

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: CHINESE GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT IN THE US: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

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Chinese international students are the largest and fastest growing international student body on US campuses (Open Door Report, 2016). This study used the consensual qualitative research method (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill, 2012) to capture the complexity of the challenges and growth Chinese graduate international student may experience adjusting to their lives in the US in the current sociopolitical context. Nine participants (6 females; 3 males) enrolled in graduate programs from various disciplines were interviewed about their perceptions of the sociopolitical environment, cultural adjustment expectations and experiences, and social support systems. Findings revealed an on-going evaluative process where participants negotiated their expectations with cultural adjustment changes in multiple life areas to achieve a subjective sense of satisfaction and well-being. Findings have implications for professionals working with CIS to help them mitigate the negative impact of internationalized oppression and develop a more individualized and realistic sense of purpose.

CHINESE GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CULTURAL
ADJUSTMENT IN THE US:
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over 1,043,800 international students enrolled in US institutions in 2016. These students contribute over \$24.7 billion to the US economy, add cultural diversity and global perspectives to US campuses, and may become valuable intellectual assets for the US labor force (Open Door Report, 2016). However, international students often experience stressors such as language barriers, confusion about role expectations, unfamiliarity with laws and regulations, loss of social support, discrimination, and immigration restrictions (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), which place them at greater risk for various psychological problems than domestic students (Mori, 2000). Despite their increased presence, international students as a whole remain one of the most understudied and underserved populations on college campuses (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). Therefore, training programs and academic institutions may lack knowledge and guidelines to work with international students and find it challenging to serve the rapidly expanding diversity.

Recent studies examining the acculturation experiences of undergraduate and graduate international students suggest that graduate international students might be at heightened risk for adjustment difficulties (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). For example, evidence suggests that older (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a) and married international students (Duru & Poyrazli, 2007) tend to report worse adjustment outcomes and higher acculturative stress. In addition, graduate international students tend to face more financial and family-related stress as compared to their undergraduate counterparts (Duru & Poyrazli, 2007). They tend to have spent more

time in their culture of origin and thus may differ from undergraduate international students with respect to their ethnic and racial identity development (Helms, 2003).

One in three international students in US institutions is from China, and the number of students from China has almost quadrupled over the past eight years (Open Doors Report, 2016). Because of significant cultural distance, or cultural differences between European and Asian cultures (Yeh & Inose, 2003), Asian international students in the US, such as those with a Chinese cultural heritage, tend to face more acculturative stress and experience less well-being than their counterparts of European background (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a).

Existing literature sometimes study Asian international students as an aggregated sample despite cultural heterogeneity among Asian countries. Studies that focus on Chinese international students (CIS) tend to operationalize their acculturation and cultural adjustment process using culturally non-specific factors such as psychological distress, broad acculturation strategies, acculturative stress, and social difficulties. Therefore, it is still unclear what are the unique hopes and expectations of current day CIS that fuse into their hoped and actual acculturation experiences, and how they make meaning and evaluate their adjustment experiences in an era when studying abroad is increasingly popular in China. Chirkov (2009) in his critical analyses of the acculturation literature argued that “the dominant mode of research in the psychology of acculturation does not correspond to the essential qualities of the phenomenon – the acculturation process” (p. 95). This qualitative study aimed to provide a thick description of how Chinese graduate international students adjust to their lives in the US by examining their decision of study aboard in

the current sociopolitical context, their experiences with social support, and how they appraise their cultural adjustment process.

Acculturation in Context

International students' adjustment is best understood in the context of acculturation, during which they come into continuous first-hand contact with the host culture and undergo a process of accommodation and long-term adaptation (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005; Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Individuals go about their acculturation process differently as they negotiate changes in their behaviors, identities, and values in their acculturation contexts. Berry (1997; 2005) categorized such variability into four acculturation strategies depending on how much individuals choose to maintain their culture of origin and participate in the host culture: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Some research has linked the use of integration to better mental health (Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Bond, 2008; Davis, Okazaki, & Saw, 2009; Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007) and less acculturative stress (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Williams & Berry, 1991).

Past research on international students has usually examined acculturation as a static state of preferences and/or behaviors. Recent evidence suggests that acculturation is a much more nuanced process that reflects individuals' negotiation and compromise in their acculturative context. For example, Miller (2010; Miller et al., 2013) found that more than half of the Asian American participants employed different acculturation strategies across behavioral (e.g., language, social interactions, and academic and vocational choices) and value (e.g., beliefs, worldviews, and norms) domains. Similarly, a sample of African immigrants in Spain reported that

they preferred “assimilation” in the domain of work and economics, “integration” in the social domain, and “separation” for the value domain (Navas, Rojas, García, & Pumares, 2007). A domain-specific understanding of acculturation suggests that acculturation is a dynamic and fluid process, during which individuals can maintain adherence to more than one culture and switch between acculturation attitudes and practices across settings and time. Qualitative methodologies can help understand what migrant individuals, such as CIS want to achieve for their acculturation and cultural adjustment (e.g., goals, expectations).

It is also important to consider the discrepancy between individuals’ ideal and actual acculturation processes, which likely plays a vital role in their subjective appraisal of their cross-cultural experiences. According to the subjective well-being perspective, individuals derive happiness and satisfaction out of progress toward motive-congruent goals, especially if these goals are valued by the culture or subculture to which the individual belongs (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). While few studies have examined international students’ ideal and actual acculturation experiences, evidence suggests that migrants’ ideal acculturation condition may indeed be different from their actual acculturation experience. First generation “visibly different” immigrants in New Zealand reported experiencing a discrepancy where they desired a more integrated approach than was actually achieved in their social relations and work (Navas, Rojas, García, & Pumares, 2007; Ward & Kus, 2012). Qualitative methodologies can help understand the nuances of how CIS negotiate their ideal and actual acculturation experiences to make meaning of their study abroad journey.

The current sociopolitical environment in China, the US, and the intercultural relationship (Berry, 2005) serve as a context in which CIS anticipate, experience and appraise their cross-cultural experiences (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Unlike earlier generations, whose study abroad was often supported by government for political expectations, current day CIS are more likely to be motivated by personal aspiration (Zweig, 1997). Having more economic resources than earlier generations would likely ease their adjustment process and perhaps give them more freedom to participate in the host culture. They pay more attention to self-development (Chirkov et al., 2007), and may thus be more eager to seek contact and establish relationships with host nationals than earlier generations. On the other hand, becoming involved in their heritage community has become a viable option with the fast growth of CIS on US campuses. Establishment of Chinese businesses by earlier generations of immigrants, ease to connect with people in their home country, and access to global entertainment and business through the Internet has fundamentally changed the nature of heritage cultural maintenance and has made it much easier in this era. Local people may have curiosity as well as biases about CIS stemming from both the interethnic relationship in the US and the US-China relationship. Acculturation for contemporary CIS may involve a process of negotiating their expectations for integration with personal and environmental constraints such as one's language ability, available heritage culture ties on campus, and local people's openness to establishing relationships.

CIS' idealized expectations about acculturation are likely influenced by media in China, which often contrast and depict the American and Chinese systems as

diametric opposites (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Oversimplified and discrete expectations of the American culture may exacerbate the discrepancy between CIS' idealized acculturation expectations and actual acculturation experiences and therefore heighten their acculturative stress. The present study seeks to understand Chinese international graduate students' ideal and actual acculturative experiences in the current sociopolitical context.

Cultural Adjustment: Stress and Resilience

Sojourners (e.g., international students) make various adaptations in an attempt to cope with living in a new culture. Scholars have theorized that sojourners' cultural adjustment should be understood and examined in sociocultural and psychological aspects (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Sociocultural adjustment involves behavioral shifts and the development of competence in daily activities in the new culture, and psychological adjustment refers to psychological or emotional well-being. Psychological adjustment of international students is typically operationalized as depression, stress, or subjective well-being, whereas sociocultural adjustment is typically measured as levels of difficulty experienced in the performance of daily activities (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a).

Scholars have critiqued the focus of traditional cultural adjustment research on psychopathology, which overlooks individuals' resilience and post-migration growth (Pan, Wong, & Ye, 2012). Wang and colleagues' (2012) longitudinal study mapped the trajectories of CIS' psychological distress in their first two years in the US. They found that the majority of the sample did not experience severe levels of

psychological distress during their initial cultural transition, which challenged an overly negative focus on international students' adjustment. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) theorized that positive changes in self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and philosophy of life could arise during stressful experiences. CIS reported gaining academic confidence and responsibility for learning (Gill, 2007; Warring, 2010), having a clearer career development plan (Dimmock & Leong, 2010), and experiencing changes in their self-identity and ways of thinking (Gill, 2007) as a result of studying abroad. The mode of studying CIS' psychosocial adjustment focuses on quantifying their level of distress and difficulty, and does not capture the nuances of their internal processes of change and growth. The present study will qualitatively examine Chinese graduate international students' cultural adjustment as both challenges and growth, and explore their subjective appraisal of these life changes.

Social Support: When, Who and How?

International students tend to experience considerable loss in social networks and loneliness when living away from families and friends in their heritage culture. Instrumental and emotional support from various sources is therefore vital for their cultural adjustment and well-being. Social support from host-nationals (i.e., locals), often operationalized as perceived social support, amount of social interaction, satisfaction with the level of support, and perceived social connectedness, is a well-documented predictor for less psychological distress, less sociocultural difficulties, and higher satisfaction for international students (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). Host-national support may help

provide insight into how to navigate culturally unfamiliar situations, and facilitate a sense of belongingness in the host culture. Host-national support partially mediated the relationship between acculturation and subjective well-being for Korean immigrants (Yoon, Lee, & Goh, 2008) and CIS (Du & Wei, 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2011b), which suggests that Asian immigrants and sojourners who identify more strongly with the host culture experience higher levels of satisfaction partially due to having better support networks with host-nationals.

Interaction with co-nationals (same-nationality friends) has become a viable option for social support from CIS given the rapidly growing Chinese student body. Co-nationals tend to share similar cultural background and cultural adjustment experience, and may be more accessible than forming host-national ties due to cultural distance, language barriers, and discrimination. Findings regarding the effect of co-national support for international students is contradictory in the literature. Some studies found the benefit of co-national social support in reducing negative affect and acculturative stress, especially for sojourners who identify strongly with their heritage culture (Du & Wei, 2015; Ye, 2005), while others suggested that co-national support might hinder international students' adjustment. For example, Geeraert et al.'s (2014) longitudinal study with Belgium sojourners studying in foreign countries found that the number of co-national contacts became negatively associated with adjustment over time. Wang et al. (2012) found that the well-adjusted subgroup of CIS reported the lowest support from fellow Chinese students in their first semester than the rest of the sample.

Inconsistent with the quantitative findings, qualitative studies with Chinese and other Asian international students revealed their strong reliance on co-national peers and family for emotional support (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden, 2005; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Themes regarding the challenges of forming relationships with host-nationals also emerged in international students' narratives (Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden, 2005; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). International students, including CIS, described the language constraint on their relationship with host-nationals, discrimination, feelings of isolation, and superficial connections with host-national peers. The current study sought to generate a thick description of how Chinese graduate international students utilize social support from various sources to cope with challenges and stress as part of their cultural adjustment process.

Present Study

Recent quantitative research on acculturation suggests that ethnic minorities tend to employ fluid acculturation strategies across settings, context and time that are different from their ideal acculturation (Miller, 2010; Miller et al., 2013; Navas, Rojas, García, & Pumares, 2007; Ward & Kus, 2012). Qualitative methods are especially valuable for exploring the diverse subjective experiences of participants. Only a handful of qualitative studies (e.g., Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014) have specifically examined the subjective experience of cultural adjustment and acculturation of CIS. Qualitative data have shed light on nuances of challenges and growth they experienced as a result of studying in a foreign country. The current

study aimed to add nuance to the current understanding of Chinese graduate international students' acculturation and cultural adjustment by exploring their subjective evaluation of their study abroad journey in the contemporary sociopolitical environment.

The first goal was to explore Chinese graduate international students' study abroad decision and experience in the current sociopolitical context. Contemporary CIS, in contrast to the earlier period, are more likely to be motivated by personal economic and academic motivations, are less likely to return to China, and tend have oversimplified expectations of the US culture given the depictions in social media (Yan & Berliner, 2011). This study will explore how the current Chinese society and the US-China relationship serve as a context in which these students decide to study abroad, develop a sense of purpose, and formulate an identity in the U.S.

The second goal was to understand how participants appraise challenges and growth that have occurred during their cultural adjustment. Qualitative studies have shed light on changes in perceptions of the U.S. (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014), as well as the development of a more internalized and globalized sense of self pre- and post-sojourn for international students (Kim, 2012). This study aimed to learn more about how Chinese graduate international students perceive their ideal aspirations and actual experiences.

The third goal of this study was to explore if and how participants choose to access different sources of social support to cope with acculturative stress. The protective effects of perceived social support from host-nationals during cultural transitions have been well-documented in the quantitative literature (Zhang &

Goodson, 2011a). The effect of social support from co-nationals and social connectedness with one's own ethnic group is more ambiguous. It is thus important to understand the process of how CIS establish social support with different sources to start disentangling these findings and promote these students' well-being.

CQR is well suited for studying complicated phenomena (Hill, 2012), such as the cultural adjustment experiences of CIS, through the use of open-ended questions in semi-structured data collection techniques and the consensus process among judges to interpret findings. Although quantitative methods in this area have elicited data about the frequency of students' acculturative stress and challenges and how that might be explained by various factors, there is a lack of depth in understanding their internal experiences. Chirkov (2009) recommended taking an interpretive approach to consider the substantial variations in the life circumstances of the cultural groups, which "requires talking to people, taking their perspectives, analyzing their stories, and discovering the meaning of their actions" (p. 97). Therefore, we aimed to probe at a deeper level CIS' social support and cultural adjustment experiences using CQR.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

Interviewees. Nine international students (6 females, 3 males) from Mainland China enrolled in graduate programs were interviewed, which meets the recommended sample size for CQR studies (Hill, 2012; Hill et al., 2005).

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 29 years ($M = 25$, $SD = 1.87$). All moved to the U.S. for enrollment in an academic program after the age of 18, and have been living in the U.S. between 1 to 6 years ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.71$). The majority of participants identified as single, while one reported being married. One participant reported being a Buddhist, and the remaining reported no religious affiliation. One participant self-identified as lesbian, and the rest of the sample self-identified as heterosexual. Seven participants reported fathers' highest education to be Bachelor's degrees, and two reported that to be graduate degrees. Five reported their mother's highest education to be Bachelor's degrees or above, two reported that to be graduate degrees, and two reported that they mother had some college education. At the time of the interview, four participants were enrolled in a master's program, one graduated from a master's program one month prior the interview, and three were doctoral students, representing a number of disciplines (architecture, chemistry, journalism, gender studies, business). Participants' current GPA ranged from 3.4 to 3.92 ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.24$).

Interviewer. I am a 26-year-old heterosexual female doctoral CIS in my ninth year studying in the US, and was enrolled in a master's program in mental health counseling when I conducted the interviews. I have previously participated in phenomenological and CQR studies and have had experience interviewing participants. My own cultural adjustment experience informed this project, such as

separating different sources of social support to capture different challenges and opportunities in connecting with American peers, Chinese peers, international students from other countries, and people in China. In terms of expectations (i.e., “beliefs that researchers have formed based on reading the literature and thinking about and developing the research questions,” Hill et al., 1997, p. 538), I expected CIS to report adjustment challenges in academic, occupational, social, and emotional aspects of their lives. I expected CIS to report experiences of discrimination and isolation. I expected social support, especially that from other Chinese peers and family to be a vital coping strategy for CIS’ well-being. I also expected participants to report personal growth in areas such as identity formation and career development. In terms of biases (i.e., “personal issues that make it difficult for researchers to respond objectively to the data,” Hill et al., 1997, p.539), my mid-upper class background could make me underestimate participants’ financial stress and economic inflexibility. My academic training in a social justice oriented program makes me more sensitive about power and oppression in participants’ narratives.

Judges. The primary research team of five bilingual female CIS (Age $M = 26$, $SD = 2.92$) consisted of three master’s students in the Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership program, one doctoral student in human development, and one doctoral student in counseling psychology. The length of stay in the US ranged from 7 months to 98 months ($M = 35$ months, $SD = 37.14$). The judges were all from the same mid-Atlantic public university.

Prior to analyzing the data, research team members wrote about and discussed their biases and expectations. Because all judges were CIS whose personal experience was very close to the topic, the team also spent significant time throughout the coding process to discuss their own cultural adjustment experiences

and how personal experiences might bias their understanding of participants' narratives. Three coders reflected on how their social identities and background (e.g., woman, mid-upper class, age) might bias their expectation for why CIS study abroad. Most judges expected that CIS would view studying abroad as a way to gain academic and work experience, and thus were less able to relate to motivation other than self-improvement, such as immigration and fulfilling parents' goals. All judges reported varying levels of difficulty building deep connections with American peers due to factors such as personality, language difficulty and a lack of shared interest. As a result, they expected it to be a common experience for participants. All judges expected most CIS to form close circles with other Chinese students, although some might branch out to form connections with American peers. Two judges believed that it was important for CIS to challenge themselves in order to improve themselves in a new environment, while two judges believed it was important for them to feel comfortable and accept who they are. Lastly, three judges expected CIS in different disciplines to have different cultural adjustment experiences. For disciplines that tend to have more CIS, such as business and STEM, some judges expected fewer opportunities to connect with non-Chinese peers.

Auditor. The external auditor was a 34-year-old Asian assistant professor in counseling who used to be an international student in the US. He has extensive experience in CQR research and writing. In terms of biases and expectations, the auditor believed that moving to a different country demonstrated risk-taking and openness to experience, and thus he expected to see strength, resilience, and openness in participants' responses. The auditor had experience working with many CIS who came to the US for education, but he also thought some CIS came to the US because their family wanted them to. The auditor expected CIS to form strong ties with their

own group, which could help weather the transition but also prevent them from acculturating quickly. The auditor expected contact with family to be crucial for CIS' adjustment, although over-protected parents may hinder the adjustment process.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. Participants were asked to report their age, gender, religion, years of stay in the U.S., high school GPA or equivalent percentile, current GPA, English competence (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*), setting of the institution currently enrolled in (rural, suburban, urban), ethnic density on campus (1 = *none*, 3 = *some*, 5 = *very many*), living arrangement (residence hall, off-campus with roommates, off-campus alone), intention to stay after graduation (1 = *leave*, 5 = *stay*), exposure to the mainstream North American culture prior to studying abroad (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*), parents' occupation and highest education, home city, and its relative size to other cities in China (1 = *very small*, 5 = *very big*).

Semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview (see Appendix A) was used to explore the unique cultural adjustment experiences of Chinese graduate international students in the United States in the current sociopolitical context. The interview explored three primary sets of questions: (1) study abroad experiences in the broad sociopolitical context, (2) cultural adjustment experiences, and (3) social support systems. Hill (2012) suggested that the CQR protocol should balance the interconnected goals of rapport building and information gathering. Consistent with their recommendations, the interview protocol started with less personal questions on the broader sociopolitical context, followed by questions about participants' adjustment experiences and their use of social support. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked to reflect broadly on their experiences studying and living in

the U.S. and give advice to new international students or themselves if they could go back in time.

The interview protocol included 17 open-ended questions. The first area consisted of seven questions and was developed from conceptual literature (Berry, 2005; Yan & Berliner, 2011) that highlights the salience of the acculturation context for CIS' cultural adjustment experiences, including the political, economic, and demographic conditions in sojourners' culture of origin and the host culture. The second area had six questions and focused on participants' positive and negative cultural adjustment experiences, and how they evaluated their adjustment. The third area had four questions and asked participants' social interaction and social support experiences with ethnically and culturally similar and different groups.

Six questions were adapted from Tummala-Narra and Claudis's (2003) qualitative study that generated in-depth information on Muslim international students' cultural adjustment in the United States. Four of the seven adapted questions were in the second set of questions (e.g., Tell me about what it was like at first for you to come to the United States.), which prompted participants to think about the general cultural adjustment process such as changes made, challenges, and positive experiences. The remaining two adapted questions were in the third set of questions (e.g., How much do you interact with others who are from different ethnic/religious backgrounds than your own? Tell me about these interactions.), which explored the social interactions participants had with people from either different or similar ethnic/religious backgrounds.

Items were first tested with two CIS in English. The main feedback was that Question 6 was difficult to answer because it asked broadly about the US-China

relationship. Specific prompts were subsequently developed for this question (e.g., How do you think the media describes the US-China relationship?). After the items were finalized, the first author translated them into Chinese, and another bilingual CIS volunteer who was blind to the purpose of the study back-translated the items into English. The back translation was deemed to be adequately consistent with the original English version, and minor changes were made before finalizing the Chinese version of the protocol.

Procedure

Ethical consideration. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Boston College approved this study (Appendix D). The IRB at University of Maryland exempted this project from review because no collection of new data and no interaction with human subjects was involved in the data analysis stage. All participants were assigned a numeric ID during data analysis and all identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts. Transcripts were password-protected and stored on an encrypted online drive (i.e., Box).

Participant recruitment. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling, which is the most commonly used sampling technique in qualitative studies (Marshall, 1996; Patton, 1990). I first asked other CIS she knew to recommend potential candidates for the study, and she selected the sample based on their gender, discipline, and geographic locations to achieve variability on these factors. Common patterns that emerge from a sample that is reasonably heterogeneous are of great value in capturing the core experiences and shared aspects of the process under study (Patton, 1990). Selection criteria included current F-1 student visa status, and

identification as a CIS from Mainland China who were either enrolled in or recently graduated (within the past year) from a graduate program in an US institution.

Hill and colleagues (2005) recommended samples of 8-15 participants for CQR studies, with more participants needed when the sample is heterogeneous and results are unstable. In defining the population and sample selection criteria, demographic variables that might be relevant to participants' cultural adjustment experiences were considered. I decided to recruit only international students from Mainland China because one goal of the study is to describe participants' nuanced experiences in the current sociopolitical context. It is likely that other Chinese descent regions and countries have different sociopolitical relationships with the US, which offers different contexts in which acculturation and cultural adjustment may unfold. For example, Swagler and Ellis (2003) argued that Taiwan has a unique culture that has a greater influence of Western culture.

Only graduate students were selected because it is speculated that age, ethnic identity development, and financial and family related stress would make this subgroup of CIS experience cultural adjustment differently. Some studies indicate that younger students tend to report better sociocultural adjustment (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). As compared to undergraduate international students, graduate international students start their study abroad experience at later age and may have stronger identifications with their country of origin. They may as a result experience more acculturative stress navigating their ethnic identity development.

The sample is heterogeneous in terms of the participants' gender, length of stay (1-6 years), disciplines of study, and institutions. Of those variables, longer length of stay has been shown to be associated with better psychosocial adjustment

for international students (Goodson & Zhang, 2011a). Theoretical literature assumes that many sojourners experience “culture shock”, which will manifest as an increase of psychological problems soon after cross-cultural contact, followed by a general decrease over time (Berry, 2005; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Consistent with this theoretical concept, Constantine and colleagues (2005) interviewed international students who immigrated to the US within the past six months in their CQR study. Recent empirical evidence, however, shows that only a small percentage of international students experienced psychological adjustment in a pattern consistent with “culture shock” in their first two years (Wang, Wei, Cheng, 2015; Wang et al., 2012). This suggests that the trajectory of psychological adjustment is more multifaceted than originally thought. Cultural adjustment, especially psychological and identity related adjustment processes may keep evolving in a longer timeframe than what is implied by the concept of “culture shock”. I thus decided to include participants with a range of length of stay in hope to capture the adjustment processes of psychological, value, and identity development.

Data collection. I conducted the 40-minute to 1.5-hour audio-taped semi-structured interviews in person (n=5) or over the phone (n=4). All participants expressed moderate to strong preference to be interviewed in Mandarin. Prior to the interview, participants consented to the study and signed consent forms either in person or through email exchange. Participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview of potential risks to anonymity and that they could skip any questions or terminate the interview without penalty. In order to build rapport, the interviewer briefly introduced her academic background and how she developed interest in this research topic in relation to her experience as a CIS at the beginning of each interview. The

interviewer transcribed the interviews, noting nonverbal behaviors such as pauses and laughter, but excluding minimal verbal behaviors (e.g., “mm-hmm”).

Recruiting and training research team. Once the interviews were conducted, I recruited the research team by making an announcement in graduate programs in the College of Education at my institution. Potential team members were interviewed to see if they were a good fit for the project (i.e., fluent in Mandarin and English, had research experience, understood the time commitment, expressed interest in the project). Before analyzing data, all judges met to discuss the CQR process. For each main step (i.e., creating domains, core ideas, and cross-analysis), judges first on their own familiarized themselves with the CQR procedure through assigned readings (Hill et al., 1997, 2005), and then engaged in a discussion about the process in the coding meeting. A total of approximately six hours of training was provided in four meetings.

Data analysis. For studies conducted in non-English languages that are intended to publish in English, scholars recommend staying in the original language as long and as much as possible to avoid thinking in the English language (Van Nes, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). Because all judges and auditor were intentionally recruited so that they were all fluent in Mandarin, data and coding were kept in Mandarin until the cross-analysis stage, during which a list of categories and subcategories across all cases was generated in English. Quotes were translated by the writer and checked by one judge for accuracy.

The research team consensually drafted a list of domains (i.e., topics discussed during the interviews) based on the interview protocol. The research team then read aloud three transcripts and consensually assigned thought units into one or

more domains while modifying the initial domain list as new information emerged. Once team members understood how to assign data to domains and a stable domain list emerged, the research team split into two groups of three with the author coding in both groups, and consensually assigned thought units from the remainder transcripts into one or more domains. The same teams were kept for the remainder of the coding process. The auditor monitored both teams' work.

After all transcripts were assigned to domains, the two teams constructed core ideas (i.e., summaries or abstracts in more concise terms) from the domain data. The auditor audited all consensus versions (i.e., core ideas with domains for each individual case), and the coding teams discussed feedback and consensually agreed about revisions. The auditor examined changes until convinced that the core ideas thoroughly captured all important data in a way that reflected their domains.

During cross-analysis, core ideas for each domain were gathered across all interviews into a master list. The coding teams read through the core ideas from all interviews in each domain, and consensually constructed preliminary categories and subcategories to represent themes in the data. The auditor reviewed the initial list and provided feedback to merge, further divide, modify, or move categories to better represent the data. Once the list was deemed representative of the data, the two teams consensually coded each unique core idea into one or more categories under their respective domains. The auditor reviewed cross-analysis, and the research team consensually made any revisions. Finally, the team members returned to the original transcribed interviews to ensure all important data were captured and placed accurately in the cross-analysis. The auditor reviewed the findings again and made

final revisions until he was satisfied with the representation of the data in cross-analysis.

Chapter 3: Results

Interviews were conducted from January to August in 2014. Table 1 shows all the domains, categories and subcategories, as well as the frequencies for each. In this study, results that applied to at least 8 participants were considered general findings, those that applied to 5 to 7 participants were considered typical findings, and those that applied to 2 to 4 were considered variant findings. For each domain/category/subcategory, I provide quotes from the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, I identified quotes using labels Participant 1 through 9. Ellipses (...) are shown when interview data were deleted for efficiency and clarity. Phrases such as “you know” and “like” were also deleted to facilitate reading.

Participant Background: Who Are They?

Self-introduction to people in China and the US. The most common experience when introducing themselves to people in China and the US was that participants would generally give basic demographic information (e.g., name, age, hometown in China/from China), along with their education background (e.g., major, institution, study in the US). While all participants would share similar personal information when introducing themselves in China and the US, two differences emerged for some participants. Four participants (variant) reported emphasizing experiences in China when talking to people in China and/or emphasizing experiences in the US when talking to people in the US. Participant 5 illustrated,

I judge what people may be interested in when introducing myself. People in China do not have much conception about things in the US, so I would talk more about things related to China and leave out detailed things about the

US... Similarly, when I talk with Americans, I will say more about my experience in the US rather than focusing on how I was in China.

Two participants (variant) reported giving more detailed introduction to people in China and more superficial introduction to people in the US. Participant 2 said,

With Chinese students I would say more details because we are from the same place. With American students I would retain relatively on the surface level. Also, when I talk to other Chinese students, I hope to find something in common. With American students, what I say is just a way to be social and start a conversation, and I do not care about their feedback.

American peers' description of participants. Participants typically reported that their American peers and friends had limited knowledge of their background and/or knew them mainly through professional interactions. For example, Participant 8 said, "American peers do not know much about me. They only know where I came from, which school I went to, what I used to study, and what I am now studying... They know little about my life." Participant 6 rated his American peers' knowledge of him 3 to 4 out of 10. Participants variantly reported that their American peers had limited interest in getting to know them. Participant 4 said, "They (American peers) know where in China I was from. They like to ask that question a lot. Nothing more. They do not even care much to know my field of study." P5 said "[Talking about my background in China with Americans], to use a Shanghainese phrase, would be "non-bordering" ... They do not care about what I did before. This is what I think." Participants variantly reported that their have close American peers

who knew them well. Participant 9 said, “[American friends] know me well, because we are all interested in feminism and art... We would get together and share art...we would eat together, study together...I think they know me well, because we hang out and have fun together.”

When asked how their American peers and friends might perceive them, participants typically reported that their American peers might have positive perception of them in academic and professional aspects. Participant 1 said her American peers and friends will see her as “studious and conscientious”. Participant 8 said, “Maybe punctual, hardworking, serious. That’s about it. It will focus on academics or my work. It will not be about other aspects.” Participants also typically reported being perceived as quiet and not social in American society. Participant 4 said her American peers might say she was “rather quiet and not talkative.” Participant 2 said, “[American peers] may say I am not very proactive in integrating with them... they may not invite me to parties that are for fun or for intimate friends, but they would invite me to class social as a classmate.” A variant finding participants reported was that their American peers might have positive perception of their personality. Participant 7 said, “They [American friends] may think – someone actually said this – they used the word “personable”. They also said I am open, energetic, and friendly.” Participant 9 said, “They [American friends] would say ‘she really likes to talk’... I may also come off to them as a very happy person.”

Motivation and benefits to study in the US. Participants generally reported that they decided to study in the US because they wanted to experience better academic environment in the US and improve future career development, especially

because they believed that people with study-abroad experience might have better career opportunities in China. For example, Participant 1 said, “If you declare your major in China and enter a field, it is very hard to switch...so I came to the US and see if I can explore my real interest.” Participant 8 said,

I just think the US has top notch education, and I heard the quality of education is much different from that in China... [I thought] the US would not have so many tests, would have more practice opportunities, more opportunities to do projects and connect with society, and more student interaction, unlike in China, where mostly teachers lecture and students listen.

Participants also typically reported that they wanted to experience the American culture and society. For example, Participant 7 said, “I can experience something different, no matter it means environment or culture. It is pretty nice to know more things and learn new things while I am still young.” Participants variably reported they decided to study in the US because it was a fad in China. For example, Participant 3 explained, “I did not think too much. I came to the US because other people [in China] were going to the US. My parents think the same thing. So nothing specific or special, it was a natural decision.” Only one participant mentioned immigration as a motivating factor for him to study in the US.

Things hard to give up to study in the US. Participants typically said that it was difficult to be away from close friends and family members to study in the US. Participant 2 said, “[The only difficult things to leave is] just old friends, because as time passes we have less in common to talk about.” Participant 1 said, “it was difficult to leave my mom and dad. That’s it.” A variant finding was that two

participants said it was difficult to give up career opportunities in China. For example, Participant 4 said, “It was really easy to find a job in China because I majored in laboratory medicine... with pretty good pay, so that was difficult to give up.” Two participants said there was not much to give up to study in the US.

Plans after education in the US. After completing their current academic programs, participants reported various short-term and long-term goals, which was reflected as a neutral average rating of 3.22 on a 5-point scale for their intention to stay in the US ($SD = .83$). In the short run, participants typically wanted to accrue temporary work experience or obtain further education in the US. For example, Participant 2 illustrated,

I think it is important to have work experience in the US for a simple reason: learning to practice... If I immediately return to China after learning in the US, what I learned here would be devalued because it may not be applicable to the Chinese market... I think it only completes my study-abroad experience if I have both academic and professional experiences, irrelevant to whether I can stay in the US or not in the long run.

Participant 8 said, “I want to work in the US for one to three years. I have heard that if one has extensive work experience in the US, it would be more advantageous to find a job or get promoted in China.”

In the long run, four participants were open to where to stay (variant).

Participant 7 said, “Actually I do not incline to stay or return. I think I will see where provides better opportunities. Some of students in my program had an easier time finding job in China...So there is no absolute answer.” Participants variantly reported

that they planned to return to China in the long run. For example, Participant 3 said, “I should be going back in July. As for now, it is unrealistic to find a job in the US. My family wants me to go back as well.”

Sociopolitical Context of Acculturation

Participants’ perception of Chinese society. Participants reported both positive and negative perception of the Chinese society. They typically thought that there was great economic and employment potential in China, especially for those with study-abroad experience. For example, Participant 5 said, “China is developing, non-stop and rapid development, constantly upgrading and regenerating. China is changing from an old, rigid, dictatorial and centralized country to a more democratic and open country, and in the process there are lots of opportunities.” Participant 8 said, “In term of economy, China has been developing well and is gradually slowing down. For my major, urban planning and real estate, China has many opportunities because China has a tradition for construction and has more needs for development.”

Another typical category emerged involving perceived social instability due to limited resources and social inequality. Participant 8 said, “I think fellows in China has a ton of complaints about living issues. They seem to say there are lot of unstable and unsafe factors including air pollution and high commodity price.” Participant 9 said,

I think the current Chinese society is far from reaching gender equality. China is still very patriarchal. I don't know if you've read this, but a Chinese puerpera died in delivery room because her mother-in-law did not want the doctor to perform C-section. Her mother-in-law said getting a C-section

would impact having a second child... I am very concerned about women in China and whether they can be treated with equality.

Participants were typically concerned about the emphasis on social relationships and connections for success in China. For example, Participant 6 said, “I think only two groups of people can succeed in China. One group are very smart and strategic people, but there would be fewer nouveau riche because China is becoming more orderly. The second group are people with family background.” Participant 3 said, “In China, social connection is very important... In the US your ability may count 70-80% and your social ability counts 20-30%. In China it’s 50-50, even more unbalanced. This will give me some pressure if I work in China.”

Participants’ perception of US society. Participants on average reported moderately low exposure to the American culture prior their study abroad experience ($M = 2.61, SD = .70$). Participants predominantly discussed positive perceptions of the US. Participants typically perceived people in the US to have independent and simple social relationships, and fair competition based on ability rather than connections, often in comparison to their perception of unequal competition and complicated social relationships in China. For example, Participant 6 said, “The US society values intelligence. This means if you are smart and you conduct yourself well in the US, you will for sure succeed.” Participant 4 said, “I did not like the environment in China where you need to find social connections to get a job. Even going to graduate programs can be corrupted... I think competition in the US will be a lot fairer.” Participants typically thought that the US had good living conditions due to factors such as well-developed laws and regulations, basic infrastructure, and good

environment. For example, Participant 6 said, “The US is a developed country, so the society is mature and well-developed, and the regulations and laws are dependable.”

Four participants (variant) perceived American people to be friendly and nice to strangers. For example, Participant 2 said, “I really think Americans are kind-hearted and simple – they do not think as complicated as Chinese people. Americans are simple. They genuinely help you.”

Participants’ perception of US-China relationship. When asked how they would describe the current US-China relationship, participants typically thought that the two countries were simultaneously cooperative and conflictual. Participant 6 said, “The US and China are like a couple – they fight but they cannot leave each other... War because of Japan or Taiwan issues would not benefit either of them... A love-hate relationship”. Participant 2 illustrated,

I think on the surface, the relationship is peaceful and friendly. The US opens its gate and welcomes more and more international students from China. But politically, it does not seem to be that simple... Although the US seems welcoming on the surface, it may be in for profit. I think China is still at disadvantage.

A variant category emerged involving participants’ perception of improved economic collaboration and interdependence between US and China. Participant 5 explained:

In terms of economy and talent exchange, how can I put this, the two countries cannot be without each other... The US-China relationship is more and more de-politicized. Tens of years ago starting from the Cold War,

political ideology governs everything... Now no one cares about ideology, and there is a lot more non-government exchange such as commerce.

In terms of how the US-China relationship might influence their experiences as CIS in the US, participants typically discussed visa policy and accessibility for international collaboration. Participant 1 said, “If this counts, it will be a positive influence. My teacher told me that a lot of projects are constructed in China, and as someone who can speak Mandarin and English, I can be a cultural communicator and connector.” Participant 7 had one incident where her visa renewal was checked and delayed because of her field of study, which she thought reflected the US-China relationship. She said, “This does not only happen to me, but a lot of Chinese student. I think it is the most important for me that the visa policy be changed.” A variant category involved the influence of the US-China relationship on interracial conflict in the US. Two participants mentioned the Jimmy Show in 2013 when a White child joked about killing all Chinese as a way to handle debt with China. Participant 2 said, “When I encounter things like that, I really hope China will be stronger, and our rights as Chinese in the US can be protected. Psychologically, we can feel we are living with confidence and dignity.” Another variant category of no personal influence emerged. Participant 9 said, “As long as US and China do not go into war and US does not evict all Chinese, the US-China relationship does not impact me personally.”

American people’s perception of China/CIS. Participants typically reported that Americans did not like having too many CIS or held prejudice against CIS. For example, Participant 1 said,

I know some Americans don't like [CIS]. They think there are too many Chinese. They wouldn't – when they say this to me, they always say 'no offense', but they would still say it... Although in recent years, China's economy is blooming, in the US I don't feel it. It doesn't feel like there is a grand country backing you. China still feels like a country that's looked down upon.

Participant 6 said, "I think they [American peers] would be afraid that there are more and more Chinese... Secondly, the two cultures are different. So they would first of all be afraid, and then they would try to have you accept their culture."

Participants typically thought Americans would not explicitly express negative attitude toward CIS or would be indifferent. For example, Participant 8 said "I think behind our back they [Americans] must think, must have some negative thoughts about the influx of so many Chinese. But in front of us... they would not directly express that." Participant 4 said, "Where I study, there are very few Chinese, so I think they [Americans] would only know about CIS if they know some personally. If they don't, they would not have much idea."

Four participants (variant) thought that American people held positive perception and stereotypes about CIS as smart and hardworking. Participant 4 said, "Maybe some American friends would think all Asians are smart... the idea that all Asians are smart, it may have formed based on their accumulated perception of Asians over time... if they have more personal interaction, more communication, they would know [CIS] better." Participant 2 said, "I think 70 to 80% of Americans would think CIS are friendly, hardworking, and nice. Overall good perceptions."

Cultural Adjustment

Cultural adjustment challenges. Although interview questions separately asked about cultural adjustment experiences in a chronological order, initially proposed categories of “initial experience in the US” and “cultural adjustment challenges” were later combined due to extensive double coding. This suggests that participants’ recall of initial experiences in the US often involved adjustment challenges. Participants generally discussed their difficulty developing intimate relationships with Americans and their loneliness and lack of belongingness in the US. Participant 5 discussed his difficulty finding things to talk about with American peers.

I still don't have very deep conversations with Americans... It's not like our conversation gets deeper the longer I stay in the US... With Chinese, you can talk more about personal stuff, like your plans in the future. How do you talk about that with Americans? If I tell American peers I need companies to sponsor my visa, many don't know what that is. Neither are they interested. They may be more interested in - the woman in my lab goes skiing every weekend. But I don't ski. I can only say, oh skiing sounds fun. That's it.

Participant 6 said, “The biggest change after coming to the US is that I have fewer and fewer friends... I have experienced much greater loneliness than when I was in China.” Participants mostly experienced this challenge as long-standing and hard to overcome – only Participant 7 talked about finding more to talk about with Americans over time.

Participants typically experienced challenges learning to independently manage their everyday life in the US, such as getting used to the food and learning regulations. For example, Participant 3 said, “When I first came to the US... I was afraid to go anywhere and I felt anxious for days. I carried furniture up the stairs myself. It was very heavy, the bed... I have never experienced so much pressure.”

Participant 5 illustrated his process of adjusting to cultural differences in daily living:

I went to Subway for the first time... I remember thinking, ‘how can Americans have such strong teeth and stomach to digest such hard bread?’... another thing is Americans drink ice water... Americans also don't hand wash clothes... I used to think it was not clean to wash everything in the washer, but I could not find places to hang my laundry.

Participants typically reported academic difficulties due to factors such as language, unfamiliar teaching style, and heavy course load. For example, Participant 1 said, “P had difficulty adjusting to the teaching style of her American professor when she was in the second quarter. She felt miserable and frustrated that her professor would not directly tell her how to modify her project.” Participant 2 discussed the intertwined language and cultural barriers to freely expressing his ideas:

When I talk about my design concept with professors, one challenge I face is I cannot take it one step further. On the surface we are having a natural conversation, but slowly I find it not deep enough, like a bottleneck... Your English ability depends on how much you know their culture... how to freely use vocabulary in everyday life.

Participants typically talked about employment difficulties in the US. Specifically, participants typically expressed worries that they would lack networking and career advancement opportunities in the US and would not be able to find a satisfying job. For example, Participant 4 said, “You are not born and raised in the US, and you have very different culture. It would be very hard to advance to management positions in the future.” Participant 6 said, “I would guess that my biggest barrier in the future would be the lack of help and support from my advisor and close ‘comrades’.” A variant finding was that participants thought international student visa status impeded employment opportunities. For example, Participant 8 said,

When we go to a job interview and the employer asks, ‘do you need sponsorship’, and you say yes, their face may change and the interview may end hastily... I think this is understandable though. If a random foreigner competes with you for the same job, you will also feel upset. All you can do is be exceptional, so exceptional that employers think it is worth it to pay for your visa sponsorship.

Three participants (variant) talked about language and cultural constraints on employment opportunities. For example, Participant 5 said, “Maybe this is human nature that we feel more comfortable with people who are similar... I think employers may consider things like that and it may impede my employment opportunities. I can’t fit in like a local or a Chinese American.”

Three participants (variant) talked about financial challenges living in the US. For example, Participant 6 said, “Things here are too expensive... we are still students, or maybe we just start working, we don't make much.

Coping strategies. Participants identified social and non-social ways of coping that eased their adjustment. I will first discuss social strategies by separating different sources of social support, and then discuss non-social strategies by separating behavioral and cognitive coping.

Social strategies. Participants typically reported receiving instrumental support from Americans, including strangers and peers. Participant 9 talked about how her American friends exposed her to American history and culture.

I am not familiar with the concept of race... My American friends helped me a lot. They made me realize that race in the US is a deeply rooted concept, that I may experience racism in the US... they also taught me words. Like “colored people” is an offensive word, but one can use it under certain circumstances. Like why ‘ABC (American-born Chinese)’ is not a good word to use.

Participant 4 once received instrumental help from her American neighbor.

I was living with another Chinese student, and our neighbor downstairs was American. Our lease was with an agency, and our monthly utility bill was often over 100 dollars. We had no idea how much utilities should be...Our neighbor offered to call the leasing agency... and said, “you cannot play tricks simply because your tenants are two foreigners.”

Another typical category emerged involving receiving no support or unhelpful support from American peers. Participant 2 talked about not seeking emotional support from American peers because of cultural barriers. “I don't [vent with Americans]. I don't think I would be understood... maybe I naturally want to find people who share similar background with me. I would rather talk about happy things with American classmates. This may be cultural barrier.” Participant 1 had one incidence where her American peers were not helpful for her academic challenge. “I told my American classmates a couple times. They did not seem to understand. They said they understood, but they didn't know what to do. They kept telling me to follow what the professor said, but I didn't know how.”

A variant finding was that two participants received emotional support from Americans. For example, Participant 9 would vent with her American office mates when she felt stressed or upset. Lastly, two participants (variant) discussed seeking school support. Participant 9 gave an example.

Staff are very friendly and helpful...I didn't understand health insurance and I found it very complicated... The staff was so sweet and patient, even though they explained so much to me and even though the plans still sounded the same to me... Because I can't drive, the staff eventually helped me pick a plan that was within walking distance.

Participants generally reported receiving instrumental support from Chinese peers and friends in the US, which they often found more helpful because of shared cultural adjustment experiences. Participant 6 said, “I have a Chinese friend who is my senior in my lab. She told me if I wanted to know American culture, I should go

watch sports – the four sports Americans like.” Participant 4 said, “They [Chinese friends] help me every day... when I was applying for PhD, they helped me edit application and gave me advice on what to wear for interview. We also discussed programs together.” Participant 3 shared that her Chinese friends in the US helped her find two internship opportunities.

Participants typically reported receiving emotional support from Chinese peers in the US. Participant 8 talked about venting with her Chinese friends after losing a full-time position to an American peer. “I did not really need support. I just wanted to vent... I talked to my [Chinese] roommate ... because she would easily resonate with me. I also talked to my [Chinese] college friends [in the US], because we all have similar experiences and they would all support me.” Participant 6 said, “I will find intimate friends, people I can drink and talk with. I don't need them to tell me what to do... Chinese friends of course.”

With regard to people in China, participants generally would not choose to seek support because they did not want to burden them or because they grew apart over time. For example, Participant 6 said, “I never [tell friends and family in China]. I think it is everyone’s obligation to report only good news and not the bad...they cannot help. It would only worry them. So why tell them... I think it is very hard to keep close connections with friends in China.” Participant 3 said,

With friends in China, I only talk about unimportant things... sometimes they don't get it. I have a close college friend who studied in the UK. Now that she is in China, she often tells me to be content and cherish being abroad whenever I tell her what I face here. Gradually I stopped telling her things.

Participants typically reported seeking emotional support from family and friends in China. Participant 4 said, “My family really can’t help much. Telling them unhappy things would worry them. But I still find family warm. So whenever I feel upset, even if I don't talk about what upsets me, I would call home or skype with them.”

Non-social strategies. When feeling upset or down, participants generally reported using distraction and avoidant coping, such as drinking and sleeping. For example, Participant 3 said, “When I’m really depressed, I won’t tell anyone. Instead I would just drink by myself. Sometimes I get upset for no obvious reason, so I can’t tell others.” Participant 2 said, “I sometimes feel doubtful when I don't get recognized in my academics. How I deal with these feelings is I will forget about it and get back to studying... If not, I will go play basketball by myself.” Three participants (variant) reported using active behavioral coping, such as learning new ways of doing things. Participant 8 said, “I don't like writing abstractly. Americans can write beautifully, but my English writing is not as great. So I thought, why not make the presentation more concrete using mainly pictures? ... I felt really accomplished for the presentation I delivered to the local community.”

Another general subcategory involved cognitive coping and intrapersonal growth. Specifically, participants generally thought that their openness and independence increased as a result of living in the US. Participant 2 said,

Of course there are changes [after coming to the US] ... When I was in China, I used to care a lot about what others think. Since coming to the US, I can better focus on my own business because this environment fosters deep

thinking and allows you to have independence so that you would not care much about others.

Participant 3 said, “I think I’ve become a lot more open. Unlike China where I was surrounded by Chinese, I need to actively make friends if I don't want to be by myself... Now I can hang out with different kinds of people and I’m more open to novel things.”

Participants typically reported using acceptance and optimism to cope with stress. Participant 5 said, “I can only adjust my own thinking. I can get upset about a lot of things if I want to. So I tell myself, if things happen according to my plan, that would be too perfect to be true.” Participant 7 said, “Sometimes it all depends on how you look at things. Happiness lies in contentment.” Participants variably reported adjusting their standard for English ability to be less stringent. Participant 9 said,

I realized that everyone has difficulty with academic writing, including Americans...I used to think it was because of my language ability that I could not write well. Now I know it can be because my thought is not formulated. I tell myself not to use English as an excuse.

Self-appraisal of adjustment outcome. Participants generally had positive evaluation of their cultural adjustment, with all rating it at 7 or 8 on a 10-point scale. As an example, Participant 5 illustrated different evaluation depending on what standard he used.

It depends on how you look at it. As a foreigner, someone who did not grow up in the US, I think I am at a 7 or 8 out of 10. Honestly, I’ve met Chinese who’ve been here over ten years, and I don't think they are doing much better

than me... But if you compare me to Chinese who came as a high school student or younger, or Chinese who grew up here, I am far from them.

When asked to define what they thought would entail good adjustment in the US, Participants typically defined it by subjective satisfaction and a sense of purpose. For example, Participant 2 said,

I think the most important thing is to have a positive mentality - no matter you fit in or not, I think this is the most important thing. Are you satisfied with yourself? Are you positive and active? When you wake up every day, do you think what you should do today and what you should do tomorrow? Do you feel motivated when you think about that? ... I think no matter where you are, feeling motivated is good.

Participants typically talked about external behavioral markers of adjustment in social and academic aspects. Some participants talked about fitting into the US society and interacting with Americans as markers for good adjustment. For example, Participant 5 said, "Honestly my idea of good adjustment has not changed much. From the very start, I knew good adjustment is fitting completely into living in the US interacting with Americans." Participant 9 said,

I see many international students – not just Chinese but Koreans, Indians, and Europeans as well – I see them only hang out with people from their country. I don't think that's good... you came to a new country, and you are living like when you were in China... then why did you come to a different country with so much trouble?

Participant 8, on the other hand, did not think good adjustment meant fully fitting into the American society. She said, “Have your own social group that can get your needs met... Can get around conveniently... I’m still looking for jobs but I don't think it is without hope...I can handle my own life. So I think it’s good.” A variant finding was that participants felt less need to fit into the US society over time. Participant 1 illustrated,

When I first came to the US I had thoughts like that, that I should fit into their mainstream circle. Now I think there is no need. I used to think I was only proactive if I tried to enter their circle, because you came to this country and you should not be complacent and conservative. You should not stay at home and only interact with Chinese. Others would think you came to the US for nothing. But now I don't think so. I think it is more important to be in comfort.

Participant 8 said, “When I was in the Midwest, I met mostly White people and I thought I should fit into their life. After moving to the West Coast... I see different people, like Mexican immigrants who can’t speak fluent English, worse English than me, but are living well. I start to think I don't have to hang out with White people to fit in.”

Social Interaction

Social interaction with Americans. Participants generally described their interaction with Americans to be friendly but superficial, which overlaps with their reported difficulty to develop intimate relationships with American peers. For example, Participant 8 said, “At that time, I really wanted to be good friends with her [American roommate]. Later I realized we have nothing to talk about. In the morning

we would carry two trays in the cafeteria, but we would have nothing to talk about after saying ‘good morning’ ... It was so tiring, so tiring to talk with them.”

Participants typically thought there were cultural differences in entertainment and socializing manners, which made close interaction with Americans challenging. For example, Participant 6 said, “My first year was the year I went to the most American parties. Now I don't go to that many... I don't like American parties... actually I don't find it fun.” Participant 4 said, “Communication is lot easier when it is in the same language context. You would know what your teacher is thinking about, what your classmates are thinking about...”

A variant finding emerged involving participants’ deliberate focus on cultural exchange when interacting with Americans. For example, Participant 4 said, “If I want to vent about my Indian classmates, or other classmates, I would tell a Chinese friend... I don't want Americans to think, ‘Why do Chinese think like that.’ Not just negative perception about me, but about all Chinese.” Participant 7 said, “If they [American friends] invite me to parties, even if I don't have time, I will go at least once... It's not easy that they invite me, so I should save their face.”

Three participants (variant) reported conflictual interaction with Americans. Participant 3 recalled one conflictual interaction with her classmates.

My first semester, I was doing a group project with an American woman... She was intimidating. Because of communication issues, she thought another Chinese team member and I didn't complete our work. So she sent us a rude email... I cried and did not know what to do. I did not talk to her for a long time. I was really upset.

Four participants (variant) reported having personal interaction with Americans based on common interests. For example, Participant 9 said

My American friends don't make me feel like a foreigner... They don't ask me where I'm from. They ask me where I moved from... [The most memorable experience] was we went to a concert together. That was a lot of fun. After the concert, we sang and danced on the road.

Social interaction with Chinese in the US. Participants generally said they had a lot of professional and personal interaction with Chinese in the US and they have fun together. For example, Participant 8 described her most memorable interaction with her Chinese friends in the US. "Ten of us rented a big house and ate hotpot for two days. We bought broth, condiments and food from Chinatown... It felt like Chinese New Year." Participant 6 said,

The biggest issue hanging out with Americans is that I don't feel excited and happy. But if I drink with Chinese, no matter what we drink, I feel happy... There are Chinese elders, and Chinese Americans, but we won't speak English and we all enjoy ourselves. I think this is cultural belongingness.

Three participants (variant) reported having limited or conflictual interaction with Chinese peers in the US. Participant 5 said, "The more similar your background, the more pressure for competition. Because you are similar, you compete for jobs and scholarships... It's more common for Chinese students to have conflicts with one another than to have conflicts with Americans."

Social interaction with other international students. Interestingly, most participants either did not report much interaction or did not talk about interaction

with international students from other countries. Participants variantly reported enjoyable interaction. For example, Participant 7 said, “I have met people from many different countries. Sometimes I get to know about their culture and their food. I find it very interesting.” Participants variantly reported limited or conflictual interaction.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This CQR study aimed to provide a nuanced depiction of the current day CIS and their cultural adjustment and social support experiences through narratives of nine participants. Participants were generally motivated to study in the US because they wanted to take advantage of the academic environment in the US, improve their future career opportunities, and experience the American culture and society. In terms of the sociopolitical environment, participants typically thought the Chinese society had economic and employment potential, especially for those with study-abroad experience, but were also concerned about social issues such as societal inequality, high living cost, and competition pressure. They typically perceived the US society to have independent and simple social relationships, and fair competition. They typically perceived the US-China relationship to be simultaneously cooperative and conflictual, and saw the US-China relationship to greatly impact visa policy and international collaboration. Consistent with previous findings (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), participants reported experiencing cultural adjustment challenges in various areas of life including difficulty forming intimate relationships with Americans, difficulty managing everyday life in a new culture, academic challenges, and employment difficulties. They generally reported friendly but superficial interactions with American peers, and a lot of professional and personal interactions with Chinese peers in the US. They generally experienced loss in support network in China and would not seek support in fear of burdening family and friends. They typically sought emotional support from people in China, but hardly sought instrumental support

because they did not expect people in China to understand navigating living in the US.

Subjective Evaluation of Adjustment

One novel contribution of this study was the exploration of participants' subjective definition and appraisal of adjustment. The cultural adjustment literature has predominantly used low psychological distress and low stress to operationalize good adjustment (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). Some recent studies examined CIS' subjective well-being as an outcome variable to challenge the overly pathologizing bias in the literature, and found complicated relationships that suggest subjective well-being is qualitatively different from a low level of psychological distress (Du & Wei, 2015; Wang, Wei, & Chen, 2015). Using a qualitative approach, findings in the current study shed light on an on-going evaluative process of cultural adjustment where CIS negotiated their expectations with realistic constraints to achieve an internal sense of satisfaction and well-being. This nuance was not reflected in numeric values, as all participants rated their level of adjustment at 7 or 8 on a 10-point scale. Participants' motivation to deeply participate in the US society through academic advancement, temporary work experience, and social interactions with Americans often formed before they came to the US. Seven out of nine participants made reference to external behavioral markers to evaluate good adjustment, such as improving English competency, having American friends and fitting into the American society, most of which implied their desire for host culture participation. As they encountered academic and employment challenges, as well as social difficulties forming close relationships with American peers, some comprised their

expectation and reported decreased need to fit into the US society. Six out of nine defined good adjustment as a state of subjective satisfaction, happiness, and a sense of purpose in life. Six participants discussed both external and internal references for defining “good adjustment”, which suggest that they were simultaneously aware of their expectation for host culture participation and professional achievement, as well as an internal drive for cultural familiarity and self-acceptance. Results revealed a constant push and pull many participants experienced as they came to terms with unfulfilled host culture participation expectations and made personal meaning for their study abroad experiences.

Social Connection and Subjective Evaluation of Adjustment

The dimension of subjective appraisal adds to our understanding of the role host-national and co-national social support and social connectedness for CIS’ adjustment and sense of well-being. As has been previously found in other qualitative studies (Constantine et al., 2005; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013), participants generally reported difficulty developing genuine and close relationships with American peers beyond superficial or professional interactions. They typically reported that their American peers had limited knowledge of them. In their American peers’ eyes, they typically came off as serious and hardworking but quiet and non-social. The lack of depth and intimacy in social interactions limited the quality and quantity of support participants perceived as accessible and helpful from their American peers. However, results also indicated that connection with Americans may be perceived as important for fulfilling CIS’ psychological needs of acceptance and belongingness in a new culture. Many participants viewed their relationships with Americans as a

representation for their level of involvement and participation in the US society, which was an important behavioral marker for good adjustment. This finding may help explain why host-national support has been found to be a mediator for the relationship between acculturation and subjective well-being for CIS (Du & Wei, 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2011b).

Related to their desire to make American friends and participate in the US society, participants showed ambivalence towards developing close relationships with Chinese peers in the US. On the one hand, they generally had a lot of professional and personal interaction with Chinese in the US, from whom they typically received emotional support and generally received instrumental support. On the other hand, they typically perceived that their American peers disliked when CIS formed their own groups, and some thought it would be “bad adjustment” if CIS only interacted with Chinese peers and were isolated from the American society. Developing close relationships with Chinese and American peers may not be easily compatible.

Participant 8 reported decreased motivation to go out of her way to make friends with Americans after finding her Chinese friend group. Participant 6 compared hanging out with Americans and Chinese, and said he simply would not get as excited when he interacted with Americans, and as a result he gradually stopped going to American parties. The ambivalence towards developing close relationships with Chinese peers in the US may help explain the complicated relationships between social support from co-nationals and psychosocial well-being for CIS in the literature.

Internalization of Adjustment Challenges

As participants coped with and made meaning of their adjustment challenges to achieve an internal sense of happiness and satisfaction, they showed a tendency to internalize their experiences of social isolation and employment barriers. For example, participants only discussed language and cultural barriers to socializing and connecting with Americans, such as not enjoying American ways of entertainment, not understanding subtle social protocols, and not having conversational topics, despite their awareness and experiences that Americans may hold prejudice against CIS or lack interest in knowing CIS. It seems that participants tend to internalize their sense of social isolation and loneliness and attribute it only to individual (e.g., personality, motivation, and effort) and cultural factors (e.g., language barriers) without considering external and systemic factors such as interpersonal and structural racism and discrimination. Research with ethnic racial minority Americans found that they might have a hard time being included into the American identity because of visible non-White features, and as a result face increased risk of discrimination and prejudice (Park-Taylor et al., 2008). For CIS who do not identify with the American identity but still long for acceptance and belongingness in the host culture, their experiences of isolation may be easily justifiable by their foreign identity and cultural differences rather than experiences of discrimination and systemic factors such as racism and xenophobia.

The tendency to hold individual attributions for marginalization and oppression has been found in other disadvantaged populations. Godfrey and Wolf's qualitative analysis (2016) explored how economic status hierarchies may be internalized and explained by marginalized individuals by interviewing 19 low-

income racial/ethnic minority and immigrant women in the US. They found that despite high levels of marginalization in this sample along multiple dimensions, almost all participants attributed economic inequality to individual factors (e.g., character flaws, lack of hard work) whereas fewer than half held structural explanations for poverty and wealth. Their participants often held beliefs that justified the status quo and had limited awareness of structural inequality and oppression (i.e., critical consciousness). There was evidence of system justification beliefs in the current study. For example, Participant 8 thought she lost a full-time position to an American man mainly because she was not proactive enough. When the interviewer asked about her perception of inequality in this scenario, Participant 8 said,

I think my boss was a very fair person. Maybe there are other reasons, but I think the best way is to find problems within myself to make improvement... I did tell my boss that I was looking for a full-time position. He told me to look into Texas and North Dakota because they have low unemployment rate... But I still think if I did better than that American guy, my boss would let me know that there was an opening.

Holding self-blaming attributions that justify the status quo can come into conflict with achieving and maintaining an internal sense of well-being.

Limitations

As is common to all qualitative research, the self-report and retrospective nature of the data impacted our findings (Polkinghorne, 2005). Participants were asked to recall their experiences when they first came to the U.S. as well as changes they had made as a result. The quality of the data depended on the extent to which

participants reflected on and effectively communicated their experience. Such reflection and communication is limited by one's awareness and memory, and individuals often do not have complete access to their experience. However, the focus of this study was on their perceived cultural adjustment process rather than an actual account of the events.

It is possible that the interviewer influenced what emerged during the interview. The interviewer may have probed certain points (e.g., experiences of discrimination, academic motivation to study in the US) more than others (e.g., financial stress, immigration motivation to study in the US) because of her biases and expectations. To address this limitation, the research team reviewed their biases and expectations in an ongoing manner during the coding process. Participants may have been motivated to respond to questions in a socially desirable manner, especially given that they were interviewed by a CIS. Participants may have been hesitant to discuss acculturative stress and challenges to avoid loss of face (Zane & Yeh, 2002) in front of an ingroup member. In order to address this limitation, I disclosed my personal motivation to pursue this project at the beginning of each interview to enhance trust and acknowledge my shared identity with participants. I emphasized that individuals experience cultural adjustment differently, and the goal of the study was to understand participants' unique perspectives.

All participants in this study chose to respond in their native language when given the opportunity. Although interviewing in participants' preferred language enhanced the richness and quality of the data, translation unavoidably posed risks of meaning loss. Qualitative research is considered valid when the readers of the

publication understands the meaning as it was expressed by the participants in the source language (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). Although the research team consisted of native speakers of Mandarin who were fluent in English, translating concepts and metaphors that were culturally bound posed specific challenges to the validity of the study.

One interview question (i.e., How does the current Chinese society influence your experience in the US, if at all) generated thin data and responses to this question was either discarded or combined into other categories. Although the interview protocol was piloted with one volunteer participant and the wording was subsequently modified, this question still turned out to be too broad and abstract for participants to meaningfully answer. More specific prompts (e.g., How does the current Chinese society influence your decision to study in the US/your future plans) may facilitate the reflection and discussion of the impact of their perception of the Chinese social environment.

Since interview data were collected in 2014, results would not reflect impact of recent changes in sociopolitical context, such as the salience of the US-China relationship during the presidential campaign, the Trump administration, and new changes in visa policy for CIS and other immigrants.

It is important to contextualize current findings by understanding the characteristics of the sample. Participants in the proposed study were relatively well adjusted academically, as evidenced by an average sample GPA of 3.61. All but one identified as single. Almost all participants had parents who had college education or above, which is an important indicator of their SES. These participants might have

less financial stress and were better adjusted than the broader population of Chinese graduate international students. Furthermore, due to the sampling procedure, individuals who were not connected to the CIS community and those who were unwilling or unable to articulate their cultural adjustment experiences were likely not referred to the study. Future studies should specifically aim to recruit subgroups of CIS (e.g., high school students, sexual minorities, visiting scholars) to understand the heterogeneity of this population and add complexity to their cultural adjustment narratives.

Implications for Practice and Research

The on-going subjective evaluation process CIS may go through as they give meaning to their study abroad experiences and come to terms with unfulfilled host culture participation expectations may involve feelings of confusion, ambivalence, disappointment, frustration, and stress. CIS' tendency to internalize their experiences of social isolation professional challenges without acknowledging and understanding structural barriers further come into conflict with achieving and maintaining a subjective satisfaction and self-empowerment. Professionals working with CIS should facilitate this meaning making process by helping them understand messages of external reference they have received from their heritage culture and host culture environment in order to develop a more individualized and realistic sense of purpose. Professionals should also consider systemic barriers when understanding CIS' cultural adjustment challenges and actively work to externalize their experiences of isolation, discrimination and marginalization to mitigate the negative impact of internalized oppression. When institutions design programs for international students

to facilitate their adjustment, they should balance providing opportunities for host culture participation with affirming the importance of heritage culture maintenance and co-national support.

In terms of research, findings support the importance to holistically understand cultural adjustment by using a variety of outcome measures, such as subjective well-being, bi-cultural self-efficacy, and meaning in life. Future studies can also explore how acculturating conditions (e.g., heritage country context, host country context, voluntariness and purpose for moving) impact migrants' hopes and expectations for cultural adjustment. Findings also revealed areas for future research with this population. One area of adjustment challenge that has been inadequately studied is employment challenges. Participants typically reported experiencing employment challenges due to language and cultural barriers as well as structural barriers (e.g., visa status). Because participants typically wanted temporary work experience in the US after completing their education, it is expected that academic and occupational challenges could be especially stressful to cope with. Successful participation in the workspace often places high needs for migrants to acculturate, which may conflict with their need and want for heritage culture maintenance or cultural integration in private space. In this study, some participants worried that language and social challenges with Americans in their personal life would impede their employment opportunities and their professional performance. For example, Participant 5 said, "Maybe this is human nature that we feel more comfortable with people who are similar... I think employers may consider things like that and this may impede my employment opportunities. I cannot fit in like a local or a Chinese

American.” Given participants' educational and occupational motivation to study in the US, future studies should seek to better understand the career development process of this population in order to help them navigate their career inspirations in the US and their home country.

Future research should also examine non-social coping for CIS, given cognitive coping and avoidant coping were strategies most participants reported using in this study. The use of acceptance and avoidance may be examples of forbearance coping, a common Chinese coping strategy that involves the minimization or concealment of problems or concerns to maintain social harmony (Moore & Constantine, 2005). Wei and colleagues (2012) found that forbearance coping was only related to higher psychological distress in a sample of CIS when acculturative stress was high, but was unrelated to psychological distress when acculturative stress was low. Professionals should not assume forbearance coping as detrimental and dysfunctional when working with CIS. Surprisingly, five out of nine participants mentioned drinking as a coping strategy. Substance use has not been studied much among international student populations. Given risk factors such as young age, acculturative stress, discrimination, loss of social support from home country, loneliness, and unfamiliarity with the drinking culture and regulations in the host culture, future studies should examine substance use in this population.

Appendix A

Comprehensive Literature Review

One in four international students in US institutions is from China, and the total number of Chinese international students (CIS) has almost tripled over the past five years (Open Doors Report, 2013). How CIS make adjustment to living in a new culture and strive for well-being can be best understood in the framework of acculturation. Social contact and social support are vital in the acculturation and adjustment processes both as important markers of one's acculturation status (i.e., how much one interacts with people of similar/different cultural background) and as well-established protective factors for psychosocial well-being (i.e., perceived available social resources for emotional and material support).

An emerging body of literature has started to examine CIS' experience studying and living in the US. This section will provide an integrated review of research on acculturation, cultural adjustment, and social support as important constructs that shed light on CIS' cross-cultural transition experiences. The first section will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of acculturation and the importance to consider acculturation context to understand migrants' motivation and goals when adjusting to living in a new culture. The next section will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of cross-cultural adjustment and the importance to consider adjustment in a strength-based perspective beyond scholar-determined adjustment outcomes. The third section will review literature on social support, an often-studied protective factor that is theorized to assist migrants' acculturation and adjustment process.

Theoretical Understanding of Acculturation. I will start this section by reviewing the theoretical basis of acculturation from a cross-cultural psychology perspective. I will review the theoretical and empirical evidence that suggests the importance to consider the context in which people go about making changes to live in a different culture, and give examples of how the sociopolitical context may influence current day CIS' acculturation motivation, goals, and expectations. I will then review Berry's acculturation model (1997; 2005) as the mode of studying acculturation in the literature, and discuss issues with the conceptualization and measurement of acculturation.

What happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context when they attempt to adjust their lives in another one has long been a topic of interest in cross-cultural psychology. Do migrant individuals, such as immigrants, refugees and sojourners, continue to act in the new cultural setting as they did in the previous one, do they change to fit into the new setting, or do they develop complex patterns of continuity and change? Evidence from decades of research suggests that there is considerable variability in the ways in which people seek to go about their acculturation process.

The classical concept and definition of acculturation was presented by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936, p.149):

“Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups.”

In this definition, acculturation is conceptualized as a process of change resulting from intercultural contact that can take place in both the dominant and the non-dominant groups. In practice acculturation tends to induce more changes in the non-dominant group in the host culture (Berry, 1990), who are usually the population under study. Berry (2005) further defined acculturation as “a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups” (p. 699), specifying that acculturation involves changes both in the psychology of an individual (e.g., value, identity, attitudes, behaviors) and in the culture of the group (e.g., interethnic relations, stereotypes) that can result in long term changes and adaptations.

Acculturation Context: Culture of Origin and Culture of Settlement. Cross-cultural scholars view individual human behaviors as interacting with the cultural context within which it occurs (Graves, 1967; Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005). Berry (2005) wrote, “we need to understand, in ethnographic terms, both cultures that are in contact if we are to understand the individuals who are in contact” (p. 702). Aspects of the cultural contexts that are important to consider for understanding individual acculturation experience include the two cultures in contact, the two changing ethnocultural groups, and the nature of their contact and interactions (Berry, 1997, 2005).

The cultural characteristics in society of origin accompany individuals into the acculturation process as a combination of political, economic, and demographic conditions (Berry, 1997, 2005). Richmond (1993) suggests that society of origin can

be studied as a basis for understanding the degree of voluntariness in the migration motivation of acculturating individuals. He posited that migration motivation could be understood on a continuum between proactive and reactive. Proactive migrants seek to maximize material and symbolic reward and are usually motivated by factors that are facilitating and enabling, whereas reactive migrants seek to escape from threats and are usually motivated by factors that are constraining or exclusionary. Proactive migrants thus have greater freedom in deciding whether to move, their choice of destination, and the opportunity of returning to their culture of origin.

In the society of settlement, the general orientation that a society and its citizens have toward immigration and pluralism serve as the context in which migrant individuals re-establish their lives (Berry, 1997; 2005). Murphy (1965) argued that societies that are supportive of cultural pluralism are likely to foster more positive acculturation and adjustment experiences, because they are less likely to enforce assimilation or exclusion on migrant individuals, and are more likely to provide institutional and interpersonal support.

CIS' Motivation, Goals and Expectations. The current sociopolitical environment in China, the US, and the interethnic relationship serve as a context in which CIS anticipate, experience and appraise their cross-cultural experiences (Yan & Berliner, 2011). In the early years of the “open policy in education” in the 1970s, primarily advanced or established scholars were sent abroad by Chinese government for educational exchanges and scientific training, with the goal to develop China after years of lost development during the Cultural Revolution (Zweig, 1997). Unlike the earlier generations, whose study abroad was often supported by government for

political expectations, recent generations of CIS are more likely to be motivated by personal aspirations (Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Chirkov and colleagues (2007) recently examined CIS' motivation to study abroad in Belgium and Canada. They found that a greater extent of autonomous motivation to study abroad (e.g., "I moved to Belgium because it would be fun and interesting") predicted higher levels of subjective well-being and psychological well-being for CIS in Belgium ($n = 80$, mean age = 23.3 years, average length of stay = 8 months). Furthermore, a two-factor structure was emerged for CIS' goals to study in Canada. The *preservation* factor reflected the goals of avoiding disadvantageous conditions in the home country (e.g., I came to study abroad because I wanted to avoid the unacceptable political and social conditions in my home country), whereas the *self-development* factor represented the goals of pursuing good education and better career opportunities (e.g., I came to study abroad because a foreign university degree will open good employment opportunities for me). Students on average endorsed the self-development goals more strongly than the preservation goals. More importantly, the preservation goals were negatively associated with students' motivation to learn about the Canadian culture and predicted lower life satisfaction. Their studies suggest that current day CIS may consider personal growth, economic opportunities, family expectations, and social conditions when they make a decision to study abroad, and these motivation and goals in turn impact how they approach their acculturation process and influence their well-being. Understanding how these students make decisions to study abroad and anticipate the study abroad experience is thus fundamental in understanding their acculturation and adjustment experience.

CIS' expectations about their cross-cultural transition are likely influenced by social media in China, which often contrast and depict the US and Chinese systems as diametric opposites (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Oversimplified and discrete expectations of the American culture may exacerbate the discrepancy between CIS' acculturation expectations and actual acculturation experiences and therefore heighten their acculturative stress.

Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, and Kumar (2014) interviewed eight undergraduate CIS at a midwestern university to investigate their pre-sojourn and post-sojourn expectations about the US, acculturative stress, and social support. A consensual qualitative research method (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill, 2012) was performed on the data. Participants *generally* ($n = 7-8$) expected the study and life experiences in the US to be positive, mainly based on their perception of the US education as free and self-determined. Three participants reported that their pre-sojourn perceptions were based on information from television, movies, and news. Participants *typically* ($n = 4-6$) reported that their post-sojourn perceptions of the US were different than expected. Inconsistent expectations included Americans' interests in sports and video games, how financial matters were handled, the interactive teaching style, and how structured and demanding the college courses were in the US.

The discrepancy between individuals' goals, expectations and their actual acculturation experiences likely plays an important role in their subjective appraisal of their cross-cultural experiences. According to Michalos' (1985) multiple discrepancy theory of satisfaction, individuals compare themselves to multiple

sources of standards including other people, goals, and ideals, and make satisfaction judgments based on discrepancies between current conditions and these standards. Individuals thus tend to be less satisfied if they perceive that they have underachieved their expectations.

While limited studies have examined international students' expected and real acculturation experiences, evidence suggests that migrants' ideal acculturation condition may indeed be different from their actual acculturation experience. Navas, Rojas, García, and Pumares (2007) separately examined acculturation on an ideal plane (e.g., the degree to which one would like to maintain one's culture of origin) and the real plane (e.g., the degree to which one currently maintains one's culture of origin). In a sample of 1523 first generation African immigrants in Spain, they found that participants on average desired to both maintain their heritage culture and fully participate in the host culture in their social relations and work domains, but felt like their host culture participation was underachieved. Similarly, first generation "visibly different" immigrants in New Zealand scored higher on an integrated acculturation strategy in attitudinal terms than behavioral terms, which suggests that an integrative combination of heritage culture maintenance and host culture participation is more preferred than actually achieved (Ward & Kus, 2012). These studies suggest that although integrating one's culture of origin and the host culture in social relations and workplace is often held as an ideal by ethnic minority immigrants, it may be difficult to achieve in reality for a number of reasons including individual factors (e.g., lack of language proficiency) and environmental constraints (e.g., lack of cultural pluralism orientation in the host culture).

In summary, recent generations of CIS are likely to be motivated by personal inspirations rather than governmental expectations (Chirkov et al., 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Zweig, 1997). They may consider a range of factors such as personal growth, economic opportunities, family expectations, and social conditions when they make a decision to study abroad, and have specific goals and expectations for their study abroad experience. They likely pay more attention to their overall well-being and acculturative experience, and may be more eager to seek contact and establish relationships with host nationals as compared to the earlier generations. On the other hand, the fast growing population of the Chinese student population on US campuses makes involvement in their heritage community a viable option. Acculturation for contemporary CIS may involve a process of negotiating their expectations with personal and environmental constraints such as one's language proficiency, available heritage culture ties, and local people's openness to establishing relationships. This adjustment process likely influences their satisfaction judgment and needs to be further understood.

Berry's Model: Mode of Research in Psychology of Acculturation. Berry's (1980; 1990; 1997; 2005) acculturation model represented a conceptual advance over the unilinear model of acculturation and has offered the theoretical basis for recent research in acculturation. The unilinear model of acculturation places individuals on a continuum of acculturating strategies ranging from identifying exclusively with the heritage culture (the culture of origin) to exclusively with the host culture (new dominant cultural environment). It assumes that acquiring the host culture identity accompanies distancing from one's heritage culture identity.

Berry (1997) argues that a unidilinear conceptualization insufficiently captures the complexity and variety of acculturation strategies people employ, as it is ambiguous if a middle point on the scale would represent preferences and behaviors that are half-and-half of each culture, or of neither culture. According to Berry's bilinear model of acculturation, individuals in non-dominant groups employ different strategies in their daily encounters with respect to two major issues: *cultural maintenance*, or the extent to which they prefer to maintain their heritage culture and identity, and *contact and participation*, or the extent to which they prefer to have contact with and participate in the new cultural context with other ethnocultural groups. Depending on how individuals make decisions to maintain their culture of origin and seek contact with the host culture, four acculturation strategies can emerge. *Assimilation* occurs when individuals from the non-dominant group do not wish to maintain their heritage cultural identity and prefer to seek daily interaction with those in the new cultural context. In contrast, when individuals prefer to maintain their heritage culture identity and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with other cultural groups, the *separation* alternative is defined. The *integration* strategy is termed when individuals are interested in both maintaining their heritage culture and seeking interactions with other groups. Finally when there is little interest in neither heritage cultural maintenance nor having relations with other cultural groups, individuals are termed to employ the *marginalization* strategy.

Berry (1997; 2005) stated that his model is based on the assumption that non-dominant groups and their individual members have the freedom to choose how they want to acculturate, which is not always the case. For example, when the new cultural

context enforces certain forms of acculturation, or constrains the choices of non-dominant groups or individuals, the observed preferences reflect accommodations within environmental constraints. As will be discussed and reviewed in the following sections, however, the contextual factors have not been reflected in the operationalization and measurement of the acculturative process for various acculturating groups (e.g., refugees, international students, voluntary immigrants).

Issues with the Conceptualization and Measurement of Acculturation. The earlier section on acculturation context has presented theoretical and empirical evidence that suggests the importance to consider the context in which individuals expect, experience, and appraise their acculturation process. In existing literature, acculturation is often measured as a set of preferences and/or behaviors and values individuals endorse that are intrapersonal rather than contextual, and universal rather than culturally constructed. Due to this approach of research, a lot remains unknown about migrants' subjective experience of acculturation as they make compromises and accommodations and derive personal meaning in the process.

While scholars agree that acculturation entails changes when two or more cultures interact together (Berry, 1990; Suinn, 2009), it is less clear what these changes actually are. In his 1997 article, Berry stated that “individuals and groups may hold varying *attitudes* towards these four ways of acculturating, and their actual *behaviors* may vary correspondingly. Together, these attitudes and behaviors comprise what we have called acculturation strategies” (p. 11). This definition would imply that how people choose to go about their acculturation process could be understood and measured as a mixture of values and behaviors interchangeably. In his

2005 article, Berry conceptualized that *values* and *behaviors* as two related yet distinct components of acculturation strategies, and stated that “[t]hese two components are kept distinct, both conceptually and empirically, since there is not usually a complete correspondence between them” (p. 704). The ambiguous relationship between an individual’s attitudes (i.e., preferences about how to acculturate) and behaviors (i.e., actual activities) underlies various instruments of measuring acculturation strategies or status.

For the most part, past research on international students usually measured their acculturation as a static state. Following the conceptual framework of Berry’s bilinear acculturation model (1990, 1997, 2005), participants’ acculturation conditions are usually measured as relative preferences/endorsement along two separate identities (host culture identity vs. heritage culture identity), or as one of the four acculturation strategies after scores of the two cultural identities are arbitrarily split in half. Measures of acculturation status or strategies typically assess acculturation through measuring preferred behaviors, values, or a combination of both. Some measures have been developed for diverse cultures while others are specifically worded for one or a few cultures. Some most highly used acculturation instruments in Asian American and Asian international students research include Asian-specific measures such as the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA; Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987; Suinn, Ahuna, & Khoo, 1992) and the Asian Values Scale (AVS; Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999), as well as culture non-specific measures such as the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000) and the Acculturation Index (AI; Ward &

Rana-Deuba, 1999). SL-ASIA is a behavior-based acculturation scale, where participants provide ratings of behavioral preference across areas such as language, friendship choice, and participation in cultural activity. AVS is a value-based acculturation scale, where participants report how much they agree with various Asian cultural values, such as emotional self-control, filial piety, humility, and family recognition through achievement. VIA measures both behaviors (e.g., participation in cultural traditions, entertainment, friendship choice) and values (e.g., belief in cultural values).

Recent evidence suggests that acculturation is a much more dynamic process and there is considerable within-individual variability that is not captured by Berry's model and existing measures. For example, Miller and colleagues (2013) found that while Asian American college students seemed to use different acculturation strategies congruent with Berry's model for both their behavior and value domains when the two domains were analyzed separately, 67% to 72% of the participants in two independent samples employed different acculturation behavioral and values acculturation strategies. This suggests that the majority of participants endorsed and practiced different acculturation strategies. Miller's (2007; Miller & Lim, 2010) bilinear multidimensional measurement model of acculturation posits that one can employ different acculturation strategies across behavioral and values domains. Miller (2010) found that the four-factor (i.e., Asian values, Asian behaviors, Western values, Western behaviors) solution explained more variance in both 1st and 2nd generation Asian Americans' acculturation strategies than a two-factor solution suggested by Berry's model (i.e., Asian culture, Western culture).

The relative acculturation extended model (RAEM; Navas, Rojas, García, & Pumares, 2007) also differentiates between acculturation attitudes and behaviors. This model conceptualizes attitudes to be ideal aspirations of acculturation outcomes, and behaviors to be real options put into practice. RAEM postulates that the acculturative process is complex and relative in such a way that individuals may prefer and adopt different options, and may prefer different acculturation strategies in various life domains. For instance, in a sample of African immigrants in Spain, Navas and colleagues (2007) found that immigrants preferred *assimilation* in the peripheral domains such as work and economic (e.g., consume habits), and preferred *integration* in the social domain (e.g., social relations and friendships). However, they preferred *separation* for the central spheres of the culture such as family relations, religious beliefs, and ways of thinking.

Ward and Kus' study (2012) further examined the culture contact/participation dimension in Berry' model, and offers additional evidence that exiting theoretical and empirical work on acculturation needs more clarity and nuance. 289 first-generation, "visibly different" immigrants (55% female, average age = 38.35) of diverse ethnic background were recruited through ethnic networks and ethnic community members in New Zealand. Single items assessed participants' preferences of heritage culture maintenance (It is important that my ethnic group maintains its own culture in New Zealand) and *host culture contact* (It is important that my ethnic group engages in the wider New Zealand society), versus heritage culture maintenance and *host culture adoption* (It is important that my ethnic group adopts New Zealand culture). Participants rated their preferences on a 5-point

disagree/agree scale, and four acculturation strategies were derived using the scalar midpoint split. While integration was the modal response in both cultural adoption and cultural contact models, the proportion of those in the integrated category changed. A shift from separation to integration occurred when cultural contact, compared to cultural adoption, was crossed with cultural maintenance, where the proportion of participants endorsing the integrated strategy increased from 61% to 85%, $z = 5.48, p < .001$. The results suggest while scholars may consider cultural maintenance and cultural participation as two meaningful dimensions, migrants' subjective perspective about what it means for them to acculturate is a lot more nuanced. A lack of clarity and accuracy in the conceptualization and operationalization of these key dimensions will not only have consequences in the categorization of Berry's four acculturation strategies, but also their relationship to migrants' well-being.

Chirkov (2009) critiqued the acculturation literature for approaching the subjective matter in a mode of explanation rather than understanding. The underlying theoretical position of this area of research often assumes that the psychological processes that operate during acculturation are universal for all the groups despite of substantial variations in the life circumstances of the cultural groups, and that the important parameters for acculturation have been adequately understood and studied by scholars. "The dominant mode of research in the psychology of acculturation does not correspond to the essential qualities of the phenomenon – the acculturation process" (p. 95).

In sum, current empirical and theoretical work on acculturation highlight the complexity of the acculturation process and shed light on the importance of attending to the within-person variability across different settings. Unlike what Berry proposed in his model where acculturative choices reflect migrants' preferences, migrants often have to reconcile what they expect and value with what they practice, and make compromises and derive personal meaning in their acculturation and adjustment process. Existing measures of acculturation do not capture such negotiation and meaning making, a process that is essential in migrants' subjective experience during cross-cultural transitions.

Theoretical Understanding of Cultural Adjustment. Acculturating individuals make various adaptations and changes in an attempt to cope with living in a new culture. As reviewed and discussed in previous sections, the study of acculturation has approached this complicated phenomenon by examining processes of cultural shifts and maintenance. The line of research on cultural adjustment, on the other hand, approaches this phenomenon by examining how individuals, such as international students, cope with stress and strive for well-being during cross-cultural transitions. In this section, I will first summarize the psychosocial adjustment framework and then review empirical work on international student adjustment this framework has stimulated. Lastly I will discuss some issues with the current adjustment framework.

In the most general sense, cultural adjustment refers to short-term changes as well as long-term accommodations that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands (Berry, 1997, 2005). In practice, however,

adaptation, adjustment, acculturation and accommodation have often been used interchangeably in the literature, mainly due to the theoretical diversity underlying what constitutes “adjustment” and a lack of clarity of the construct in consequence.

Within a stress and coping framework (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), cultural adjustment is a process of constant cognitive and behavioral efforts (i.e., coping) to manage external and/or internal demands (i.e., stress). Characteristics of the individual and characteristics of the change can facilitate or inhibit the adjustment process. Personality variables and social support are posited to predict cultural adjustment outcomes because they are associated with the level of stress an individual may experience. Furthermore, social support is thought to act as a buffer against the psychological effects of stress during cross-cultural transitions (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

The social learning perspective, on the other hand, conceptualizes the cultural adjustment process as the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills and behaviors through contact with host-nationals, cross-cultural experience and training (Searle & Ward, 1990). According to this perspective, adjustment difficulty arises when acculturating individuals cannot negotiate daily social encounters. Clinical models and social learning models both stress the importance of interpersonal relationships during cultural transitions. Unlike clinical models, the social learning perspective specifies that friendships with host-nationals are crucial for learning skills to live in a new culture. Cultural distance (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980) is another important variable posited to influence the adjustment process according to the social learning perspective. Cultural distance is represented by different cultural elements such as

climate, language, food and family structure between the heritage culture and the host culture, and individuals whose heritage culture is less similar to the host culture are thought to be more likely to experience life changes during cross-cultural transition, and in turn have less favorable adjustment outcomes (Domingues, 1970).

In an attempt to bring conceptual integration to the fractionated area of cross-cultural adaptation, scholars have recently theorized that sojourners' cultural adjustment (e.g., international students) should be understood and examined in psychological and sociocultural aspects (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Psychological adjustment refers to psychological or emotional well-being, and is conceptualized in a stress and coping framework. Sociocultural adjustment, on the other hand, involves behavioral shifts and the development of competence in daily activities in the new culture, and is understood within a social learning model.

Searle and Ward's study (1990) was the first to empirically distinguish the psychological and sociocultural forms of adjustment in a sample of 105 Malaysian and Singaporean college students in New Zealand (mean age = 21.2 years, mean length of stay = 27.1 months). Psychological adjustment was measured as self-rated depressive symptoms. Sociocultural adjustment was measured by the author-devised Sociocultural Adjustment Questionnaire that later became the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS; Ward & Kennedy, 1994), where participants rated the level of difficulty experienced in 16 aspects of living (e.g., shopping, food) on a 4-point scale (0 = *none*, 4 = *extremely*). Results indicated that while the two forms of adjustment were interrelated ($r = .38, p < .001$), they were also predicted by different

types of variables. Life changes, extraversion, and satisfaction with host-national contact predicted psychological adjustment, whereas expected difficulty and cultural distance uniquely predicted sociocultural adjustment. They concluded that psychological and sociocultural adjustment, while interrelated, are distinct adjustment processes associated with common and unique predictors.

The psychosocial adjustment framework lays the theoretical foundation for the measurement of sojourners' cultural adjustment in the literature. In a recent review, Zhang and Goodson (2011a) summarized studies that examined predictors of international students' psychosocial adjustment. International students' psychological adjustment has been predominantly measured as psychological symptoms ($n = 33$, 51.6%), followed by acculturative stress ($n = 10$, 15.6%), stress ($n = 7$, 10.9%), physical symptoms ($n = 5$, 7.8%), and satisfaction ($n = 4$, 6.3%). International students' sociocultural adjustment has been predominantly measured as difficulty experienced in sociocultural situations ($n = 37$, 57.8%).

Conceptualization and Measurement Beyond a Pathological Lens. How scholars conceptualize the trajectories of cultural adjustment guides their research design. Scholars used to think that the trajectory of cultural adjustment follows a U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955, Oberg, 1960). According to this conceptualization, sojourners will initially enter a “honeymoon” phase with enthusiasm and fascination about the new culture, followed by a period of “culture shock” with loneliness and distress, and finally they will feel better adjusted again as they integrate into the local community. The U-curve conceptualization has assumed a central position in theory and research for more than thirty years (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998), but evidence for

the U-curve is weak and inconclusive. Cross-sectional studies on international students revealed a negative relationship between length of stay in the host culture and adjustment outcomes, which suggests that cultural adjustment issues decrease and level off over time (for a review, see Zhang & Goodson, 2011a).

Ward, Okura, Kennedy, and Kojima (1998) surveyed 35 Japanese undergraduate international students at four time points: within 24 hours of arrival, and at 4, 6, and 12 months in New Zealand. Sociocultural adjustment was measured using the SCAS, and psychological adjustment was measured using the Zung (1965) Self-rating Depression Scale. These students reported the greatest psychological and sociocultural distress at the entry to New Zealand, which decreased within first four months with no significant changes in subsequent measures. Interestingly, the magnitude of the relationship between depression and social difficulty increased over time, with non-significant relationships at the point of entry ($r = -.05$), 4 months ($r = .19$), and 6 months ($r = .16$), and a significant positive correlation at 12 months ($r = .36$). The findings are qualified by the unique social and cultural factors of these Japanese students, who commenced their cross-cultural transition together as an international student cohort living in an environment relatively detached from the host culture. Such a living arrangement may have contributed to the variation in the relationship between depression and social difficulty over time, as these subjects' contact with the host culture gradually increased over time. Overall this study challenged the U-curve conceptualization and suggested that psychological and sociocultural stress were the greatest upon entry and decreased in the initial months.

Recent longitudinal studies with sojourners suggest that cultural adjustment, at least psychological adjustment may follow much more variable patterns for different individuals. Wang and colleagues (2012) empirically identified distinct cultural adjustment patterns of new international students over their first three semesters in the US using a person-centered rather than variable centered analytic approach. The sample consisted of 507 Chinese (217 women, 290 men, 80% graduate students) from a variety of disciplines at different institutions across the US. Psychological adjustment was measured by the Brief Symptom Inventory-18 (Detogaris, 2000), where participants rated their depression, anxiety and somatization symptoms during the past seven days. Growth mixture modeling revealed 4 distinct group of adjustment trajectories over 4 time points (pre-arrival, first semester, second semester, and third semester): a) 10% of the sample were termed the consistently depressed group, who exhibited high levels of psychological distress across each time point, b) 14% were the relieved group, whose experienced a sharp decrease of psychological distress after they arrived in the US, c) 11% were the cultural-shocked group, who had a sharp increase in psychological distress at in the first two semesters, d) 65% were the well-adjusted group with relatively consistent low psychological distress over time. Contrary to the U-curve and previous findings, the results suggested that the majority of the CIS did not experience severe levels of psychological distress during their initial cultural transition. Results challenged the overly negative focus of international student adjustment research in the literature by using mainly psychological symptoms as adjustment indicators.

Wang, Wei, and Chen (2015) did a similar longitudinal study on 411 CIS in the US using subjective well-being as the indicator of their cultural adjustment. Subjective well-being is a broader indicator of psychological health than psychological distress because it encompasses the experiencing of low levels of negative emotions and high levels of positive emotions, and high life satisfaction. More importantly, appraisal of subjective well-being reflects an interaction between psychological factors (e.g., personality, goals, standards, aspirations) with life circumstances (e.g., environmental stress; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), which is likely a more accurate operationalization of the subjective experiences of cultural adjustment than psychological symptoms. In this study, participants rated their positive and negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) as well as their global life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) at four time points: pre-arrival, first semester, second semester, and third semester. Similar to previous findings in the Wang et al. (2012) study, four distinct trajectories of similar proportions were identified with negative affect as the indicator. 50% resembled a well-adjusted group with consistently low scores across time. 25% resembled a culture shock group with increased negative affect in the first two semesters and dropped levels in the third semester. 19% resembled a relieved group with decreased negative affect over time. 6% resembled a distressed group, who had consistently high negative affect since pre-arrival. Interestingly, different proportions emerged when life satisfaction was used as the indicator. Fewer participants seemed to be consistently well-adjusted (31%), and more participants showed a pattern of culture shock (41%). These results highlight the importance of broadening our understanding

and measurement of adjustment outcomes, as trajectory patterns were different across two indicators. Life satisfaction as an indicator was more sensitive at detecting those who encountered some degree of adjustment difficulty.

Although “culture shock” as the predominant trajectory of cultural adjustment has been challenged by recent studies, many studies continue to examine cultural adjustment only during the initial period of the cultural transition process with the assumption that adjustment only happens for a short period of time. Studies by Wang and colleagues (2012, 2015) show that a significant proportion of CIS in their samples did not report heightened psychological distress or negative affect during the first two years in the US. Cultural adjustment, especially psychological and identity related adjustment processes may keep evolving in a longer timeframe, and the current methodology measuring only psychological symptoms at the initial stage of cultural transition inadequately captures the actual adjustment experience of many.

Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) used qualitative method to study international students’ identity related adjustment and friendship network. They interviewed 20 (13 females, 7 males) single undergraduate and graduate international students from different countries and ethnic backgrounds, whose length of stay in the US ranged from 7 months to 9 years and 8 months. Participants were asked to sketch their adjustment phases, with the x-axis representing the length of time and the y-axis representing the degree they felt satisfied about their adjustment to the US. While 14 out of 20 participants viewed their initial entry adjustment phases as filled with loneliness, stress and homesickness, they were more likely to depict their adjustment as going uphill as they stayed longer in the host culture. More importantly, the longer

the international students stayed in the US, the more complex they tend to view their adjustment experiences. This was often depicted as multiple M-shaped curves. Participants discussed the process of becoming aware of the need to change their expectations, mindsets, and communication styles to become proactive agents in their adjustment journey. This study probed participants to discuss their narratives of identity-change using qualitative interviews, and revealed constant and variable identity negotiation processes these international students engaged in to establish their friendship network in the host culture, sometimes years after their initial arrival in the host culture.

One way to fill in the gap and extend the current literature is to examine international students' subjective definition of adjustment rather than imposing scholar-determined adjustment outcomes. The social cognition models highlight the importance of cognitive processes such as expectations, values, attitude and perceptions in the adjustment process (Weissman & Furnham, 1987). According to this perspective, holding ethnocentric attitudes (Brislin, 1981; Church, 1982) and unfavorable expectations of the host culture (Armes & Ward, 1989) will affect contact with host-nationals, which in turn, will affect adjustment outcomes. For example, East Asian graduate international students with a moderate level of anticipatory fear were found to have less psychological symptoms than those with low and high anticipatory fear groups (Chiu, 1995).

A handful of qualitative studies on CIS' perceptions of their adjustment revealed themes of change and growth, such as gaining academic confidence and responsibility for learning (Gill, 2007; Warring, 2010), having a clearer career

development plan (Dimmock & Leong, 2010), and experiencing changes in their self-identity and ways of thinking (Gill, 2007) as a result of studying abroad. Pan, Wong, and Ye (2012) recently developed and validated a Post-migration Growth Scale (PMGS) for CIS through in-depth interviews and factor analysis. The intrapersonal growth dimension captures changes in the perception of self (e.g., I have found a lifestyle and learning method which is applicable to me). The interpersonal growth dimension captures changes in interpersonal relationships and communication skills (e.g., I realize the importance of family to me).

In all, sojourners' cultural adjustment has been predominantly conceptualized and measured as psychological symptoms and social difficulties within the first months of their cultural transition period (for a review, see Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). Indeed, many international students face demands including building new relationship networks, navigating different cultural and social norms, and facing challenges in daily activities (Mori, 2000). However, there is a paucity of research exploring the international student experience beyond the struggles they face. Their cultural adjustment experience has been mainly conceptualized through a pathological lens, and most effort has been devoted to alleviate distress. Recent evidence suggests that a significant proportion of international students (30 to 50%) consistently show low levels of distress and high levels of satisfaction during the initial period of cultural transition. The existing unbalanced view of international students' cross cultural experiences deprived us of the opportunity to learn how they navigate the transition, what their strengths and resources are, and what meaning they make of their challenges and growth.

Predictors of International Students' Cultural Adjustment. Despite limitations in method and measurement discussed previously, decades of empirical and theoretical work on cultural adjustment have generated a body of literature on factors that may promote or hinder international students' adjustment and well-being.

Zhang and Goodson (2011a) did the first systemic review on predictors of international students' cultural adjustment. They included quantitative studies reporting factors significantly associated with international undergraduate and graduate students' psychosocial adjustment in the US. The most frequently reported predictors of psychological adjustment in terms of psychological symptoms and acculturative stress included social support, English proficiency, and length of residence. In general, international students who perceived having more social support, reported higher self-assessed English proficiency, stayed longer in the US, reported higher identification with the host culture, and reported lower levels of maladaptive perfectionism tend to report lower levels of psychological symptoms. The most frequently reported predictors of sociocultural adjustment in terms of difficulty experienced in everyday activities included English proficiency, social contact with Americans, acculturation, and length of residence. In general, international students who reported greater self-assessed English proficiency, had greater contact with Americans, reported stronger identification with the host culture, and stayed longer in the US tend to report less difficulty with everyday social activities.

This review provided mixed evidence for the psychosocial adjustment framework advanced by Ward and colleagues (1994, 1999). Many common

predictors, such as length of residence, English proficiency and acculturation, had similar predictability for both psychological and sociocultural adjustment. These results call for a new conceptualization of cultural adjustment that can address the shared elements underlying both domains.

Social Support During Cultural Adjustment. CIS often experience considerable loss in social networks when living away from families and friends. Instrumental and emotional support from various sources is therefore vital for their cultural adjustment and well-being. According to James, Hundley, Navara, and Alles (2004), social support can be defined as “perceived availability of potential social resources” including “appraisal support (advise and discussion), belonging support (identification with a social network), and tangible support (material aid)” (p. 11).

Social support has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that includes aspects such as perception of levels of support, types of social support, and sources from whom individuals receive social support (Procidano & Heller, 1983). In the international student adjustment literature, social support is commonly operationalized as perceived social support (Dao et al., 2007; Geeraert, Dumoulin, & Demes, 2014; Ye, 2006), amount of social interaction/contact (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006), satisfaction with the level of support (Yeh & Inose, 2003), and perceived social connectedness (Du & Wei, 2015; Wang, Wei, & Chen, 2015; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhang & Goodson, 2011b), with a unique distinction between co-national (i.e., same nationality friends) and host-national (i.e., locals) sources of support. Empirical evidence echoes the importance of social connection

and interpersonal network for international students' psychological and sociocultural adjustment, both as a predictor and a buffer against stress (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). In this section I will review qualitative and quantitative studies that shed light on international students' experiences with social support.

Host-National Ties and Social Support. One of the important resources on which international students can rely when they study abroad is social support from host-nationals. In the acculturation literature, whether migrants, such as international students are motivated to seek contact with host-nationals is conceptualized as a hallmark of their host-culture identification (Berry, 1997, 2005), which is theorized and empirically found to predict less psychological distress and sociocultural difficulties (Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). In the psychosocial adjustment framework, social contact with host-nationals is thought to be crucial for the development of new skills to navigate culturally unfamiliar situations (Searle & Ward, 1990). Zimmerman (1995) goes so far as to claim that “the most important factor in international students' adjustment to US American culture was frequency of interaction with US American students” (p. 329). Quantitative studies have examined host-national social support as both a direct predictor for well-being as well as a buffer against stress for international students (e.g., Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004).

Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011) examined international students' friendship network in terms of friendship ratio and strength in a sample of 84 international students from 32 different countries enrolled in a university in Hawaii (mean age = 28 years, mean length of stay = 33 months). Results indicate that having a higher ratio of host-national friends with varying degrees of closeness was

associated with international students' sense of satisfaction and connectedness, which highlights the important role host-national friendships play in the cultural adjustment process.

Having host-national networks may be especially important and beneficial for some international students depending on their personal and environmental characteristics. For example, Kashima and Loh (2006) found in a sample of 100 Asian international students in Australia that having more host-national ties was only significantly related to psychological well-being for those with high need for order and low tolerance of uncertainty. Ying and Han (2008) examined the effect of ethnic density for Taiwanese international students' cultural adjustment over the course of three semesters after their initial arrival. Participants at schools with moderate numbers of Taiwanese students reported greater affiliation with Americans and better English competence, whereas those on campuses with large numbers of Taiwanese students affiliated more with co-nationals after the first semester. More importantly, affiliation with Americans predicted self-rated general adjustment in the third semester only for participants at moderate ethnic density schools, but not for those at high ethnic density schools. These results suggest that international students can have very different need and experience with host-national social support depending on who they are and where they study.

Wang and colleagues' (2012) identified four distinct adjustment trajectories in a sample of 507 CIS over their first three semesters in the US by measuring their psychological distress at four time points. Besides personal characteristics such as low levels of maladaptive perfectionism and high levels of problem-solving appraisal,

the well-adjusted group (i.e., consistently low levels of psychological distress) was characterized as having the lowest percentage of co-national social support (65.6%) in their first semester. Interestingly, all four trajectory groups reported similar percentages of host-national social support at all time points with an increasing trend (14%, 16% and 19% at Time 2, 3, and 4, respectively), and all groups reported similar proportions of support received from co-nationals, host-nationals, and international students from other countries in their second and third semester. Authors concluded that their sample of CIS highly relied on co-nationals for social support, and that having a more balanced array of social support early on is associated with positive adjustment processes.

Co-National Ties and Social Support. Friendship with co-nationals is often another major source of social support for international students, given their shared cultural background and cultural adjustment experience. Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) theorized that maintaining cultural ties with one's heritage community, such as adhering to cultural values and interacting with co-nationals could promote sojourners' psychological well-being because it would provide a sense of belongingness and identity. Asian international students, such as Chinese tend to affiliate more with co-nationals than other international students (Kashima & Loh, 2006). As Chinese student enrollment has significantly increased in the US in recent years, becoming involved in Chinese ethnic communities has become a viable option for CIS.

Unlike host-national support, studies have found contradictory findings about the effect of co-national support for international students. For example, Du and Wei

(2015) did a longitudinal study on a sample of 213 CIS in the US. They found that co-national connectedness mediated the relationship between heritage culture identification and negative affect, whereas host-national connectedness mediated the relationship between heritage culture identification and satisfaction. These results indicate that students with higher levels of heritage culture identification were likely to report less future negative affect through feeling close to other Chinese, but were also likely to report less future life satisfaction through feeling distant from other Americans. Having close co-national ties helped these students feel less distress, but did not help them feel more positive affect or satisfaction.

Some studies even found co-national support to be negatively associated with positive adjustment outcomes. Geeraert and colleagues' (2014) longitudinal study with Belgium students studying in foreign countries found that the number of co-national contacts became negatively associated with self-rated adjustment (i.e., the extent to which they felt comfortable to the host society) over time. Similarly, Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011) found that a higher ratio of co-national friendships in one's interpersonal networks was negatively associated with international students' life satisfaction.

Narratives of Social Support Experiences. Despite the theoretical importance to examine social support and its impact during cultural transitions in the international student populations to promote their well-being, relatively little do we know about the nature and quality of these relationships. Qualitative methodologies have been identified as useful tools to provide in-depth and highly descriptive data that can advance culturally based research, training, and practice (Ponterotto, 2010). A

handful of qualitative studies with Asian international students revealed their strong reliance on co-national peers and family for emotional support, as well as the challenges they face forming relationships with host-national peers (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, & Kumar, 2014; Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Banden, 2005; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013).

Constantine and colleagues (2005) did a CQR study where they interviewed 15 Asian international freshmen college women. Participants typically reported a supportive network of friends that lived abroad in their country of origin, good relationship with family members, as well as a supportive network in the US. Participants typically sought advice from friends when they face adjustment problems, but they also typically learned to be more independent and often kept problems to themselves. Participants also generally reported being exposed to prejudice and discrimination in the United States.

Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) interviewed 20 (13 females, 7 males) single undergraduate and graduate international students from different countries and ethnic background, whose length of stay in the US ranged from 7 months to 9 years and 8 months. Participants discussed the importance of time in forming friendships in the host culture. They longed for deeper intercultural friendships with host-nationals, but they also constantly compared the transitional and temporal nature of their newly formed relationships with their long-established friends back home. Most students reported that their host-national ties did not have the same depth because of a lack of shared history and a sense of uncertainty in the future. Participants often reported stories where they felt ignored and excluded by their American classmates when they

did class projects or had everyday encounters, and they constantly switch between feeling welcomed like a guest and feeling marginalized like an alien.

Given the established positive impact of having host-national connections, and the heavy reliance of Asian international students on family and co-nationals for emotional and material support, it is important to explore these students' subjective experiences of if, when, and how they access different sources of support.

Furthermore, it is vital to understand what it means for these students to have/not have host-national and co-national friends to understand how social support from various sources may factor into their identity and sense of well-being.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Background and the broader sociocultural context

1. How will you describe yourself to people in China? How will you describe yourself to people in the US? What are the differences/similarities?
2. How much do you think American peers know about your background?
3. How do you think American peers perceive you/Chinese international students?
4. How did you decide to come to the US? (Prompt: What were things that are difficult to leave and what were things that attracted you?)
5. What are your plans after your education in the US? What do you perceive as the biggest obstacles in achieving what you plan for?
6. How will you describe the current Chinese society? How does the current Chinese society influence your experience in the US, if at all?
7. How will you describe the current US-China relationship (prompt: How do you think the media describes it? What adjectives will you use to describe the relationship? Is the relationship positive/conflictual/etc.)? How does the current US-China relationship influence your experience in the US, if at all?

Cultural Adjustment

1. Tell me about what it was like at first for you to come to the United States. Have you noticed any changes that you have made as a result of moving to the United States?
2. What are some challenges of living in the United States?
3. What are some positive experiences that you have had with living in the United States?

4. Overall how well do you think you have adjusted to living in the United States?
 (Prompt: On a scale of 1-10, how well do you think you have adjusted to living in the US?) What does “good adjustment/adjusting well” mean to you? Tell me about someone you know who did not adjust well.
5. Have you noticed any changes in how you think about what it means to “adjust well” over time?
6. What do you think has helped you with adjusting to life in the United States?
 Social interactions and social support system
 1. How much do you interact with others who are from different ethnic/religious backgrounds than your own (e.g., American students, international students from other countries)? Tell me about these interactions. What are they like?
 If they say that they do not interact much, ask why not?
 2. How much do you interact with others who are from a similar ethnic/religious background as your own (e.g., international students from your own country)?
 Tell me about these interactions. What are they like?
 If they say that they do not interact much, ask why not?
 3. Tell me a time that you feel down/depressed. What did you do to resolve it? Who did you seek support from?
 4. Who else do you turn to for support? For example, when you have had a really bad day, who do you talk to?

Appendix C

Email Recruitment Text

Greetings:

We are writing to you to ask if you are interested in being interviewed for a research project at Boston College devoted to exploring Chinese international students' adjustment and well-being in the US in the current sociocultural context. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. We will change your name for any publication and presentation the interviews may be used for. Even though anonymity is offered, participation in this study involves some degree of exposure to the public, as direct quotes with details of your life may compromise confidentiality.

The interview will last 30 to 90 minutes and will be recorded. The questions will cover a broad range of topics centering around your background, your perception of the current political and sociocultural environment in China and in the US, your experience adjusting to the US, as well as your experience with seeking and receiving social support. If at any time there is a question or topic you do not wish to discuss, you can simply skip that part or stop the interview process.

Many participants found these interviews to be helpful in sorting out their feelings and thoughts about their own life. While no compensation will be offered, we will do our best to make this a positive and comfortable experience. Your participation will help to give voice to the current lives of Chinese international students in the US, and may help inform people who interact with international students issues that they should be aware of.

The principal investigator of this study is Yun Lu, who is a second year Master's student in Mental Health Counseling in the Lynch School of Education at

Boston College. Dr. Usha Tummala-Narra, a faculty member in the Lynch School of Education in the Department of Counseling, Developmental and Educational Psychology at Boston College, and Dr. Vaishali Raval, a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at Miami University supervise this project.

If you are interested in helping us, please send an email to Yun Lu (luyq@bc.edu).

Thank you so much!

Yun Lu

Lynch School of Education

Boston College

Email: luyq@bc.edu

Appendix D

Informed Consent



Boston College *Counseling Psychology*

Informed Consent to be in study

A Qualitative Study of Chinese International Students' Adjustment and Social
Support in the US

Researcher: *Yun Lu*

Dear Participants:

You are being asked to be in a research study designed to explore Chinese students' adjustment, well-being, and experiences seeking and receiving support in the US through structured interviews. You were selected to be in the study because you identify as an international student originally from Mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan who is over 18 years old, and who is currently enrolled in a US institution or have graduated from a US institution within the past year. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The principal investigator of this study is Yun Lu, a counseling psychology Master's student at Boston College. The supervisors are Dr. Tummala-Narra, a faculty member in the Department of Counseling at Boston College, and Dr. Vaishali Raval, a faculty member in the Department of Psychology

at Miami University. Please read this form. Ask any questions that you may have before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to understand Chinese international students' experience and well-being in the US in the current sociocultural context, how they seek and receive social support from peers, and how positive and negative experiences with social support influence their adjustment. People in this study are international students from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and the total number of people in this study is expected to be fifteen to twenty.

What Will Happen in the Study:

If you agree to be in this study, you will spend about 30 to 90 minutes participating in an interview with a research assistant in person or via Skype or phone. Interviews will be taped recorded, transcribed, and stored in a password-protected online server that Boston College requires to use for protection of privacy. The questions will cover a broad range of topics centering your experiences being an international student in the US and in what ways you cope with obstacles and difficulties. We also may ask questions about your decisions to study abroad, goals for future, and other aspects of your life history. If at any time, there is a topic you do not wish to discuss, you can ask the interviewer to skip a given section or ask the interview to be terminated.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

There are no expected risks in this study. However, at times, some sensitive issues regarding your experience of studying and living in the US may bring up

feelings and concerns that may be difficult to re-experience or talk about. If at any point you do not feel comfortable, we will end the interviewing immediately.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

The primary benefit of participating in this study is that people, such as those interacting and working with international students, will gain important information on the nature of the experience of Chinese international students in the current sociocultural context. Ideally, the insights that are shared in our publications may help to generate greater public attention to the challenges that Chinese international students face these days living, studying and working in the US. Although there is no compensation for participation, some participants may experience a sense of support in talking with someone about their story.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be kept in a locked file. All electronic information will be coded and stored on a secure server at Boston College. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. While changing names can protect people's identities to some extent, the use of direct quotes with various details of you life may compromise confidentiality. Mainly just the researchers will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

The informed consent will be destroyed by shredding five years after the results of the study are published. The interview recordings and transcripts will be stored electronically on a secure server at Boston College for use of future research.

Choosing to be in the Study and Choosing to Quit the Study:

Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting. Your quitting will not jeopardize grades nor risk loss of present or future faculty/school/University relationships.

Getting Dismissed from the Study:

The researcher may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g. side effects or distress have resulted), (2) you have failed to comply with the study rules, or (3) the study sponsor decides to end the study.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact Yun Lu at luyq@bc.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Statement of Consent:

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name)_____

Date _____

Table 1. List of Domains, Categories, Sub-Categories, and Frequencies for All Data

| <i>Domain/Category/Subcategory</i> | Frequency |
|--|-------------|
| <i>Participant Background</i> | |
| Self-introduction to people in China and the US | |
| Similarities | |
| Basic demographic information and education background | General (9) |
| Differences | |
| Emphasize common experience with respective groups to enhance connection | Variant (4) |
| More detailed introduction to Chinese | Variant (2) |
| American peers' description of participants | |
| Knowledge of participants' background | |
| Know participants well | Variant (3) |
| Limited knowledge through professional interaction | Typical (7) |
| Lack of interest in knowing participants | Variant (4) |
| Perception of participants | |
| Positive perception in professional aspects | Typical (6) |
| Positive perception of personality | Variant (4) |
| Quiet and not social in American society | Typical (5) |
| Motivation and benefits to study in the US | |
| Pursue better academic environment and improve future career development | General (8) |
| Experience US culture and society | Typical (5) |
| Fad | Variant (3) |
| Things hard to give up to study in the US | |
| Close relationships in China | Typical (6) |
| Career opportunities in China | Variant (2) |
| Nothing hard to give up | Variant (2) |
| Plans after education in the US | |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Short-term: Work/further education in the US | Typical (5) |
| Long-term: Open to where to stay | Variant (4) |
| Long-term: Return to China | Variant (3) |
| <i>Sociopolitical Context</i> | |
| Perception of Chinese society | |
| Economic growth and employment potential | Typical (5) |
| Emphasis on social relationships for success (“guanxi”) | Typical (5) |
| Instability due to limited resources and social inequality | Typical (7) |
| Perception of US society | |
| Simple social relationships and fair competition | Typical (5) |
| Well-developed laws and good living conditions | Typical (5) |
| American people are friendly to strangers | Variant (4) |
| US-China relationship | |
| Perception of US-China relationship | |
| Improved economic collaboration and interdependence | Variant (4) |
| Simultaneously cooperative and conflictual | Typical (5) |
| Impact of US-China relationship on experience | |
| Influence on visa policy and international employment | Typical (5) |
| Influence on US interracial conflict | Variant (2) |
| No personal influence | Variant (3) |
| American people’s perception of China/CIS | |
| Dislike too many CIS/Prejudice against CIS | Typical (7) |
| Indifference/no explicit expression of negative attitude | Typical (5) |
| Positive perception/stereotype of CIS as smart and hardworking | Variant (4) |
| <i>Cultural Adjustment</i> | |
| Cultural adjustment challenges | |
| Difficulty developing intimate relationships with Americans and lack of belongingness | General (9) |
| Learn to independently manage daily living difficulties | Typical (7) |
| Academic difficulties | Typical (6) |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Financial difficulties | Variant (3) |
| Employment difficulties | |
| F1 status impeding employment | Variant (4) |
| Language and cultural constraints on employment opportunities | Variant (3) |
| Lack of networking and career advancement opportunities | Typical (5) |
| Coping strategies | |
| Social strategies | |
| Americans | |
| Emotional support | Variant (2) |
| Instrumental support | Typical (6) |
| No support/unhelpful support | Typical (5) |
| School support | Variant (2) |
| Chinese in the US | |
| Emotional support | Typical (6) |
| Instrumental support | General (9) |
| People in China | |
| Do not seek support/increasingly distant relationship | General (8) |
| Emotional support | Typical (5) |
| Non-social strategies | |
| Distraction and avoidant coping | General (8) |
| Active behavioral coping | Variant (3) |
| Cognitive coping/intrapersonal growth | |
| Acceptance and optimism | Typical (5) |
| Increased openness and independence | General (9) |
| Less stringent standard about English | Variant (2) |
| Self-appraisal of adjustment outcome | |
| Positive overall self-evaluation of adjustment | General (9) |
| Personal definition of “good adjustment” | |
| Subjective satisfaction and sense of purpose | Typical (6) |

| | | |
|--|--|-------------|
| | External behavioral markers of adjustment | Typical (7) |
| | Decreased felt need to fit into US society | Variant (4) |
| <i>Social interaction</i> | | |
| Americans | | |
| | Friendly but superficial interaction/professional interaction | General (8) |
| | Personal interaction and common interests | Variant (4) |
| | Deliberate focus on cultural exchange | Variant (4) |
| | Conflictual interaction | Variant (3) |
| | Culturally different ways of entertainment and socializing manners | Typical (5) |
| Chinese in the US | | |
| | A lot of professional and personal interaction/have fun together | General (8) |
| | Limited or conflictual interaction | Variant (3) |
| Non-Chinese international students in the US | | |
| | Enjoyable interaction | Variant (3) |
| | Limited or conflictual interaction | Variant (3) |

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