americans was very important to Sheldon's feelings of fitting in. Being invited to spend time with Americans helped him to feel socially welcomed:

Making American friends was really important. When they invite me to go to dinner, go to the gym, hang out, it made me feel really good. Now I spend a

lot of time with them, but in the beginning it was even more important because it was a new friendship. I feel included by Americans, and they introduced me to some people, and I introduced them to people I know, and we hang out all together.

In addition to helping students feel a sense of belonging, Sheldon's friendships with American students also helped him to build a network of friends. Through the few students he connected with initially, he met other students and developed his current friend group, which is composed of equal numbers of American and Chinese international students. This is consistent with other participants' accounts. Iris described how her American roommates were "so nice and they don't judge." Iris's roommates helped answer her questions about cultural and social norms, including how to approach her job supervisor and whether to pursue a leadership role in a club. Ray described meeting two women in class who invited him to a fraternity party and encouraged him to build a thriving social life in situations "where I'm usually the only Chinese guy." Having even a few meaningful relationships with Americans seemed to influence participants' social and academic confidence.

Students experienced challenges in the academic and social lives, as well as outside of the classroom and campus. The disappointments and encouragement that students experienced as a result of navigating challenges in their lives made a difference to their transitions. Pursuant to the results of these challenges, students felt bolstered or weakened, and seemed to adapt their behavior as a result of their experiences. After experiencing success speaking English or building relationships with other students, participants sought increasingly challenging social and academic

stimulation. When faced with a disappointment or failure, like being rejected by American peers, participants sought comfort and safety in low-challenge situations.

“I am Chinese, but I also have an American life”: Convergence of experiences

A few participants, particularly after spending several semesters in the U.S., seemed to have fully transitioned to American university life. These students described how they lived with an integrated identity of being a Chinese international student with an “American life.” They balanced having meaningful friendships with Chinese and American friends, academic and co-curricular campus involvement, and rich lives filled with new experiences. Over time, a few students expressed that they could blend into the campus community, fully cognizant of the academic and social expectations of American university life. Their transitions seemed to become so comfortable that in some settings, participants didn’t need to consciously think and try as much as they once had. Ming reflected:

I don’t worry about [fitting in]. I just live my life, go to class, come up with business ideas, and it’s normal. We’re just a bunch of guys from everywhere, some Chinese guys, some American guys. We are in a society where the technology is, the world is so small.

Heavily invested in an idea incubator group made of American and Chinese students, “just a bunch of guys from everywhere,” Ming viewed himself as “just another guy with ideas” sharing space with his diverse friend group. His remarks are representative of participants who seemed to normalize their transition over time as a result of positive social interactions.

Iris also found validation and normalcy through her social experiences. She lived with three American roommates, participated in campus organizations and employment at which she is the only Chinese international student, expressed feeling “almost like an American.” She said,

When I’m walking to class, I think, there are so many Asians here. I could be just an Asian American. I’m speaking English, I’m with my friends. It’s another type of comfortable, hanging out with my American friends.

Iris’s comments suggest that seeing her identity reflected in the campus diversity supported her transition. The “many Asians” on Iris’ American university campus helped her to see herself as “just an Asian American” like any other student of Asian heritage on campus. Additionally, her social, academic, and language process helped her to feel comfortable and natural. Iris talked about having good relationships with her American roommates and other students, a meaningful leadership position in a student organization, an on-campus job she enjoyed, and an academically fulfilling internship. She expressed confidence in her language skills, which improved dramatically as a result of her speaking on the phone for her job, and used contemporary slang fluently during our conversations.

Participants’ post-graduation plans also seemed to hold meaning to their development of “an American life.” Several students described plans to attend graduate school or seek employment in the United States. Making long-term plans in the U.S., similar to their American peers, appeared to help students feel, as Bruce said, “quite natural.”

I'm focused on school, getting ready for the applications to graduate school. I have a routine working with my lab and talking with the other people there. I have my friends and my girlfriend. I don't really have to think about it as much, and it feels quite natural.

After navigating travel and coursework, developing a social network, and becoming comfortable with life in the U.S., Bruce talked about having a routine and focusing on graduate school applications. Like his American lab colleagues, he was focused on academics and not having to "think about it as much" for other areas of his life. The ability to go on autopilot seemed to indicate a point in the transition where students merged their past and current experiences into one life.

Other students described their "Americanness" according to the behaviors they adopted over time at their American university. Ray developed a large social network and several outlets for campus involvement. He expressed surprise when comparing other Chinese international students' experiences to his own "American life." Ray explained,

Sometimes, I pretty much act American. I am Chinese, but I also have an American life. Every time I try new challenges, I tell myself, "I'll try it," but I think that's the American way of life. One thing that surprised me so much: all my Chinese friends, they never went to a fraternity or sorority. One way I think Americans make other friends is by going to the pub, the bar, and Chinese students never go to those places, never. But I do that.

Some participants merged their identity and experiences with the adjustments they made through the transition to the U.S. They described that sometimes, their

adjustments felt so natural, they couldn't distinguish what was "normal" for other Chinese international students. Ray described his attendance at parties and involvement on campus as acting "pretty much American." In addition to his actions, Ray perceived his "I'll try it" attitude to also be representative of an American approach to life. In short, Ray stated the experience of few participants who seemed to have blended being a Chinese international student with transitioning to American university life, "I am Chinese, but I also have an American life."

Though few students seemed to share the perspective of Ming, Iris, Bruce, and Ray, the breadth and depth of their experiences represent a comprehensive level of transition to American university life. They shared examples of emotional resilience, academic adjustment, social integration, and functioning without "thinking too much about it." After experiencing success and stability in several areas of their lives, they recognized their experiences and identity as a Chinese international student in the context of their lives as students on an American campus. Their experiences illustrate biculturalism, the ability to, understand and appreciate cultural expectations and function effectively in both cultures (Oberg, 1960). These students' experiences represent a culmination of some Chinese international students' transitions, a unique level of adjustment compared to other participants. Participants who did not express having an integrated Chinese and American life still understood aspects of both cultures and had meaningful learning and experiences. However, they seemed to be more in the cultural irritation or adjustment stages of culture shock. Ferraro and Briody (2013) emphasized that individuals can "get by" (p. 202) without progressing past the early stages of culture shock, but that achieving biculturalism tends to

produce more positive, growth-producing experiences. Thus, culture shock may relate to the process of international students' transition experiences.

Grounded Theory of Chinese International Students' Transition

This section presents the grounded theory and model that emerged from participants' narratives. The model encompasses Chinese international students' transitions to American higher education. The model addresses and aims to explain the process of transition, rather than explicitly labeling a transition as "successful" or establishing a connection to other educational outcomes. It focuses on the pre-departure influences on transition, students' acquisition of tools to meet their physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and ideological needs, and points of divergence through which students maintained (survived) or expanded (thrived) during their time abroad.

The grounded theory of Chinese international students' transition is illustrated in Figure 4. Pre-departure influences, including students' expectations, goals for studying abroad, post-graduation plans, level of family support, and personal characteristics (e.g. outgoingness) appear to the far left in the model and are connected to other parts of the model with arrows because they have an influence throughout students' transition process. Family support, prior interactions with American culture, and positive pre-departure expectations seemed to make the transition process less challenging for students, and facilitate students' ability to navigate trials. Students who were outgoing, resilient, and open to change related these personality traits to their transition to American university life, especially when

faced with challenging situations during the transition. Students who did not seem to exhibit these traits responded differently to challenges.

Throughout their transition, students sought to fulfill their *sequence of needs*, which is represented in the central portion of the model. Students' needs are categorized into five categories: physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and ideological. The categories appear chronologically, in the order that they appeared in most students' narratives, and they are connected to pre-departure influences with an arrow to indicate the way that students sought to access resources related to their needs. Students described their experiences seeking resources to meet their needs during their transition to life in the U.S. For example, students had to settle into a residence, navigate use of the English language, build a social network, and engage with academic content. As they gained resources and stability, meeting their needs in one category, their concern shifted to other categories.

Students faced situations that either emboldened or discouraged them as they strove to have their needs met. This is represented in the model as *points of divergence*, embedded in the center of the sequence of needs. Examples of points of divergence include one student using English to successfully navigate public transportation and feeling validated and confident as a result, and another student experiencing a discouraging point of divergence after being rejected by Americans in her class project group, leaving her insecure about her language and social skills. In some cases, students responded to situations that were affirming or challenging in and of themselves. For example, the logistical challenges Iris faced due to broken eyeglasses were complex to manage. However, it seems that students' agency and

resilience, including pre-departure influences, also contribute to how students respond to points of divergence. Wenxin's experience being excluded from by her group project classmates may have been compounded by Wenxin's level of confidence, extraversion, and resilience. In the model, an upward arrow represents uplifting responses and a downward arrow represents discouraged responses, signifying students' reactions to points of divergence.

There were connections between the points of divergence and how students subsequently managed their transitions, which are represented as large trajectory arrows that frame the model. Students engaged in strategies of response to the challenges and affirmations students experienced during their transition and subsequently seemed to follow patterns of either expanding upon (*expansion*) or *maintenance* of their comfort zones. Students who experienced confidence-building affirmations and expanded their comfort zone sought higher levels of verbal in-class participation, engagement with faculty, meaningful relationships with peers (including students who were not Chinese international students), and campus and community involvement. These students seemed to find meaningful opportunities for engagement and growth during their study abroad by way of the dissonant experiences they sought. By contrast, students who were discouraged sought to maintain their comfort zone, and described socializing solely or primarily with other Chinese international students, feeling reluctant to verbally participate in classes or interact with faculty, and tended not to become involved with student organizations.

Usually, students' experiences seemed to fall into either the maintenance or expansion category. Some participants demonstrated that it is possible to move from

maintenance to expansion over time; however, students in expansion largely did not return to using maintenance strategies. Because students' experiences did not show movement from expansion to maintenance, this may suggest a saturation point in students' confidence and resilience that allowed them to remain in expansion.

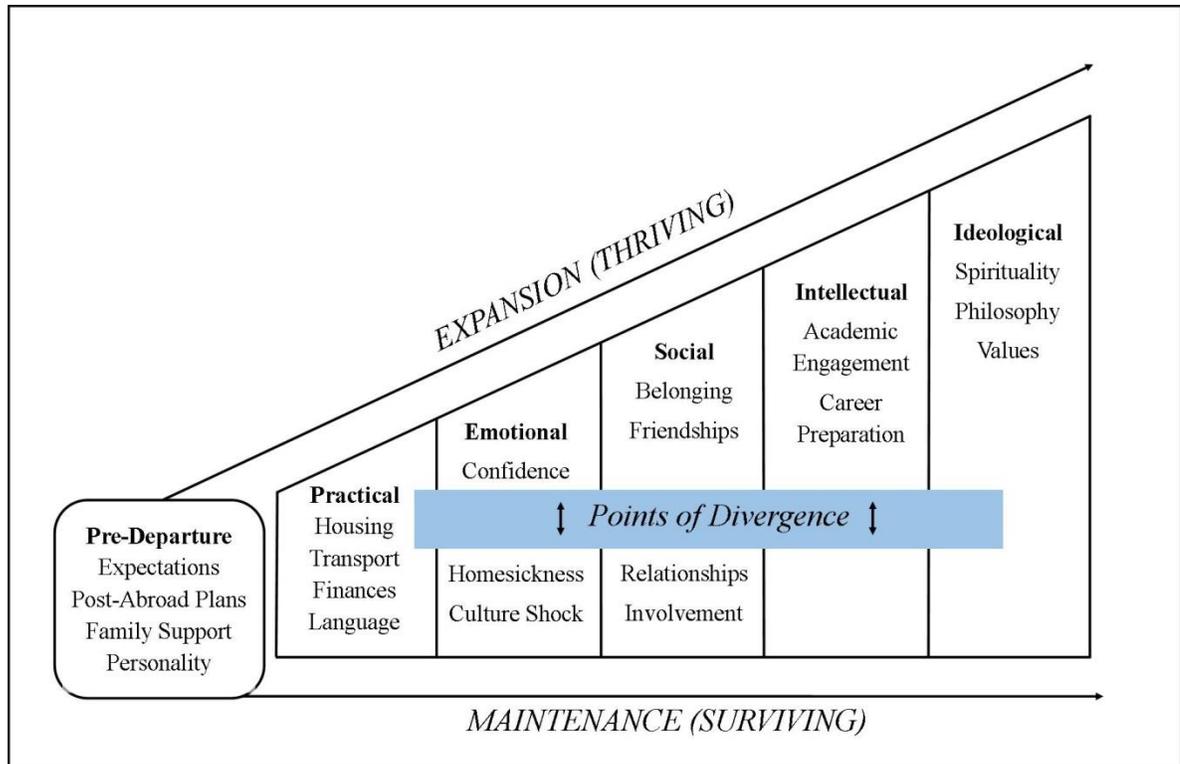


Figure 4. A Model of International Students' Transition.

Overview of Pre-Departure Influences

Participants shared a number of influences and experiences prior to studying abroad that shaped their transitions to American university life. These pre-departure influences included students' expectations and perceptions of the United States and American university life, plans for after completing their time abroad or degree, family support, and personality. Next, students' post-study abroad plans seemed to contribute to their experiences. Specifically, students who expressed interest in

remaining in the U.S. for graduate study or employment seemed to demonstrate broader comfort zones than those who intended to return to China. Ray made sense of this by describing the tendency of Chinese international students to cultivate friendships with other Chinese students as an investment in their long-term social future (return to China). Finally, students' personality seemed to play a role in their transition. Though I did not administer a personality test or formally assess participants' personality types, several students used descriptors and experiences that may have indicated facets of their personality along the big five dimensions (McCrae & Costa, 2005). For example, Iris and Ray repeatedly described their outgoingness and openness to difference and change, which they connected to the ease of transition and expansion of their comfort zones. Students who were outgoing, open to new experiences, and agreeable seemed to exhibit resilience during their transition.

Expectations. Participants had pre-departure expectations about facing challenges. Students who anticipated experiencing cultural differences and practical trials prior to studying abroad seemed to feel more confident when facing them. For example, Steven and Iris both talked about their frustration with being sent between offices and trying to decode bureaucratic processes on campus. However, they responded to this challenge in different ways. Steven had no expectations or was not thinking about what he would experience in the United States, and seemed to have more difficulty when facing challenges. As a response, Steven sought comfort among other Chinese international students and did not become involved with campus life. Conversely, Iris had acknowledged the possible challenges she would face. She encountered a number of early trials, and described her early ability to successfully

overcome challenges as a motivation for getting involved, including with a customer service-focused campus job.

Aspirations. All of the participants addressed the connection between their future plans, social networks, and goals for after studying abroad. Students who expressed their intent to stay in the United States, or who were equally open to future plans in China or the United States, seemed to approach their social experiences differently from the participants who planned to return to China. Students' social networks seemed to reflect their post-study abroad goals. Ray explained that Chinese international students who intent to return to China often build relationships with other Chinese students, anticipating that they will be part of their social networks at home. Several students spoke about pre-departure strategies used to build friendships with other Chinese students who would be studying abroad in the U.S., including making friends through the Chinese social media platform "We Chat," especially for students who intended to return to China after studying abroad. Students like David, Steven, Ron, and Ruolan spoke about the long-term utility of these friendships for not only their time abroad, but their future network building in China. Additionally, students who planned to return to China spoke less about campus involvement. Amy, Jesse, Steven, Vivian, and Ziyu all planned to return to China after studying abroad, and all five were not involved in campus activities. Some students who planned to return to China after studying abroad, including Ron and Ruolan, were involved with academic organizations; however, this was the extent of their co-curricular involvement.

Conversely, students who expressed interest in staying in the U.S. for graduate study or employment seemed to have different social patterns. Iris, Ray, Patrick, and Bruce were among those who expressed intent to stay in the U.S. after studying abroad. Ray described often being the only Chinese student in his social situations, including off-campus parties with his expansive social network of American students. Bruce talked about his friendship and collegiality with American lab mates. Patrick participated in a living-learning community and a club sport. Iris spoke extensively about her American roommates and friends, and was highly involved on campus, including with internships, student organizations, and a campus job.

Examining students' social patterns and co-curricular involvement seems to suggest different patterns of engagement based on students' post-study abroad plans. Students who intended to pursue employment or graduate study in the U.S. after studying abroad seemed to seek more campus involvement, cross-cultural relationships, and culturally dissonant experiences, whereas students who planned to return to China spoke more about in-group friendships and less campus involvement.

Family support. Students' family support also influenced their transitions to the U.S. No participants explicitly mentioned not having family support, but approximately half did not mention their families when they talked about the decision to study abroad. I interpreted the students who did discuss family support as having family as a more salient influence in their pre-departure experience. Many participants spoke broadly about the sacrifices and investments their parents made for their education. Students wanted to honor their parents through academic success, and whether their parents supported or accepted their decision to study abroad. Ming

talked about how his father had studied abroad and shared stories and positive experiences, which inspired him to study abroad. Some students, including Patrick and Mariah, also talked about how their parents encouraged them to study abroad. Patrick's mother was a scholar of English language and culture who spoke to him about the professional benefits of studying abroad, and Mariah's family hoped that she would have a positive experience with the diversity of the United States following her religious conversion. William described how having an uncle in the U.S. helped his parents to feel reassured of his safety, and William to feel more confident knowing he had family nearby. Having family affirmation helped students to feel more confident about their transition.

Early exposure. Several participants had traveled to the U.S. with their families prior to studying abroad. These participants discussed how their travel informed their understanding of and experiences with life in the United States. Patrick, Iris, and Sheldon attributed their decision to study abroad at least in part to their previous travel experiences. William had family already residing in the U.S., and described the reassurance of having part of his support system in the country. For these students, experience with or connections in the U.S. helped them to develop understanding of and expectations for American culture and what they might experience during their time abroad, preparing them for the process of transition. Early exposure to American culture through prior travel, family connections, and resources such as English language tutoring in China may be indicators of those students' socioeconomic status.

Sequence of Needs

Upon arrival, participants pursued opportunities to get their needs met. Together, the categories in the *sequence of needs* represent the areas that participants navigated during their transition. The proposed model uses broad, culturally inclusive descriptors to avoid ethnocentrism. For example, rather than position cultural values such as “self-actualization” or “achievement” on the sequence, I have categorized needs as “intellectual” and “ideological.”

Participants’ narratives suggest they first aimed to meet their physical needs, including access to housing, transportation, food, medicine, and financial resources. Steven and Sheldon were among the students who spoke about steps they took, some prior to arriving in the U.S., to acquire housing and learn about the physical infrastructure of campus. Iris and Vivian provided examples of seeking medical care and eyeglasses. Several students, including Steven, Ray, and Iris, described their concern with finding food.

Many students discussed having adequate English language skills as an immediate practical need. Language also seemed to be a facilitator of students’ ability to access other tools. For example, Vivian and Iris both found that their language skills could not address their medical needs. Though Ruolan had studied English for many years, she felt that her language skills did not include enough informal, colloquial language for her to feel successful communicating with her peers. Ziyu and David felt too shy to attempt speaking English. Joseph felt overwhelmed and isolated by his limited English language skills. These students’

experiences demonstrate the importance of English language skills as a practical need during the transition to American university life.

After students were physically secure, their needs became emotional and social in nature. Several students expressed feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and lack of confidence in their social or language skills. Ron used the term “culture shock” to describe when he felt lonely, missed Chinese friends and food, and constantly compared the U.S. and China. Vivian felt “lonely,” and Joseph described himself as “depressed” and missing Chinese friends, sights, and food. To combat culture shock and homesickness, participants sought social belonging through acquaintances, friendships, relationships, and campus and community involvement. Every participant talked about finding friends in their courses, residence halls, and through acquaintances. Some students also talked about barriers to developing a social network, including limited language confidence, discouraging academic or social encounters with other students, and the alcohol-centric nature of American students’ social life. Some students, including Iris, Patrick, Bruce, Ron, and Ruolan, developed social networks through campus organizations and activities including culture-based organizations, academic organizations, lab research, music ensembles, and sports.

Intellectual needs were the next area of focus for participants. To meet their intellectual needs, students worked hard to perform well academically, engage with their academic and vocational interests, and take steps in career planning. Many participants spoke about the dissonance they faced when comparing their Chinese and American classroom experiences. Students observed contrasts in student-faculty

interactions, expectations for in-class participation, academic integrity, and methods of assessment. Amy, Patrick, and Ming were among the students who described a comparatively low level of formality between students and faculty in the U.S. Ming described the urge to call professors “Doctor” instead of the first name greeting professors often requested. Wenxin was confused by how to show “respect for their position and knowledge” without using a formal title.

Students also observed differences in assignments and grading. Patrick and Ray spoke at length about the emphasis of a single exam in their Chinese courses, as well as the administration of homework as “optional” for self-improvement. By contrast, in their American courses, many students were required to submit multiple graded assignments and participate in several exams. Ziyu perceived her American faculty was less strict with grades than her Chinese faculty. However, there seemed to be a contradiction between the comparatively lax nature of American faculty and the strict policies around academic integrity. Several students, including David, Ray, and Patrick, described the strict prohibition of cheating and plagiarism in the U.S.

Many students spoke about expectations for in-class verbal participation, which Joseph referred to as “the hardest thing” about his American courses. Language skills and a desire to respect others in the classroom seemed to contribute to students’ difficulty with verbal participation. Wenxin described how it took her a long time to decide what to say and formulate a response, by which point class discussion had sometimes changed topics. Similarly, Ziyu felt shy about speaking aloud in class. Ray said that he wanted to respect his professors and peers by not speaking in class. He perceived that questions and comments could insult their time

and intellect. Intellectual needs, especially academic expectations, seemed to be the category that participants felt most comfortable discussing.

Finally, a few participants spoke about their ideological needs, including the desire to engage in philosophical conversations, and develop or reflect upon spiritual and values-based needs and considerations. Only a few participants, Ray, Iris, Patrick, and Mariah, seemed to reach the point where they were seeking fulfillment of their ideological needs. They discussed their personal philosophies and the resources they consulted to aid their philosophical and spiritual development. Iris and Patrick reflected on how their values seemed to shift over time to include what they perceived to be “American” and “Chinese” values. Both students described valuing their families while striving for individual achievement and building a future in the U.S. Ray spoke philosophically about a desire to better himself and his community. During her time abroad, Mariah was able to find community with other Muslims, something she had not been able to do in China, and described how she had grown in her faith as a result.

Points of Divergence

As students pursued access to resources and experiences to meet their needs, they encountered challenges and sources of support that seemed to shape the way they engaged socially and academically moving forward. These *points of divergence* made a difference in participants’ subsequent experiences and successes, and seemed to be shaped by students’ personalities, resilience, prior experiences, and the events themselves. Sometimes, participants’ abilities to successfully access needs or navigate situations leaving them feeling positive and affirmed; in other situations,

participants struggled, failed, and were disappointed and discouraged. Some examples described by participants as discouraging included difficulty navigating the vocabulary needed during an illness (Iris and Vivian), feeling excluded by American students during a course group project (Wenxin), and being overwhelmed by homesickness (Ron). Some affirming examples included spending time as the only Chinese student among a group of Americans socializing at a friend's residence (Ray), contributing to a classroom discussion, and being elected to a leadership position of a student organization (Iris).

Students' descriptions of their subsequent behavior after a pivotal moment showed that their reactions to points of divergence were essentially to either seek comfort or feel empowered. For example, Amy felt newly confident and empowered after successfully navigating solo travel while using her English language skills. She spoke about the increased social and language confidence she felt after her success traveling. Similarly, after overcoming academic challenges and earning high grades, David described feeling more socially confident when he interacted with Chinese and American classroom peers. It seems that students responded to points of divergence with either enhanced or suppressed confidence and future behavior changes.

Expansion Versus Maintenance

After experiencing affirming or discouraging points of divergence, participants approached other situations in their life with enhanced confidence or concern. Many participants described patterns related to their willingness to try new experiences, meet new people, and expand their boundaries. Their reactions appeared to become parts of larger patterns over time.

Students who exhibited maintenance, also referred to as “survival,” sought familiarity and comfort after encountering transitional challenges. They socialized primarily with other Chinese international students, demonstrated lower levels of involvement with co-curricular activities, and attended (but were reluctant to participate in) class. For example, after interacting with some American students, Jesse assessed their social patterns as centered on alcohol consumption, which he did not want to experience. As a result of feeling discouraged socially, Jesse did not seek out participation in co-curricular activities. His lack of confidence also related to his discomfort with speaking in class. Jesse sought comfort and familiarity with other Chinese international students within his major. Similarly, Ron described a “culture shock” that shaped his social and academic experiences. He felt homesick, did not feel confident with his English language skills, and felt overwhelmed by Americans’ expectations for him to be “relaxed.” He described himself as “making a lot of mistakes,” and sought comfort in a friend group of other Chinese international students. Ruolan also talked about the role that her lack of language confidence played in her social patterns. Because she did not feel confident with her English language level, she socialized primarily with other Chinese international students. Additionally, she described feeling bored with the lack of nightlife options, which led her to stay at home and thus limited her opportunities to expand her social network and enhance her language skills. Though she later joined an academic honorary society, she was not otherwise involved with student organizations. These examples demonstrate how students’ experiences contributed to their developing behavioral patterns of maintaining their comfort zones and seeking social familiarity.

Conversely, students who exhibited expansion described meaningful cross-cultural and in-group friendships, campus and community involvement, and class participation. Students who sought interactions and opportunities that increased their locus of experience developed a pattern of expanding their comfort zones socially and academically. For example, Ray had a thriving social network of American, Chinese, and other international students, and he participated in unique experiences such as attending fraternity parties. He was also involved on campus, including with a research laboratory, and he participated in a short-term study abroad course. He described feeling confident academically, including speaking with faculty and participating verbally in class. In addition to the affirmations that Ray accumulated in the U.S., he seemed to possess an openness to new experiences and a positive, easy-going personality that also influenced the way he approached and responded to situations. He summarized his philosophy for his time abroad by stating, “Every time I try new challenges, I tell myself, ‘I’ll try it.’” Similarly, Mariah expressed having meaningful relationships with American, Chinese, and other international students. She was a member of formal and informal communities related to her academic interests and Islamic faith. Academically, she earned solid grades and felt comfortable speaking in class. Mariah seemed to thrive in all areas of her life. She attributed her happiness and stability partly to the sense of acceptance and social openness that she had not experienced in China, which enabled her to be herself and focus less on the previous stigma of religious expression she had experienced before coming to the U.S. Additionally, Mariah seemed to approach her life with an upbeat personality and gratitude for her experiences, positive and negative.

It is plausible that students' personalities and backgrounds influenced their experiences and responses. For example, Ray described his enjoyment for new experiences and meeting new people. Though this is exhibited in his experiences with his process of transition to studying in the United States, it is also illustrative of the personality traits described by McCrae and Costa (2005) as openness to experience and extraversion. David's reflections seem to indicate higher levels of conscientiousness and low extraversion, which may have influenced the experiences and behaviors that I interpreted as maintenance in the model. Additionally, students' socioeconomic statuses may have shaped their experiences. Students' comfort with new situations and cultures may result from previous experiences with travel and intercultural interactions. Despite having some information about students' backgrounds, the intricacy of their past experiences may have shaped what I interpreted in their points of divergence and subsequent behavioral trajectories.

As the purpose of this study is to explore transition as a process, rather than through students' outcomes, I have been careful not to assign "good" or "bad" labels to students' experiences and behaviors. Whether students were maintaining or expanding their comfort zones, they provided examples of enjoyment, success, and growth during their time in the U.S. A student's decision to engage in expansion or maintenance related activities simply meant they experienced enjoyment, success, and growth in different ways. For example, both Jesse and Ray spoke about their social experiences and friend groups in a similarly satisfied way, using similar descriptors such as "best friends." However, Jesse socialized primarily with other Chinese international students, whereas Ray's social network was comparatively

diverse and expansive. Ruolan and Iris spoke about their academic success, but demonstrated very different patterns of academic engagement; Ruolan was in an honor society and reluctant to speak in class, whereas Iris was highly involved and confident participating verbally in class. Despite their different experiences, these students show that different patterns of involvement all represent progress, albeit differently. However, student development literature suggests that dissonant experiences optimize growth and learning, so the extent to which students grow from their transition process as international students depends on their goals for studying abroad.

Moving Between Patterns

Students' narratives suggested that it is also possible to move between patterns of maintenance and expansion. Several participants whose early experiences caused them to remain in their comfort zone indicated that they moved toward expansion after experiencing practical, emotional, and social victories that bolstered their confidence. Amy attributed a change in her confidence to her successful traveling and speaking English with strangers on a trip to visit her friend. Early in Iris's time in the U.S., she needed new eyeglasses, an experience that exhausted her knowledge of American health resources and tried her language skills. Iris also described her friend network at the start of her time abroad; she socialized primarily with other Chinese international students at the time. Iris' behaviors are a reflection of a pattern of maintenance. However, she described her involvement with the Asian American Student Union and getting an on-campus customer service job as pivotal to her transition. As a result of being involved with the Asian American Student Union,

Iris developed a network of Chinese-American friends. The Chinese-American students were American nationals and native English speakers, and served as cultural intermediaries because of their Americanness and Chinese heritage. Through her job, Iris improved her language skills, made friends, and felt more connected to campus life. Similarly, Ming moved from maintenance to expansion as he became more comfortable with differences in academic expectations. He described feeling a lack of confidence with his language skills, discomfort with participating verbally in classes, and confusion about the comparative lack of formality with professors. As a result, he kept quiet and did not participate in classes at first. Building friendships with American students and talking about their shared academic interests helped Ming to feel more confident participating in the classroom. Ming also became more comfortable with the differences between student-faculty interactions in the U.S. and China, and felt more at ease approaching faculty.

Finally, time may contribute to students' shift from maintenance toward expansion. Wenxin spoke about the role of time as influential in addressing a deeply challenging experience. Wenxin spoke about her highly upsetting rejection by American group members during a class project. She spoke about her subsequent hesitation to engage socially and academically with Americans, and described feeling withdrawn and disappointed. Despite this experience that moved her into the maintenance category, she said that over time, she became open to developing friendships with her peers and engaging more in class. She did not attribute the change to a specific event, but rather, to the passage of time. Other students described changes in their confidence, language skills, and understanding of academic

and social expectations over time. Time may play a role in students' readiness to address situations during their transition.

Despite the numerous examples of students moving from maintenance toward expansion, none of the participants described moving from expansion to maintenance. Some students talked about difficult moments they experienced while they were already in the expansion zone. Mariah had secured practical stability, a large social network of Chinese and American students, and academic success, but talked about occasional difficulties with language comprehension when meeting new people. Though Ray was academically successful and socially thriving, he expressed disappointment that he had not found a romantic partner. Despite their challenges, these students' experiences did not seem to lead them to change their overall behavior, emotions, and thoughts.

Summary

This chapter discussed this study's eighteen participants and the findings that encompass their experiences prior to and during their time abroad. It explored students' perceptions and resources prior to study abroad. Participants' search for physical essentials, emotional fulfillment, social connectedness, intellectual functioning, and ideological reflection were also discussed. Additionally, key affirming and challenging moments shaped participants' subsequent engagement, leading them to either maintain or expand upon their comfort zone. The findings chapter connected these pieces and presented an emerging model of Chinese international students' transition to American higher education. The model accounts for the ways that students described their pre-departure influences, needs during their

transition abroad, and discouraging and affirming points of divergence. Students described behaviors that related to maintaining or expanding their experiences, and reflected ways in which they moved from maintenance to expansion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study was designed to address gaps in the extant literature about international students and students' transitions. Chinese students are the largest population of international students in the United States, numbering more than 250,000 (Institute of International Education, 2014). Scholarship about international students does not address students' experiences throughout the transition process to a new country and system of higher education. Although the United States and China exchange large numbers of scholars each year, the countries have dramatically different histories, cultures, and systems of higher education; among their differences, China and the U.S. differ in their approach to tertiary education governance and pedagogy. This study uses the term "culture" to mean national culture, consistent with Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) application of the term, and as a result is synonymous with "nation." Studies of Chinese and American students on campuses in their respective countries have suggested that students demonstrate different patterns of cognitive development (Zhang, 1998, 1999; Zhang & Hood, 1998; Zhang & Watkins, 2001). The literature has suggested that the differences in developmental patterns may result from cultural and structural differences in higher education. This implies that if students are accustomed to the cultural and structural expectations of their home country and university, they may face sharp contrasts by participating in study abroad at an institution outside their home country.

In addition to gaps in the literature about international students' experiences, this study addresses a gap in literature about the process of students' transitions. Evenbeck (2014) described international students as highly underrepresented in

studies of student development and experiences, including their transitions between countries and systems of higher education. Existing theories of transition do not describe students' experiences through the process of transition, and related models were developed with American organizations and individuals, making it unlikely that they would be culturally transferable to Chinese international students' transitions.

This study used qualitative methods to deepen the understanding of Chinese international students' transition processes. Grounded theory methods were used to highlight participants' voices and rich experiences, analyze the data, and build a theory that reflects Chinese international students' experiences transitioning to American university life.

Chinese international students experienced the roles of the learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation methods differently in the U.S. than on their home campuses. Participants provided insight about their personalities and experiences prior to studying abroad, which seem to have influenced the way they responded to events during their transition in the U.S. They talked about their priorities and how they pursued various practical, emotional, social, intellectual, and ideological needs throughout their transition process. Students shared examples of positive and discouraging events, as well as how they responded to these pivotal moments, and seemed to develop patterns of behavior in which they sought familiarity or challenge subsequent to certain events. Together, participants' narratives provide insight about the transition process of Chinese international students.

Chapter five relates the emerging theory to the research questions guiding this work, and describes connections between the research questions, findings, and

literature. I will also discuss implications for student services practitioners, practitioner preparation, student development theory, faculty praxis, and future research. The resulting theory will help practitioner-scholars better understand and respond to Chinese international students as they transition to the United States and American higher education. This study has implications for student services practitioners, faculty in practitioner preparation programs, and faculty of undergraduate international students.

Relationship between Research Questions, Literature, Findings, and Theory

The narratives of participants in this study connect to existing literature about culture, student development theory, and international students' choice to study abroad. Three questions guided this study:

1. How do students understand the roles of the learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation methods? That is, how do students experience pedagogical differences?
2. How do students experience transition into a system of education outside their home country?
3. Do cultural differences in education influence students' larger transition into a new environment and set of academic and social expectations?

I propose a theory that suggests Chinese international students experience a complex process of transition when entering higher education in the United States. The transition is guided by students' attempts to meet a sequence of practical, emotional, social, intellectual, and ideological needs. Along the way, students experience milestone moments, or "points of divergence," which serve pivotally to either bolster

or weaken students' comfort and confidence. As a result of individual contributors and the milestones themselves, students seem to develop a subsequent pattern of behavior, either expanding and leaving or maintaining and remaining within their locus of comfort and familiarity.

Understanding the U.S. Context of Higher Education

The findings of this study suggest Chinese international students understand the roles of the learner, instructor, peers, and evaluation methods in the United States to be different from their experiences in the Chinese educational system, and they seem to learn these differences over time. Students experience and respond to pedagogical differences in different ways based on their understanding of cultural context. Participants related many of their experiences to their interactions with other members of society. This supported Hong's (2009) assertion about how Chinese view the world as more fixed than the individual, and Morris and Peng's (1994) finding about Chinese relating events to their situational causes. Participants shared rich examples about their interactions with peers, instructors, evaluation methods, and other classroom experiences.

Students acknowledged differences in the role of learners in China and the United States. Students described their learning process in China as heavily emphasizing rote memorization, whereas the American environment required more synthesis and ideation. Students seemed to think of learners in China as passive recipients of knowledge. This supports the literature about pedagogical differences between China and the U.S., including Kipnis (2011), Li (2009), and Zhang. In the

U.S., students had to adapt to new expectations in which they were synthesizers and even co-creators of knowledge.

Students' experiences support literature about differences between Chinese and American faculty. Participants described stark contrasts between the faculty-student interactions in China versus the United States. Students described their relationships with instructors in China as comparatively more formal and respectful, and described their Chinese professors as functioning very differently from American counterparts. Chinese faculty delivered lectures and conducted research, but did not engage heavily with undergraduate students. Students did not feel comfortable asking questions of their Chinese faculty, and many described them as inaccessible outside of class time. This is supported in the literature. Kipnis (2011) noted the formal relationship between Chinese faculty and students, and the limited interactions between students and professors outside of the classroom. Li (2009) described the large amount of power wielded by Chinese faculty. Comparatively, students perceived faculty in the United States as more collegial, interactive, and informal, which was sometimes uncomfortable for participants. American faculty expected to engage with students via discussion and questions, held open office hours and encouraged students to attend, and some offered opportunities to engage in research partnerships with undergraduate students.

Differences between Chinese and American faculty-student interactions seemed to related to participants' initial discomfort interfacing with American faculty. Prior knowledge of American pedagogy did not seem to ease participants' entry into a new set of academic expectations. A common experience among

participants was difficulty participating and speaking in class. Even after students knew it was an expectation, their desire to respect their peers and instructors overrode their need to participate. Over time, they came to understand the cultural differences of approach and expectations, and adapted their interactions accordingly. As they became more confident with their language skills, peers, and instructors, students became more comfortable asking questions and sharing their perspectives in class.

Students viewed the role of their peers as similar in China and the U.S.: to provide social and academic support. Participants described similar social patterns and goals when they were in China and the U.S. Peers seemed to serve as academic resources and social supports for participants' experiences in both countries.

Every participant spoke about the differences in evaluation methods in China and the United States. Students in China are socialized to be exam-centric in education; participants described the emphasis on exams in their Chinese high schools, including the culminating national university entrance exam. Their experiences at Chinese universities followed suit, and students were evaluated and issued course grades based on a single exam. Kipnis (2011), Moriguchi, Evans, Hiraki, Itakura, and Lee, (2011), Postlethwaite (1988), and Zhang (2008) wrote about the importance of exams in the Chinese educational system. Homework and smaller assignments were offered, but often not for a grade; rather, the assignments provided an opportunity to receive informal, ungraded feedback, helping students learn and prepare for the graded exam. Participants appreciated having the ability to prioritize the assignments they would complete based on the areas of their learning that needed the most attention.

Upon arrival in the U.S., students described feeling overwhelmed. Upon receiving their first syllabi, participants were surprised by the sheer number of graded assignments, including homework, papers, and several exams. They felt overwhelmed by the assignments and their new inability to participate in low-stakes practice assignments, as well as to choose whether they completed the work. After several semesters, many participants expressed appreciation for the small, frequent graded assignments in their American courses and the shift of pressure away from a single performance. Participants also talked about the comparative grading in China and the U.S. They described the inflation of grades in the U.S. and compared the average scores and what would be described as a “good” grade as a bit lower in China.

Students’ understanding of local cultural context seemed to relate to the way they experienced differences in the classroom. As participants developed a better understanding of practical resources and social interactions in the United States, they described having a better understanding of and experiences with American methods of instruction and evaluation. Confidence with the English language and developing friendships with Americans helped students to feel more comfortable participating in classroom discussion. As students came to understand Americans’ comparatively lower power distance, they better understood the less formal nature of faculty-student interactions and were more comfortable approaching faculty and asking questions. As time passed, students came to understand Americans as comparatively individualistic and indulgent (Hofstede Center, 2015). Students found parallels between short-term relationship making and short-term studying, assignments, and

grading exhibited by Americans. These examples illustrate the comparatively short-term American time orientation versus the Chinese long-term time orientation (Hofstede Center, 2015). Over time, students grew in their understanding of cultural expectations of their local university context, and came to understand the role of learners, peers, instructors, and evaluation in the United States. Students' understanding and integration of American cultural expectations with their past experiences is indicative of biculturalism (Ferraro & Briody, 2013; Oberg, 1960).

Experiences with Transition Process

This study deepens the understanding of the process through which Chinese international students transition to American university life. The narratives shared by participants in this study confirmed parts of Schlossberg's (1981, 1995) model of transition, particularly the "anticipated event" versus "unanticipated event" component of Schlossberg's theory. Schlossberg (1981, 1995) described that reactions to transitions differ when events are anticipated versus unanticipated. When individuals anticipate events, they are better able to develop expectations and coping mechanisms with which to navigate a transition; conversely, unanticipated transitions afford no time for preparation and development of coping mechanisms, and individuals meet these transitions with more challenge. Students who had broad awareness or "anticipation" of the cultural similarities and differences they might face during study abroad transitioned to the U.S. more smoothly than students who had not. Through their previous travels and studies, Sheldon, Patrick, and Iris were able to anticipate aspects of American of culture that might challenge or feel comfortable to them. As a result of their openness to new experiences, Ming, Ray, Sheldon,

Mariah, and Bruce similarly predicted the parts of their transition that would be most trying or easy. Students' ability to reflect and prepare for studying in the United States may have contributed to their level of coping and dealing with challenges throughout the transition process.

Participants also reflected on their experiences as “moving in” and “moving through,” supporting two of the three phases of transition described by Schlossberg. The first, “moving in,” describes the process of familiarization with expectations. Participants described their pre-departure thoughts and experiences as a process of developing expectations and plans for their time abroad. Next, when individuals are “moving through,” they navigate issues and balance their former and current situations. The bulk of participants' narratives relate to the complex issues they faced as they sought to navigate the transition process and balance their experiences in China with their time in the U.S. Finally, “Moving out” describes the phase when individuals complete one transition and begin to anticipate future transitions. This study was not able to evaluate the final stage of Schlossberg's theory.

This study also provided some insight related to international students' development of self-authorship (Baxter-Magolda, 2001a). Many students described the convergence of their experiences and their ability to make meaning of their experiences and identities. Pizzolato (2003) found that students who faced greater adversity exhibited higher levels of self-authorship than peers who had encountered lower adversity. Zhu, Liu, and Cox (2014) found that Chinese international engineering students exhibited self-authorship and attributed it partly to dissonance created by “adjustment issues, such as language barriers, the sense of isolation, lack

of collegiality” (p. 51). Participants in this study faced many unique challenges, which may similarly have enhanced their self-authorship. Lastly, Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnston, and Wang (2012) identified differences between catalysts of self-authorship development for students from different ethnic groups. They suggested that East Asian students, for example, experience greater dissonance when faced with decisions that related to others, as opposed to decisions that only affect themselves (Pizzolato, Nguyen, Johnson, & Wang, 2012). The relationship between culture and developmental catalysts helps to explain why some situations seemed to be more challenging than others for participants in this study.

Pre-departure experiences and characteristics. Pre-departure experiences and characteristics seemed to play a role in the way students experienced the transition process. Students spoke about the influence that their pre-study abroad expectations and family support played in their experiences. This parallels findings from Tinto (1975, 1993, 2000), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005), and Terenzini and Reason (2005) that indicate that pre-college variables, including students’ expectations and family support, influence students’ success and outcomes.

Several participants exhibited traits of McCrae and Costa’s (2003) personality trait theory, which identified openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism as five traits exhibited to varying degrees among individuals. Personality traits exhibited by participants support the authors’ assertion that the theory is culturally inclusive. In addition to displaying the traits, participants’ traits seemed to connect to their experiences, congruent with literature connecting personality traits to patterns of behavior (McCrae & Costa, 2003).

Participants confirmed many themes presented in the extant literature about why international students study in the United States, including relative educational opportunity and degree worth (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Stearns, 2009). For example, Patrick believed that because of spending a year of secondary school in the United States, he would be received more favorably by American universities than Chinese universities. His Chinese high school teachers expressed concern that his year abroad might also affect his performance on the national university entrance exam. He chose to study in the U.S. for relative educational opportunity, because his tertiary education opportunities in the U.S. were more favorable than they would have been in China. Yang, Sing, and Ping (2013) found that Chinese students also chose to study abroad in the U.S. to pursue academic majors or degrees that were not accessible to them at home. Patrick spoke about the ability to pursue the courses and major of his choice as a core reason for studying abroad.

Participants also talked about the degree worth, the social and economic value of degree attainment, which is described by Perkins and Neumayer (2014) and Stearns (2009). Jesse, Ming, Ron, and Wenxin were all attracted to the institution by the strength of their academic programs, and discussed the importance of ranking and prestige of academic credentials earned in the U.S. for professional success in China. Other students did not cite degree worth as their reason for studying abroad, but did speak about the role of degree worth for their friends and parents. Iris, for example, described the desire of her peers at home to study abroad in the Ivy League, and their surprise when she shared the less recognizable institution she chose. Name

recognition and prestige were also important to Wenxin's parents, and played a role in their support of her going abroad.

Sequence of needs. Participants described their process of seeking and accessing resources to meet their needs. The students also described interactions between those needs, how they prioritized needs, and the ways they accessed needs. These aspects of students' narratives paralleled the first two levels of Maslow's (1943, 1954, 1970) hierarchy. For all participants, securing their practical, physical needs came first. When students reflected on their early concerns and actions upon arrival in the U.S., many spoke about issues related to housing, food, transportation, and health care. Then, their concerns turned to fulfillment of their emotional needs, finding comfort and support, and development of a social network. Because participants spoke about their needs to different degrees, and few seemed to reach the point of describing their ideological needs, for example, it was unclear whether participants' needs followed Maslow's model after the first two stages.

Students first focused on fulfilling their practical needs: securing housing, making financial arrangements, and locating food, transportation, and medical care. Students also cited language as a highly important component of transition, particularly for its importance in securing other practical needs. After securing their practical needs, participants' focus shifted to addressing their emotional state and needs. For some students, this meant managing homesickness, disappointment, culture shock, and isolation; others experienced euphoria and confidence. The effort to meet emotional needs often related to social engagement and steps toward

belonging, the formation of friendships, and the pursuit of campus and community involvement.

Intellectual needs followed, including classroom and co-curricular learning and career development. Students explored their academic interests and degree programs for their undergraduate majors and longer-term graduate degree options. They also planned for their future career goals in the U.S. and China. Additionally, some students became involved with campus and community organizations related to their field, including internships, part-time employment, and academic service and honor organizations. Finally, a few participants indicated pursuit of ideological needs, including philosophical, spiritual, and values-based resources. These few participants spoke about their need for fulfillment in a spiritual, religious, or moral sense. One participant sought this through religion, while the others did so through philosophical conversation and actions to help others, including through community service. The order in which participants pursued resources to fill their needs is not paralleled in other literature on transition. The “sequence of needs” described by Chinese international students fills a gap in the literature about students’ transitions and international students’ experiences.

Responses to points of divergence. For many participants, milestone moments, or “points of divergence,” made the difference between whether they stayed within or moved beyond their comfort zones. These moments often came while participants sought practical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs. The points of divergence, combined with students’ personal characteristics and prior experiences, seemed to catalyze participants’ future behaviors. The way that students

approached pivotal moments, the moments themselves, and students' responses to the moments seemed to accumulate over time to shape their behavioral and experiential trajectory. The literature about coping mechanisms and acculturation provides some insight into participants' behavioral patterns.

Some participants described periods during which they sought to maintain their comfort zones. Participants maintained their comfort for temporary and lasting periods of time. One possibility is the presence of culture-specific assimilators, or behaviors related to one's culture that are produced in response to the process of cultural assimilation (Brislin, 2009). Members of collectivist cultures, for example, tend to express loyalty to one's culture (Brislin, 2009). For this reason, behavior that I interpreted as maintaining one's comfort zone might be a culture-specific assimilator for Chinese international students.

Students who described early and numerous challenges sought safety and comfort among peers who could understand or serve as resources to their experiences. For some participants, language difficulties, challenges of navigating their new environment, and homesickness and culture shock contributed to their seeking familiarity. These students talked about seeking familiar food and customs, socializing with other Chinese international students, and speaking their first languages. Such actions might be described as nostalgic behaviors, referred to by Sedikedes, Wildschut, Routledge, Arndt, and Zhou (2009) as sentimental longing for past experiences. Sedikedes et al. (2009) found that nostalgia is a coping mechanism for acculturative stress and culture shock, with a positive relationship between nostalgia and self-regard, sense of meaning, and social support. By seeking other

Chinese students and familiar cultural artifacts, students may have been practicing a coping mechanism for their transition process. However, Sedikedes et al. described that persistent nostalgia might cause cultural “tethering” (p. 370) to one’s home culture, foster separation with other members of one’s home culture, and prohibit acculturation. Additionally, Ng and Lai (2009) found that Chinese international students who practiced Chinese customs, speaking, watching Chinese entertainment, developed a strong “Chinese self,” which led to an increase of culture-specific behaviors. In short, students who sought familiarity and maintained their comfort zones might have perpetuated a cycle of in-group socialization by being uncomfortable or unmotivated to seek experiences that challenged their comfort and expanded their locus of experience.

Students’ experiences and intentions for after completing study abroad seemed to shape whether and how long they remained in maintenance. Some participants who expressed intent to return to China after studying abroad seemed to stay in maintenance as a result of strategically choosing to build deeper relationships with other Chinese international students. This pattern of behavior is reflected in the cultural dimensions of time orientation and uncertainty avoidance; Chinese students were more invested in long-term relationship building, and attracted to the social stability of in-group relationships.

Students’ maintenance of growth had practical, social, and academic implications. During their times of maintenance, students sought familiar and comfortable experiences. They remained immersed in Chinese television and music. Students developed deep social relationships with other Chinese international

students, and socialized with few or no American or non-Chinese international students. Participants described attending, but not participating in, courses and not attending faculty office hours. Additionally, students who were maintaining did not seek campus or community participation through clubs, organizations, and teams. The experiences that participants in maintenance described seem pedagogically similar to the norms they described for their time at Chinese universities. Thus, their behaviors seem to be maintaining comforts and norms they experienced prior to arrival in the U.S. Students' patterns of seeking comfort and norms may be reflective of Sanford's (1962, 1966, 1967) description of challenge, support, and readiness. According to Sanford, individuals need enough sustain them through dissonant experiences and periods of growth. However, having too much support causes students' growth to stagnate.

Participants' experiences, particularly their reflections on their points of divergence and subsequent patterns of engagement, strongly affirm Sanford's (1962, 1966, 1967) observations about students' response to challenging and affirming stimuli. Being challenged gives students the experience through which to learn and develop, but challenges must be scaffolded so as to encourage students' persistence and growth. Having too much challenge discourages students to the point of disengagement, resulting in no growth. Having too much support causes students' growth to stagnate.

Participants sought experiences to challenge and expand their comfort zones. It seems that their willingness to try new experiences was linked to having previous positive, affirming experiences, as well as to their pre-departure expectations and

experiences. Students who had experienced victories with language use, accessing resources, developing relationships, and navigating their environment described feeling encouraged to try increasingly dissonant experiences. Over time, bolstered by success, students seemed to thrive in the pattern of expanding their comfort.

Similar to students in maintenance, participants in expansion of comfort described practical, social, and academic implications. They developed meaningful intercultural relationships with American students and non-Chinese international students, including friendships, roommates, and classroom colleagues, and experienced intercultural learning. Many became involved with campus and community life, including through student involvement; several held leadership positions. Tinto (1975) and Astin (1985) found that students' active engagement with campus life, i.e. through student involvement, were more likely to persist.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that students who were involved outside of the classroom were more likely to persist and derive positive experiences and outcomes, including enhanced academic performance, professional skills, and social sense of belonging. Participants became comfortable participating and asking questions in class, attended faculty office hours, and engaged in internships and research projects outside of the classroom, demonstrating their increased level of engagement and agency in their academic growth.

Some students described experiences that represented their move from maintaining to expanding their comfort zones. The move was usually related to having a positive or encouraging experience, which seemed to build sufficient comfort or confidence. For other students, readiness seemed only to relate to the

passing of time, as supported by participants who were able to reflect on their experiences over the course of several semesters.

Experiences shared by participants seem to indicate it is possible to move from maintenance to expansion. However, none of participants' descriptions signified to me a move from expansion to maintenance. In their descriptions, there seemed to be a saturation point of success where students had enough affirming experiences to continue exploring and thriving. Students' narratives indicate that moving from maintenance to expansion is possible, but that movement in the other direction is unlikely. These findings indicate an area that was previously unexplored in the literature.

Relationship Between Culture, Transition, and Expectations

The close connections between culture, expectations, and students' overall transition were very clear in participants' narratives. Triandis (2009) described culture as encompassing tangible and intangible facets, human-made physical components and abstract concepts of values, beliefs, and social norms. When comparing their home and study abroad experiences, participants referenced language, food, family, religion, friendships, classroom experiences, social experiences, and forms of recreation. Participants also talked about the dissemination of culture from one generation to the next in the way that they developed expectations for classroom conduct through socialization in their home country. This matches Matsumoto's (1997) description of sharing culture from generation to generation via socialization.

The role of cultural exchange, social experiences, and adventure to students' transitions are less represented in the literature, but significantly discussed by participants. The majority of participants wanted to learn about American culture, form relationships with Americans, and travel in the United States. For Patrick, the allure of studying in the U.S. directly related to the ability to play and watch basketball. Sheldon, Ruolan, and Ray were interested in American pop culture and lifestyle. Many participants planned to or have traveled to American cities and landmarks during their school holidays. Every participant mentioned their desire to or examples of learning more about American culture. These admissions present an area not heavily considered in existing literature about international students. Literature about international students considers students' academic and financial reasons for studying abroad, but less about students' interest in cultural exchange, adding insights about the experiences that students might be seeking through the transition process.

Participants' reflections on Chinese social norms contradicted Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) assessment of the secular-rational values of Chinese culture. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) found that China exhibited moderate secular-rational values, or moderate emphasis on family and authority. Every participant talked about the role of family and authority as essential to their experiences. Family relationships, desire to make one's parents proud, and parental approval in decision making were all influential to participants. The topic of authority came up repeatedly, particularly as students reflected on academic structure and professor-student interactions in China as strict and hierarchical. The students' reflections are

more representative of a society with high traditional values according to Inglehart and Welzel. This may represent a generational shift in cultural values, or a developmental stage before students realize or adopt dominant Chinese cultural values. The expression of secular-rational values seemed to influence students throughout their transition, as students developed pre-departure expectations and navigated differences related to hierarchy and authority.

Hofstede's dimensions of culture. Students shared experiences that confirmed and contradicted China's various dimensional scores along Hofstede's (1980, 1984, 2010) dimensions of national culture. Their social and academic experiences provide examples through which to view each dimension. The dimension of power distance appeared frequently and directly in students' narratives. Power distance is illustrated by levels of access and formality between members in different levels of a structure (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Many students reflected on their interactions with faculty and their struggle with the comparatively low level of formality used in American student-faculty interactions. They spoke about the absence of formal titles and family names when addressing faculty, and described professors as "casual" and "friendly." The level of informality students observed in the United States supports the moderately low American power distance score (Hofstede Center, 2015). Students' experiences with American faculty differed dramatically from their interactions with Chinese faculty, which participants said were "formal" and "strict." China has a much higher power distance score, which likely accounts for part of the difference students observed and dissonance they felt.

Students' experiences with the dimension of individualism were less directly observable in the experiences they shared, but were more apparent by examining *how* students described their experiences. Morris and Peng (1994) found that Chinese tend to explain events without positioning oneself at the center of the event, whereas Americans tend to place oneself as the central observer or actor when explaining. This tendency relates to the high individualism of Americans and low individualism (high collectivism) of Chinese (Morris & Peng, 1994). Consistent with this scholarship, participants in this study largely related themselves to events, rather than placing themselves at the center. Participants shared their experiences and feelings, and consistently reflected on how these related to interactions with others. For example, David related his academic success and interaction with other engineering students in study sessions to his perception of his happiness and adjustment. Joseph spoke about his depression, but was concerned about it because of the implications for his family. Another example of the contrast between Chinese and American individualism levels may be found in the instance of Wenxin's group project. Wenxin's American group mates may have been focused on their individual performance or grades, and this may have contributed to their exclusionary behaviors. Wenxin wanted to contribute to the group's success and felt frustrated by not having the opportunity.

Because the United States and China have nearly identical scores on the masculinity dimension of Hofstede's (2015) scoring, it is difficult to determine the extent to which participants' narratives illustrate this dimension. China and the United States both have moderately masculine cultures, which is depicted in part

through competition (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Many students described structures that fostered competition in China and the United States, though it seemed the type of competition differed on their Chinese campuses. In China, students competed more between peers, whereas in the United States, students competed with oneself. In China, the exam-centric nature of university admission and courses was viewed by students to foster competition for limited spots at universities and within specific academic programs, and courses used bell curve grading. In the United States, students observed that many or all students could receive high grades, and the multiple graded assignments encouraged continuous evaluation. These practices may reflect a combination of cultural masculinity and individualism.

The Hofstede Center (2015) scored China as moderately low on uncertainty avoidance, which indicates a cultural preference for clarity, policies, and processes. This dimension was less apparent in students' narratives. Some students talked about navigating challenging situations, but it was unclear whether the situations were challenging because of inherent cultural issues or the situation itself. However, by participating in study abroad, students willingly navigate unstructured, vague, new experiences. This may indicate that students who choose to study abroad already exhibit differences from the cultural norm of low uncertainty avoidance.

Participants' reflections on relationship building and academic evaluation illustrate the difference in Chinese and American time orientation. Students talked about the ease with which American university students make friends, but elaborated that these relationships seemed to be superficial and short-term. Conversely, Chinese

students focused on forming deeper, more lasting relationships. Some students even built relationships with other Chinese international students via social media prior to arrival in the United States, and spoke about the lasting utility of these relationships for their eventual social and professional lives for their return to China. In addition to relationships, students' examples of academic evaluation methods in China and the United States also illustrate the contrasting time orientations between the two countries. Students' courses at Chinese universities were often evaluated on their performance on a single exam. As a result, students focused long-term planning on a single future milestone. Participants remarked about the different approach taken in their American courses, in which they were evaluated using multiple assignments and exams over shorter, more frequent time periods. This illustrates the lower time orientation score of the United States.

Students exhibited relatively high levels of indulgence. In addition to the extravagance of costs related to study abroad, many students spoke about additional travels and purchases. Iris explicitly spoke about perceptions of Chinese international students' wealth, and said that her peers indulge on clothing, accessories, and cars. Her reflections are consistent with Shao's (2014) observations about the high indulgence levels of today's Chinese international students. However, students' examples provide evidence that their indulgence levels are comparatively higher than what Hofstede's (2015) score indicated. This discrepancy may indicate generational differences in indulgence or observation of a gradual change in indulgence among Chinese.

In addition to my interpretation of students' experiences and how they can be viewed through Hofstede's (1980, 1984, 2010) dimensions of culture, I asked students directly about their perceptions of the accuracy of Hofstede's (2015) cultural dimension levels for Chinese culture, and I used examples from their narratives to illustrate dimensions of culture in their experiences. For the most part, students agreed that the levels reflected on Hofstede's (2015) dimensions were accurate according to their experiences, with one notable difference. The difference that nearly all participants observed was for the dimension of indulgence; participants gave examples that illustrated high levels of indulgence among Chinese international students. This may be indicative of a shift in indulgence from older generations to the generation of university students, which is supported in the literature. Shao (2014) described the economic impact of Chinese university students, namely by purchasing luxury goods for themselves and for contacts in China. Students spoke about participating in travel and purchasing goods that support the cultural increase in indulgence.

Implications of the Findings

This section offers implications of this study for student services practitioners, practitioner preparation, student development theory, faculty praxis, and future research. By better understanding international students' experiences through transition, student services areas can appropriately anticipate and respond to students. This study also has implications for practitioner preparation, including the student development theories we learn. As visible points of contact – and dissonance – for international students, faculty understanding of the population is also essential.

Lastly, this study offers multiple opportunities for future research and exploration. These implications provide direction for international student support, enhanced preparation of educators, and increased scholarship related to the nuances of international students' transition.

Student Development Theory

This study has several implications for the creation and application of student development theory, emphasizing the need for theories of student development that attend to students' cultural contexts and are culturally inclusive. Previous scholarship and theory does not account for the process of transition. Theories of transition, including Bridges (1991) and Schlossberg (1995) provide language for some of the variables and experiences within transition, but do not give insight as to how students experience the process of transition. This study and my theory of Chinese international students' transition to the United States contributes a new way of considering international students' experiences, transitions within systems of higher education. The theory and model can be tested and adapted for international students from other countries of origin, as well as for American students participating in study abroad. It also provides the foundation for future work to expand upon the model and deepen understanding of outcomes related to study abroad.

It is also important to note how the findings of this study diverged from extant student development theory and research. The experiences of participants in this study do not necessarily match the dominant narrative of student development theories. Maslow's (1943, 1954, 1970) hierarchy of needs is often among the first human development theories shared with educators-in-training. The theory has been

critiqued for its ethnocentric positioning of individualistic values at the top of the hierarchy (Hofstede, 1984). This study offers a culturally relevant alternative to Maslow's model and suggests that international students experience a different sequence of needs during their transition to study in the United States.

This work also supports the work of scholars who have presented culturally specific developmental patterns. For example, Zhang (1999), Zhang and Hood (1998), and Zhang and Watkins (2001) studied and compared the cognitive development patterns of Chinese and American university students studying at universities in China and the United States. They found that students in the two countries moved in different developmental patterns, with the Chinese students moving from relativism toward dualism and the American students moving from dualism toward relativism. After presenting the contrast in developmental patterns, Zhang (1999) recommended that future studies continue to evaluate the cross-cultural relevance of theories of human development. This study contributed to the discourse about the importance of considering cultural context in student development theory by consulting literature about various populations of students and examining the experiences of Chinese women and men. The findings of this study inform our understanding of comparative education, Chinese international students, and the transition processes of tertiary education students.

Graduate Student Training and Practitioner Preparation

The findings of this study also have implications for student affairs graduate preparation programs. Graduate preparation programs give limited attention to international student issues throughout the curriculum, and tend to rely on theories

with limited cross-cultural relevance. Because the genesis of the field of student services was on American campuses, we tend to approach scholarship and practice with a Western-centric or American-centric lens. This study demonstrated the unique experiences of Chinese international students through the transition process, and in doing so, demonstrated that a “one size fits all” approach to theory and practice is not acceptable for educating the increasingly diverse population of students we serve. To better address the experiences and needs of international students throughout the curriculum, graduate preparation faculty should acknowledge the cultural context of student development theories and student services, as well as the ethnocentric tendency of student services scholar-practitioners to prescribe theories and practices to populations for which they might not apply. Faculty should also include coursework about international students and international and comparative education in the curriculum, encourage emerging practitioners to approach their work with a consideration of international students’ unique needs, and pursue new research to address the gap in student development theory scholarship.

Student services personnel sometimes silo the needs and experiences of international students, viewing responding to international students’ needs as the responsibility of the international or multicultural student services departments on campus, rather than their own. Rather than view international students as a “special population,” training and consideration of international students’ needs should be considered imperative to all areas of student services. Students shared the sharpness of some challenges that caused them to retreat, sometimes with long-lasting repercussions for their time abroad. Especially for students with a shorter term of

study in the U.S., too many challenges might limit their potential for growth and exploration. Attention to the unique experiences of international students creates potential for adequate support to be offered to this population. As such, student services personnel in all functional areas should include education about international student needs and transitions to be better prepared to assist them.

Graduate preparation programs should present widely accepted student development theories as bounded by cultural context, and remain receptive to new scholarship that expands our understanding of developmental patterns, especially theories honed on culturally diverse populations. Because these theories remain few at present, faculty might give a disclaimer about the limited scope of widely-cited student development theories to encourage students to think critically about existing theories. Faculty can also share the work of Zhang and colleagues during discussion of cognitive development theories, reference this study during discussion of students' transitions, and look outside of tertiary student development for more inclusive theories of human development. This study and its emerging theory demonstrate that it is possible to construct student development theories that are culturally inclusive and representative of students' experiences, and that we should think about how students' identities and experiences might result in varying patterns of development for different populations of students.

Student Services Practice

The findings of this study pose a number of implications for student services. Orientation programs, international students' and scholars' services, student conduct,

resident life, and academic and career advising are a few areas in student services with clear implications based on this study.

Orientation programs and international student services. First, this work has multiple implications for orientation programs and international students' and scholars' services. First, some participants gave examples of needing access to information that did not become relevant to their experiences until weeks or months after orientation, including academic resources, academic integrity, and mental health resources to manage culture shock. This seemed partly related to the early language proficiency challenges that many participants described, as many students had communication issues that might have prevented them from fully comprehending the meaning or significance of orientation materials. Their examples imply the need for ongoing orientation programming, perhaps through an international student experiences course or brown-bag sessions throughout the term.

Next, each one of the participants expressed surprise about the pedagogical differences between Chinese and American education. Although they had anticipated cultural and social differences, participants seemed largely unaware of differences in pedagogy and academic expectations prior to arrival in the U.S. Several participants discussed plagiarism, cheating, and the ways they navigated academic integrity issues. As such, this study emphasizes a need to prepare international students for the pedagogical differences they may face, including classroom expectations, grading structure, and faculty interactions. Orientation should also address expectations related to academic integrity and the definitions of plagiarism and cheating. Specifically, offering examples of how expectations in China and the U.S. differ, as

well as common academic integrity errors, seemed to help students understand how to uphold American expectations for academic integrity. Peer-to-peer learning, either with seasoned American or Chinese students, would also provide the opportunity for students to ask questions, understand examples, and grasp expectations.

Additionally, international students seem to face unique layers related to practical aspects of their transition. Orientation programs should discuss the practical, socioemotional, intellectual, and ideological needs of international students. Rather than just provide students with resources, orientation programs should address the stages of culture shock and transition issues experienced by international students, as well as possible timelines for these experiences. This would help students to anticipate and normalize their experiences.

Student conduct. Findings from this study encourage student conduct offices to address international student academic integrity issues proactively, especially those that occur unintentionally due to a lack of education or misinterpretation of policies. Several participants discussed difficulty adapting to American standards of academic integrity. Although orientation programs might have discussed the concept of academic integrity, students did not understand its applicability or necessity until weeks later in their coursework. These examples illustrate a need for outreach and education to inform the international student community specifically about academic integrity issues. Such education should include the definitions of cheating and plagiarism, give examples to help students operationalize the terms, and provide an opportunity to ask questions and seek advice. Programs could also compare examples or information about the role of academic integrity in various countries.

Housing and resident life. This study points out implications for resident life departments. Several participants attributed their most meaningful friendships with American students to relationships formed in the residence halls. Other students repeatedly mentioned their global scholars' living-learning community, which provided occasions to discuss and celebrate their home country and culture and offered structured opportunities to build intercultural relationships. Resident life departments should encourage international students to participate in living-learning programs that provide structured and informal opportunities for students to engage across difference. Also, housing assignments should place international and American students within the same corridors and floors to facilitate intercultural relationships and learning, as well as to encourage opportunities for social engagement and address a potential source of social self-isolation that some participants demonstrated.

In-hall educators should strive for inclusive training and programming by including information about the experiences of international students, differences between campuses and residence halls (if applicable) in countries outside of the U.S., and information about culture shock so that hall staff are better able to understand the transition process of international students. To better support international students in the residence halls, in-hall staff should facilitate opportunities for social interaction within and outside the halls, and use programming to address academic integrity, emotional coping, and practical resources, issues that affect domestic and international students.

Health programs. The ability to navigate health-related needs was a salient experience for at least two participants. Students faced challenges related to

understanding the health care system and where to find various resources (e.g. physician, pharmacy, optometrist), as well as the language to describe their symptoms and treatments. Additionally, diagnoses and medications in the U.S. sometimes had different names than in China. With these challenges in mind, health centers should consider providing a list of “translations” for common medical concerns and medicines (e.g. acetaminophen is commonly called “paracetamol” outside of the U.S.) for international students and students participating in study outside of the U.S. Providing outreach to international students about the American health care system and where to find local non-primary care providers would also address the obstacles the health-related obstacles students seemed to face.

Academic and career advising. Students’ discussion of their post-graduate plans highlights implications for academic and career advisors of international students. When participants talked about their plans for after studying abroad or graduating, they expressed interest in employment or graduate school in either the U.S. or China. Many participants seemed uncertain of what their legal obligations were after studying abroad or graduating. There is a need for specialized post-graduation advising for international students that, in addition to advising for degree completion and the post-graduation transition, specifically addresses students’ possibilities for returning to their home countries versus remaining in their country of study. Post-graduation advising for international students should include information about the academic, career, and legal implications of pursuing graduate study or employment in both locations.

Participants reflected on the different approach to major choice taken in China versus in the United States. Students described being guided into majors at their Chinese universities, based on their academic strengths, to provide better opportunities for academic success and job placement. They faced academic benchmarks and grade requirements during their time in university to determine whether students were permitted to persist in their degree programs. Students remarked about the relative flexibility of students to choose their majors in the United States, and seemed to prefer the ability to select their courses and fields of study. However, American universities are currently under scrutiny for graduates' job placement rate (Rogers, 2013). To address students' vocational clarity, academic performance, and employability, American institutions might take cues from the Chinese in this area, establishing clearer parameters for admission and persistence in various degree programs. In order to balance students' choice with academic competitiveness and employability, institutions in both countries might consider a blend of academic benchmarks and offering non-degree electives to allow students to explore areas outside of their major area of study.

Student organizations. The findings of this study also have implications for student activities and organizations. Several participants spoke about the confidence, social networks, professional skills, and leadership development they gained as a result of participating in student organizations. Their experiences supported literature about gains made by students as result of university engagement (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Terenzini and Reason, 2005), and demonstrated the importance of engagement for international students. Additionally, student

organizations with a focus on ethnic heritage appeared to be particularly important. Two participants talked about the role of Chinese-American students as a bridge between American and Chinese culture. Both students' Chinese-American friends, who were born in the United States and spoke English as a first language, took interest in their language, culture, and lives as a means of accessing their shared ancestry. As a result, participants not only got to talk about their home culture with their friends, but also formed relationships with American students with and without Chinese ancestry. This seems to support Museus' (2008) findings of positive relationships between the experiences of students of color and involvement in ethnic student organizations. Universities should preserve student organizations with a focus on ethnic heritage, as they may also serve as valuable bridges for international students during their transition to American university life.

Faculty Praxis

This study also offers some implications for faculty praxis. Participants described large differences between Chinese and American approaches to in-class participation, graded assignments, and faculty interactions. Understanding the contrasts between what Chinese international students have become accustomed to in their university experiences prior to studying in the U.S. can help faculty recognize factors contributing to how Chinese students engage in American classrooms.

All of the students in this study described the challenge of going from an environment where in-class discussion and participation were not at all a part of teaching practice, to American classrooms in which participation might be a significant, grade-bearing expectation. Because of this sharp contrast, faculty should

consider introducing class participation and discussion in incremental, scaffolded ways throughout the term. For example, rather than require weekly verbal participation grades, faculty might consider offering an accumulation of participation points. Next, for many international students, the Socratic method of engaging students via obligatory, abrupt participation is fear provoking at best and impossible at worst. Students described being better able to engage with course material, feeling more confident, and providing more thoughtful responses in settings where they were given the opportunity to think, reflect, and prepare before producing a response. For this reason, there is merit in alternatives to in-class, react-and-respond participation, including online discussion posts. Incremental participation and alternatives to in-class discussion provide opportunities for international students to gradually address this difference in expectations.

Next, participants described the different grading philosophy in China versus the United States. Students' grades on a single exam performance primarily determined their course grades in China. Homework and smaller assignments, if offered, provided students with opportunities to practice and grow, without accounting for part of the course grade. In China, students who are confident about their performance in a certain course, or who need to prioritize their study time on a more challenging course, have some flexibility to choose which non-graded assignments they complete. Participants described appreciation for and confusion with the assignment structures of their American courses, many of which have several exams, written projects, and homework assignments as part of the final grade. Students' biggest difficulty was the inability to choose whether to complete

assignments for courses in which they do not need the practice. Faculty should share expectations for classroom conduct, participation, and graded assignments by being explicit about which assignments are graded and how they are weighted. By providing clear guidelines on course syllabi, faculty can address many of the misunderstandings expressed by participants, as well as address the role of cultural uncertainty avoidance in classroom expectations.

Finally, students' interaction with faculty and teaching assistants was repeatedly cited as a difference between Chinese and American universities. Students who were unprepared for the level of interaction, assistance, and sometimes informality by American professors described feeling intimidated and overwhelmed at first. Over time, they became comfortable with the level of attention and friendliness exhibited by many of their faculty. Many participants mentioned that they attended office hours, even sometimes when they did not need help, to take advantage of the opportunity to interact with their faculty. As such, faculty should continue to promote office hours and persist in their collegiality and attention to international students. Practices such as "meet the faculty" events provide opportunities for students to become more comfortable engaging with faculty, which will in turn help students' comfort level in the classroom.

Future research

This study developed an emerging theory of Chinese international students' transition to American higher education. In doing so, it also generated numerous questions, implications, and possibilities for future research. Forthcoming studies should replicate this study to determine its transferability to other campuses and

populations of international students, including American students on campuses abroad. Expansions of this study might also probe further about gender patterns and socioeconomic status as they relate to international students' experiences with the process of transition, as well as whether and how personality traits shape students' experiences. Future scholarship should explore academic, social, and emotional facets of international students' experiences and development, with an aim to develop theories specific to students from diverse cultural backgrounds and national origins. Scholars can replicate and expand the comparative cognitive development work of Zhang (1999) and colleagues, who found that differences in culture and higher education may influence students' patterns of cognition, with student populations all over the world. This study identified other areas of student development that can be studied, including social, moral, and identity development, as an extension of the work of Zhang and this study.

Similarly, forthcoming studies should expand this model of transition and connect the model to international students' persistence and success. Longitudinal studies create opportunities to understand participants' current experiences, as well as to recognize experiences over time. Longitudinal studies would allow for further examination of the process related to students' transitions, as well as the eventual connection of the process of transition to educational outcomes and students' success.

This study creates a foundation for future studies of international students' transitions, identity development, and outcomes. Future exploration of international students' identity development can offer insight into how students retain or expand their sense of self, especially as it relates to their ethnicity and national origin,

through transition and experiences in different systems of higher education. Future studies should also explore the role of ethnic student organizations and their significance to international student transitions and intercultural relationship building. Finally, there is ample opportunity to explore the connections between international students' transitions and outcomes. Educators still do not understand the developmental influences of short and long-term study abroad on students' experiences and outcomes. Making these connections will help students and educators to understand students' experiences in context, highlighting the effect of experiences abroad on students' learning, development, and success.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I related the emerging theory to this study's research questions and described connections to existing literature. Next, I presented implications for student services practitioners, graduate preparation programs, faculty, and future scholarship. Finally, I shared my reflections on the purpose and findings of the study.

This qualitative grounded theory inquiry examined the experiences of eighteen Chinese international students during their process of transition from Chinese to American institutions of higher education. The theoretical framework proposed that cultural influences on pedagogy may influence students' experiences with transition. Extant literature on the social, emotional, and environmental aspects of international students' transition implied that international students engage with campus in diverse ways, and that numerous sources contribute to positive experiences and outcomes. Eighteen participants shared their experiences, and from their narratives emerged themes and a theory of transition. Students' practical, emotional,

social, intellectual, and ideological needs shaped their experiences, and significant positive and negative experiences provided points of divergence during which students either maintained or expanded upon their comfort zone. Students' pre-departure perceptions, characteristics, and post-graduation plans also played a role in their transition. The theory encompasses eighteen Chinese international students' experiences with transition to an institution of American higher education, with implications for students and educators.

This study and resulting theory and model hold significance to administrators and faculty. The study takes a step beyond the ethnocentrism historically found in many theories of university student development and helps to set a direction toward culturally contextual theory and practice. It also connects university personnel with the voices and experiences of some Chinese international students, in the hopes that they will better understand and address the unique transition issues that this population meets. This project germinated out of desire to better serve international students, and to encourage scholars and practitioners in student services to consider the cultural context of our praxis. I hope that students and educators from all cultures will experience higher education differently as a result.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Communication to Prospective Participants

Dear [Student],

[Optional introduction: My name is Léna Kavaliauskas Crain, and I am a doctoral student. (Student) may have shared some information with you about me and my research, and indicated that you might be interested in sharing your experiences for this project.] My research is about the experiences of Chinese international students who have studied at both Chinese and American universities. The purpose of this project is to better understand what your academic and social experiences have been in both countries, as well as what you have experienced and observed in the process of studying at an American university.

Would you be interested in talking with me about your experiences? The interview would take approximately one hour. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to talk more about the project. I can be reached at [number withheld] or at [email withheld].

Sincerely,

Léna Kavaliauskas Crain

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Project Title: A Study of Students' Experience of Transition between Chinese and American Institutions of Higher Education

Purpose of the Study: This research is being conducted by Léna Kavaliauskas Crain at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have completed one year of university study in China and one year of university study in the United States. The purpose of this research project is to advance the understanding of students' comparative experiences in both countries and their experiences with transitioning between institutions of higher education.

Procedures: The procedures involve a one-time, in-person interview approximately one hour in length. Participants may choose to review a transcript of their interview for accuracy. Participants may choose to participate in a second interview approximately one hour in length. Participants may consent to having their transcript reviewed by other participants to yield cross-participant themes; identifiers will have been removed from the transcripts. Alternately, participants may choose not to participate in cross-participant review.

Potential Risks and Discomforts: There are no known risks for participants, except for the risk of a potential loss or breach of confidentiality. The researcher makes every effort to minimize this risk.

Potential Benefits: There are no direct benefits to participants. However, overall benefits of this study include advanced knowledge of students' transitions, and potential to advance student services designed to assist international students with their transition.

Confidentiality: The PI will collect data by interviewing each participant in person, using the attached questionnaire. Participants may select a pseudonym so that identifying features will not be visible other than to the PI; this identifying information will be stored in a separate file from study data. Subject identity is not relevant to data collection, nor will it impact the study. Data will be stored in a password-protected computer file on Léna Kavaliauskas' (PI) computer in [address withheld]. Only the PI will have access to data. Data with identifiers will be destroyed at the conclusion of data analysis.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

Right to Withdraw and Questions: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this

research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact: Léna Kavaliauskas Crain, [address withheld].

Participant Rights: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

University of Maryland College Park
Institutional Review Board Office
1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, Maryland, 20742
Email: irb@umd.edu
Telephone: 301-405-0678

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Consent: Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

If you agree to participate, please sign your name below:

NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]: _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT: _____

DATE: _____

Do you wish to participate in the optional second interview? (yes/no) _____

Do you agree to participate in review of your interview transcript by other participants? (yes/no) _____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Opening

- Interviewer and participant introductions
- Explain purpose of interview and background of study: to understand experiences with transition between higher education in China and United States
- Ask for permission to record the interview
- Ask for participant's questions

Background

What is your major? At which university did you study in China?
What was the average size of a class at your university in China?
Did your parents or other close members of your family attend university?
What brought you to study in the United States and at this university?
Are you involved with any campus groups? Do you live on campus?
Who are your best friends? Who are your more casual friends?

Transition

Tell me about your experience when you moved to the U.S.

Probing questions:

How did you feel in the first few months?

What happened?

What was easy? What was hard? Can you give examples?

How was your adjustment to academics: classes, expectations, professors?

How was your social adjustment? How did you make friends? Who are your best friends?

How did you get involved with (clubs, etc.)?

What advice would you give to a university student coming from China to help them prepare?

Culture

When you reflect on people in China and the United States, how do they compare to each other?

How do you perceive the value of authority in Chinese culture? How about in American culture?

How do you perceive how individualism is valued?

How do you perceive how authority is approached?

How do you perceive how change and uncertainty are approached?

How do you perceive how tradition is valued?

Do you think these are different between older and younger generations? If yes, what are they?

Pedagogy

Do you think that the way education is conducted relates to culture? Could you give examples for China and the U.S.?

Tell me about a typical day in your academic routine during your studies in (China/U.S.).

Probing questions:

How much time did you spend in a formal classroom environment?

How much time did you spend preparing or studying outside of class?

How much time did you spend in co-curricular or social activities?

How do you approach writing a paper?

How did you learn when in (China/U.S.)? How do you learn now?

What motivates you to learn? How do you know when you have learned something?

Role of the Instructor, Peers, and Evaluation

Now I have a few questions to compare your experiences in China and the U.S. Please compare these practices between your undergraduate education in China and education in the United States:

- Instructors' teaching methods
- Relationships between most instructors and students
- Instructors' expectations (for example: strictness/discipline, standards)
- The way your classmates influenced your learning in classroom settings
- Interactions with classmates that enhanced your learning
- The best way to earn high grades
- Ways that your school used to evaluate your academic work
- Life outside of classes

Why do you think (the above) are different?

In China, do you think that grades are a good measure of whether you have learned material? Do you think that grades are a good measure of the effort and work you have put in? What about in the U.S.? Why or why not?

Do you think that there is a difference in the experiences of men and women in classrooms in China and the U.S.? Are there different expectations or treatment of men and women students?

When you think about the reasons and hopes you gave me for your decision to study in the U.S., did you meet those things in your time so far?

Is there anything else that you would like to add that would help me to understand your experiences?

Please review your biography paragraph. Would you like to change or remove any of the information? Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix D: Follow-Up Interview Protocol

Transcript Review

After your interview, the recording was transcribed to produce this transcript of our conversation. Would you please read the transcript and make sure that it is accurate?

Is there anything that we didn't talk about then that you would like to add, related to your experiences or perspectives on the topics? Has anything changed about your experiences since the last time we talked?

[Present the redacted transcript of another participant and a highlighter.] Here is the transcript from another person's interview. Could you go through the transcript and highlight anything that seems important to you? "Important" things could be things that you think are important for this study, things that echo your personal experiences, or things you'd like to talk about further.

Needs Brainstorming

[Give paper and pen to participant.] In the interviews, one theme is resources that were important that people needed to be successful when first arriving in the U.S. and at the university. Could you think about when you arrived and what the important things were to you? Make a list, and then try to put them in order of the time you found them.

Theory Review

[Discuss emerging theory and present model in progress.] How would you change the pieces of this model? Is there anything you would add or remove?

Based on your experiences, could you talk me through whether your experiences fit into this model? Can you give examples of why or how?

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