

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Learning From the Media: Perceptions of “America” From
Chinese Students and Scholars.

Quincy Roberts, Master of Arts, 2008

Thesis Directed by: Professor Nancy Struna

Department of American Studies

This research examines the perceptions that international students and scholars from China form of the United States. This thesis tracks the participants’ recollection of their beliefs about the U.S. before arriving and examines the transformations that occurred because of lived circumstances and experiences. The research participants eagerly took advantage of the opportunity to visit and study at American universities, believing that this country had the best there was to offer in terms of educational quality. This perceived superiority of the U.S. was believed to extend into other social and cultural categories as well. Through examining the participant’s imagined ideals of life in the U.S. the objective is to understand the importance individuals and lived experiences play in the reception and interpretation of cultural images, as well as foreground the “individual” as the main site to examine the intersection of the “global” and the “local”. This is meant to elevate the importance of the individual when studying the impact and influence of globalization in the lives of individuals. By using Appadurai’s notion of mediascapes as a means to study popular culture the goal is to understand the local and the global in studying the connection between the imagination and globalization.

LEARNING FROM THE MEDIA:
Perceptions of “America” From Chinese Students and Scholars

By

Quincy W. Roberts

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2008

Advisory Committee:
Professor Nancy Struna, Chair
Professor John Caughey
Professor Barbara Finkelstein

Table of Contents

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| I. | Abstract | |
| II. | Title Page | |
| III. | Table of Contents..... | ii |
| IV. | List of Tables..... | iii |
| V. | Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 1 |
| | A. Methodology..... | 3 |
| | B. Literature Review..... | 11 |
| | C. What Was, What Is..... | 23 |
| VI. | Chapter 2: Graduate Students..... | 30 |
| | A. J..... | 30 |
| | B. Y2..... | 43 |
| | C. Chapter Summary..... | 57 |
| VII. | Chapter 3: International Students..... | 60 |
| | A. C&K..... | 60 |
| | B. L..... | 82 |
| | C. Chapter Summary..... | 96 |
| VIII. | Chapter 4: Concluding Thoughts..... | 99 |
| IX. | Bibliography..... | 110 |

List of Tables

| | |
|---|-----------|
| TABLE 1: Foreign students and scholars in China..... | 28 |
| TABLE 2: Top three countries sending foreign students to China..... | 28 |
| TABLE 3: International student population in the U.S. and China..... | 28 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Globalization is a term used to describe the complex and interconnected nature of today's world. This includes the shifting nature of social relationships as affected by changes in the world's social, cultural, economic, and technological forces. Scholars in a variety of fields have studied the effects of globalization on societies, groups and individuals to provide insight into the effects of these shifting global forces.

Considering the importance of location and nationhood (or the "local") is essential in understanding the role of globalization (and the "global") in the lives of individuals. Globalization has local and global manifestations and has resulted in the expansion of "global" forms of influence and power on the one hand, and the simultaneous strengthening of bonds to "local" sites and groups. "Globalism" and "localism" need not be mutually exclusive to each other, and the simultaneous expansion of the "global" and the "local" is important to recognize when discussing the issue of globalization.¹

This project will examine the ways the United States is viewed internationally and how this is based, in part, on the perceptions gained from media images and messages in movies, TV, and other forms of popular culture. I will particularly focus on the perspectives of the U.S. that international students from China have formed about the

¹ For more on the relationship between the Global/Local see Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" in Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 19-39; Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, "Introduction: Tracking the Global/Local" in Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 1-18; and Arif Dirlik "The Global in the Local" in Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 21-45.

U.S., by eliciting their opinions on the ways that the U.S. is portrayed in China through the media, and what they believe is learned (or constructed) from these messages. As a result, this project will investigate the importance of allegiance to national origin, and other cultural traditions, as reflected in the responses of the research participants interviewed.

Media spectatorship and audience reception are reoccurring themes in the scholarship of Cultural Studies regarding the impact of globalization on contemporary social, cultural and global relations. How media impact takes shape for specific individuals is one way to understand individual decision-making in the face of global forces.² The common setting where I observe my participants working and studying is the educational setting, and when considering graduate-level education and the barriers to successful performance and completion that international students face, this thesis has implications for a variety of disciplines.

The participants for this project come from different age groups and their generational differences lend to a range and variety of perspectives. The comparison between the responses of the older and younger participants provide generational lenses through which to view any changes that have occurred in how the U.S. is typically represented and viewed in China.

I ask the research participants in this study to reflect on the influence of popular culture on their understanding, or constructions, of American society. TV shows, movies, and popular music are the specific categories referred to when speaking of the

² Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “From the Imperial Family to the Transnational Imaginary: Media Spectatorship in the Age of Globalization” in Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 145-170

media and popular culture, and the intention is to understand its influences on the opinions and ideas held by international students and scholars at the University of Maryland. Popular movies and TV shows contain representations of American viewpoints and how “Americans” think and behave and it is my intent to unpack some of the ways these representations were/are received. In the process, messages about life in the U.S. as lived by certain groups, and the categories of difference presented in media, can be interpreted, explored and understood. This can form a basis for American identity, and how everyday life is perceived and understood.

Some of the research questions I want to explore are: How is the U.S. presented to these students/intellectuals from China and how are the images of the U.S. understood? How do they perceive this country now after living in the U.S. for over a year? Did images of the U.S. presented in the media influence these individual’s choices to migrate? Can media constructions create a transnational, or transcultural, connection to a space and place irrespective of personal experience? How do the responses from the interviewees provide insight on the impact of globalization on those under examination (i.e. the influence of the “global” on the “local”)?

Methodology

The procedures I used involved conducting interviews and some participant observation. I conducted two recorded interview sessions with the majority of the participants. However, two were unable to do more than one recorded interview, but those I did not interview twice, I had informal conversations with, participant observation

and e-mail correspondence prior to and following the recorded interview. All interviews were followed with e-mailed questions in order to clarify and expound upon ideas or statements presented during the interviews. I transcribed all interviews conducted, performed textual analysis on the resulting written record of the interviews, and sent the follow-up e-mails after this process was completed. Thus, the follow-up was targeted to specific issues that needed to be addressed, or were originally overlooked. The entire process, from initial interview to the concluding stage of subject research, lasted over 2 years. This provided enough time to examine the interviews, construct appropriate responses to engage feedback, and carefully analyze the resulting interview data.

Using a combination of the “snowballing method” (i.e. finding one participant led to meeting another, and so on) and random selection due to proximity and encounter. I selected and interviewed two international graduate students and three international scholars at the University of Maryland. They are all originally from China, three are female and two are male. There were three international scholars, two females and one male, all in their early 40s (the two females, 42 and 44 years old; the male, 44 years old). The graduate students consisted of one female and one male with their ages ranging in the mid-to-upper 20s (the female 27, years old; the male, 29 years old). Four out of five study in interdisciplinary, humanities/social science areas, although the one male graduate student earned his Ph.D. in aerospace engineering.

After a couple of interviews with students and some initial research on Chinese history, I was intrigued by the changes that China has undergone in the last two decades and the resulting effect on the type and availability of media programming available.

Expanding my research focus to provide a multi-generational perspective which included some older scholars helped bring some insight, and an interesting contrast, to the information I was getting from the (younger) graduate students. I simultaneously decided to focus on China as the common point of origin for my participants as opposed to having a wide range of transnational students from a variety of different countries. I felt this decision would provide clarity and focus to the project by highlighting the contemporary shifts that have taken place in China as well as make for an interesting exploration into the ways that cultural change and globalization is experienced by individuals.³ This also helped me to keep the project in a manageable scope for my research purposes.

The snowballing method has advantages and drawbacks: one of the good things was that instead of having to go into the interview “cold” or without any prior introduction, I would have a recommendation from their friend, so that when we met for the interview the atmosphere was more relaxed. On the other hand, my participants shared more similarities with each other than they would have if they were chosen at random.

Some commonalities are an unavoidable feature of this project due to the fact that the common setting for all participants was the University of Maryland, and that they were all either completing advanced degrees, or had already completed them. I do not believe that this compromised the integrity of this project and the data that I obtained from the interviews provided enough differentiation between participants.

There were other interviews conducted with graduate students (two to be exact)

³ The possibilities for this type of research are introduced by Roland Robertson, “Social Theory , Cultural Relativity and the Problem of Globality”, in Culture, Globalization and the World-System, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 69-90.

that could have been included in this study. However, I felt that the two graduate student participants that I selected appropriately covered the main ideas presented in this thesis and I did not want the project to become overwhelming with regard to the interviews and the amount of data that I needed to analyze.

The selection of the international scholars was somewhat different in that I had to overcome differences that separated us (age being a specific one that comes to mind). Two were contacted because I was able to make connections with them through my academic department. The other, I was able to meet because we commuted on the same University shuttle route and I took the opportunity to strike up a conversation during our bus ride.

In the end, I am comfortable with the results in that there were sufficient differences between their life circumstances to provide unique perspectives on the issues we discussed. Two of the scholars are professors and make their living in the world of academia, while the other is a government official studying at the university for the purpose of professional development to improve the quality of their job performance. The government official is a single mother, while the two professors are unmarried and without children. This difference aided in providing significant variation with regard to how they viewed American popular culture and its influence.

I wanted the interviews to be flexible in order to allow for occasional deviations to information and insights that I had not previously anticipated, but yet appropriately structured in order to delve into the perspectives the participants had regarding their views on the media constructions of life in the United States.

Interestingly enough, the graduate students are in a unique position to be among the first generation exposed to popular culture influences from the United States in its early stages of contemporary distribution in China since the Cultural Revolution. This is not to say that there was absolutely no access to popular culture before this time, but 20-25 years ago, media distribution in China began to increase as the government adopted an “open-door policy” with regards to Western culture, and now the adoption of economic and cultural influences of the West (particularly the U.S.) has reached a level previously unheard of in China. Although there is still significant censorship (which is a salient influence on the type of media content available), it is very significant that the TV and movie content that Chinese youth currently have access to, was virtually nonexistent less than a generation ago.⁴

The graduate students I have spoken with have seen the growth of media influence as they have simultaneously matured to young adulthood. As youth, they grew up with exposure to popular culture from the U.S. while also being able to recognize that this was a somewhat new and rapidly expanding phenomenon. Now that they have matured, they can look back on their experiences with a distanced gaze and reflect on these experiences. Also, because the interviews began relatively soon after they arrived in this country they were able to provide a cross-section of their experiences in China and the views they now hold after spending time in the U.S.

Meanwhile, the international scholars are of an older generation and are in the

⁴ For historical background on television growth in China see Michael Keane, “Television Drama in China: Engineering Souls for the Market”, in Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia, ed. Timothy J. Craig and Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002): 120-137; and Jie Lin, “China’s Media Reform: Where to Go?” Harvard China Review 5 (Spring 2004): 116-121.

U.S. on a more temporary basis, which guides them toward a different outlook than that of the students. The professors have consistent contact with college-age youth and since their courses center on American literature and culture, they are afforded the opportunity to observe changes in the attitudes, behavior, and perspective of the students in their courses when compared to youth of previous generations. At the same time, the government official has observed the changes in China's media access from a policy perspective, and she also has an 11 year old son, so she can observe first-hand how he is influenced by images of the U.S.

Because these scholars are older than the graduate school participants, collectively they help provide a general overview of the historical developments concerning the influence of media in China. Their perspective sheds some light on the ideas and constructs of the younger generation of students, while also providing information about their own experiences, views of what has changed, and perspective on various cultural differences relevant to the topic of the influence of media and cultural "transmission." Ultimately, their opinions allow them to comment on the cultural and social changes that have occurred in China and how the influence of U.S. media content has affected China.

The fact that I conducted this research with participants who are within the university setting establishes some specific parameters to these groups. First, all of the graduate students are well-educated. This means that while they may not be rich, they have had the ability to access a quality education in China and use that as a springboard to pursue a graduate degree in the U.S. The outlook that these participants bring reflects

their personal status as college-educated individuals seeking social advancement through educational achievement. The international scholars are also well-educated and enjoy a somewhat privileged status in their country as either professional educators or a government official. Their ability to study at the University of Maryland is an indication that they have access to opportunities that others in their country do not.

The format for the interviews was conversational to enable the questions and information to flow from the responses given. I found this type of conversational style to be most effective in terms of eliciting information and maintaining the general comfort of the interview process. All of the participants were uneasy about their English-speaking ability in some way and my willingness to converse with them displayed patience and genuine interest. In the end, this helped build rapport between myself and the participants and went a long way toward setting a relaxed tone for the interviews.

Ethnography, as a tool to explore the related ideas of globalization and the individual, has been my primary means to research how my participants see themselves and their relationship to the larger social world by asking them to describe themselves and relay their opinions. I then use their own words and the topics they discuss as the basis for further discussion and lines of questioning. I mention ethnography as a research tradition that I align my paper with based on an understanding of ethnography gained from John L. Caughey. He has written on the possibilities for ethnography and life history research as a means to explore and present individuals as multidimensional,

“To advance work on ‘the individual and culture’ we need to address the complexities of the individual’s relationship with multiple cultures. To be sure, some individuals have a much more radical set of contrasting cultures than others. But I will argue here that every contemporary individual

is influenced by a variety of different and competing cultural traditions.”⁵

The above passage outlines an ethnographic approach to understanding diversity, as it exists both within groups as well as within individuals.

The interpretation of meaning by ethnographers has been described as an attempt to “convey the *meanings* that actions and events have for actors in that world, their distinctive interpretations of reality.”⁶ The interpretations of reality held by the participants in this thesis are vital, and ethnography is the process I utilized in translating the social life of my research participant into a text that can be read and analyzed. It has been important not to assume uniformity among my participants and thus, create a text that portrays similar social lives among my participants simply because they share cultural traditions (i.e. race, gender, class, etc.).

One way to remain sensitive to this variation between individuals and not to impose uniformity as a researcher is to reflect on the fact that we all struggle with the tension created by our own varied cultural traditions and influences. Arjun Appadurai’s review of the field of ethnography is significant because he expresses the need for ethnography to expand and include a notion of “the imagination as a social practice.”⁷ Appadurai proposes that the nature of ethnography, as traditionally conceived, must adapt and actively incorporate the influence of mass mediated ideas and messages on the

⁵ John L. Caughey, Negotiating Culture and Identities: A Life History Approach (2005): 17.

⁶ Robert M. Emerson, “Part 1: The Face of Contemporary Ethnography”, in Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations 2nd ed., ed. Robert M. Emerson (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2001): 27-53.

⁷ Arjun Appadurai, Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 31.

actions and imagination of people around the world. He suggests that ethnography must take into account the influence of these mass mediated ideas, or “mediascapes”⁸, as affecting the life choices of individuals. Thus, these imagined worlds and possibilities impact “real life” choices and decisions.

I began to notice recognizable trends when examining the interview data that revolved around the following themes: the superior educational and economic power of the U.S.; popular appeal of U.S. media in China; differences in family values and organization; and difference as experienced and described through categories of race, class, gender and nationality. These themes come together to form an outline for how to view the experiences of these participants collectively as described in the following excerpts, while maintaining individuality when reading their stories about their experiences.

Literature Review

In his book *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai theorized that contemporary ideas and images circulated on a global scale along various channels and that their movement, or manifestation, in a specific setting depends on the traditions and complexities in each site (i.e. nation, community, group, or individual). He describes this movement as traveling within what he calls “scapes”, with the suffix *-scape* used in conjunction with the five dimensions of his “elementary framework” of global cultural flows; the five dimensions being: *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*,

⁸ Ibid., 35.

financescapes, and *ideoscapes*.⁹ These terms describe the fluidity with which people, media/images, technology, capitalism/monetary resources, and ideologies/cultural influences that were once considered deeply imbedded and “immovable” are transported (sometimes simultaneously) on a global scale.¹⁰

Appadurai contends that these scapes are “deeply perspectival constructs” which individual actors navigate as “agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part from their own sense of what these landscapes have to offer.”¹¹ His argument brings up two points that are important to note for this project. First, that the scapes are not objective constructs, but “perspectival” meaning that those who are actors within these scapes frame its boundaries using their own perspective, or meaning as determined by their historical, linguistic and political influences. Second, these scapes are given their perspectival construct by “individual actors” and they are navigated by individuals. In other words, individuals are essential to not only understanding the nature of these scapes, but also to their very construction as individuals are the ones that arrange themselves collectively to give these scapes their composition.

In particular, *ethnoscapes* represent “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” which includes tourists, immigrants, and other migratory groups and individuals.¹² This constant flux of groups or individuals affects the policies and politics of nations as well as the stability within their communities.

⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 35.

Diasporic ethnic, or cultural, identities are good illustrations of *ethnoscapes* because diasporic identities must be constructed out of available remnants from the past.

Constructing diasporic identity involves a retelling of the past, a mythic version of the past, to reconstruct possibilities for the future--in other words, to employ “imaginative rediscovery” to an identity that is constantly shifting and being redefined. Stuart Hall discusses this in an article titled “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”,

“Cultural identity (...) is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending space, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like all which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.”¹³

This passage aptly describes the fluidity of racial and cultural identities as collective histories must be constantly reinforced and reinvented. When discussing modern-day social communities, the constant flux of people across national boundaries on a global scale has implications, particularly on how identity is perceived. Ideas about life outside of one's own personal experiences can be influenced by information gained from this shifting cast of characters in one's daily life from diverse and varied areas and backgrounds.

When lacking the opportunity to access knowledge from these *ethnoscapes*, the messages gained from *mediascapes* can be just as influential, delivering images and ideas of diverse ways of life to communities and individuals around the world, in an instant. These *mediascapes* in turn influence the *ideoscapes*, or variety of interpretations and resulting meaning systems, of those consuming the various media.

Mediascapes are of particular interest to me for the purposes of this paper because

¹³ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2000): 23

of the fluid nature of meaning within media messages; their production and distribution channels; how the dissemination of these messages supports or contradicts various interpretations (depending on the cultural context in which they are decoded); and their potential impact on audiences worldwide. This coincides with the basic premise of “Encoding, Decoding” by Stuart Hall, where he provides a framework that describes the way meaning is inscribed within, and taken from, media texts--particularly highlighting the agency and influence held by the audience.¹⁴

Out of my personal interactions with the participants of this research I have found that the prevailing image of “America” as the place to start a new life and become successful is prevalent and widely accepted. The United States is considered the ideal place to pursue ones dreams compared to staying behind in their home country. In essence, globalization is a process whereby commodities, images, and forms of knowledge are made more readily accessible through the interstices of institutional structures, power relationships and new technologies. While in this project I do not claim to provide direct links, or causes and effects, I do want to initiate an examination of the connections between image and experience regarding the perceptions my participants have of this country--between media and migration.

I like Appadurai’s use of the term *mediascapes* because it is an appropriate way to describe how mass mediated messages provide the material for imaginative possibilities that exist outside the individual’s lived experience. He proposes that media and migration have a “joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding”, in The Cultural Studies Reader 2nd ed., ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1999): 507-517.

modern subjectivity.”¹⁵ The imagination is the site of multi-dimensional “imagined worlds” that comprise the way social groups, and the world at large are ordered, categorized and understood.

He expands on his discussion of the imagination when describing the effects of electronic media and other traditional media, by pointing out that they “transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds.”¹⁶ Resources and knowledge previously unattainable are now easily within reach for many around the world. It has become increasingly easier to travel to distant places across the globe as well as streamline images of distant places directly into your home. The importance of these developments are appropriately summed up by Appadurai’s statement that, “Ordinary people have begun to deploy their imaginations in the practice of their everyday lives.”¹⁷

The idea that globally more people are able to imagine life in places where they have had no personal experience is a central theme of this thesis and one that is repeated by the participants throughout the interviews.

Movies have become sources of information that directly or indirectly present information about the U.S. to those who are eager to discover it, and by doing so viewers imagine living a “better life” through referencing these images. It is important to remember that while talking about the “imagination” and “imagined worlds”, this should not be confused with implying that they are “fictional” or “false”. The fact that these

¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

“imaginings” are based on “real” images foregrounds the importance of understanding the meanings extracted from the images presented. Thus, the basis for the imagination goes from “imagination” (existing somewhere abstractly) to “imagined world” (existing in a particular time and space that is ideally accessible/tangible).

Related to the imagination is how migrants conceive of identity, particularly how they see themselves and their successful negotiation as inhabitants of the space between their country of origin and their new home. Having recently left one country and learning to live in another, these transnational migrants must negotiate two cultures. How they describe their management of this negotiation can be illuminated by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhaba in particular, who speaks of cultural hybridity and how “breaks in continuity” in a text that can be compared to discontinuities in identity.¹⁸ By using postcolonial theory and literary criticism to analyze discourses and propose new frameworks for cultural identity, he critiques the singular, unified concept of social identity rooted in modernity. This is similar to the critique of modernity and singular concepts of globalization and cultural identity offered by Appadurai.

While avoiding the tendency to totalize or generalize individuals or groups, I will examine the responses I collect within the dynamics of globalization in local settings or “local culture”. John Storey discusses this approach in his book Inventing Popular Culture, where he argues that since the concept of “popular culture” itself is an invention by intellectuals, it serves to impose a social order that maintains a high/low, class based

¹⁸ Homi Bhaba, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency”, in The Cultural Studies Reader 2nd ed., ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1999)

cultural divide.¹⁹ Discussing the concept of popular culture itself involves exercising the power to define culture and who is popular.²⁰

Globalization also involves hybridization and power, not globalization as Americanization, but of “the meeting and mingling of the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ in new forms of hybrid cultures”.²¹ Storey later states that, “Globalization offers the possibility of cultural mixing on a scale never before known. This can produce resistance to difference, but it can also produce the fusing of difference cultures and the making of new and exciting forms of cultural hybridity”.²² This is not a celebration of hybridity that ignores global power relations, but rather one that recognizes the fluid and changing nature of global relations in local settings.²³

Stuart Hall also talks about globalization as simultaneously operating on the local and global level in an essay titled “The Local and the Global”. Hall points out that globalization is affecting conceptions of identity and ethnicity precisely because it has contributed to changes in how people see themselves as well as how they see others--how people view the global world, and also their local setting.²⁴

¹⁹ John Storey, Inventing Popular Culture (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2003).

²⁰ For more on the problematic issues involved when discussing “popular culture” see Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’ ”, in Cultural Studies, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York, Routledge, 1992): 227-240.

²¹ John Storey, Inventing Popular Culture (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2003): 117.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity”, in Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 19-

This contradicts the traditional idea of assimilation as the overpowering of one culture over another. Hybridity allows for the idea of multiple nationalisms, both competing and present in one individual, reaffirming that any assumption about immigrants succumbing to assimilation where one's original culture is ignored or abandoned as the other dominates, creates a simplistic, binary view of the migratory process. This binary view does not take into account the possibility that an individual may negotiate and struggle with the influences of two or more cultures, but not completely abandoned. Therefore, this project is not about the prevalence of media that overpowers the senses of viewers and compels them to view the U.S. a certain way, but rather that the media provide the material used to support a particular construction of this country. The choices these individuals make, to accept or reject what they see, affects the experiences of these transnational migrants in their everyday practices and lived experiences.

Out of my conversations with transnational migrants from other countries, it becomes clear that the imagined possibilities, compared to the opportunities available in their home country, motivate many people to come to U.S. Yet once they arrive, they are in the midst of a variety of influences and cultural communities, including that of their home country, the country they now live in, and the "imagined community" they see themselves belonging to and/or aspiring to.

Bonny Norton explores this in the context of the language learning classroom

in “Non-participation, Imagined Communities and the Language Learning Classroom.”²⁵ By looking at the level of non-participation that adult learners exhibited in their ESL classes, Norton suggests that “different learners have different imagined communities” that they envision themselves belonging to, and that the initial investment that a particular learner has in the target language determines the way the learner views their expectations for the course, and changes as they interact with the larger language community (or social/cultural community) in which they find themselves.²⁶ This concept of “imagined communities” is significant because in the context of her research, the imagination portion refers to “the extent to which we create images of the world and see connections through time and space by extrapolating from our experience.”²⁷

This “transcending of time and space” allows the learner to occupy multiple communities at once. This transient position is one that I feel many transnational migrants occupy, particularly those in this project, as they seek to understand the culture in which they find themselves.

The concept of the imagined community is also explored by Benedict Anderson in his book, Imagined Communities where he argues that the nation-state itself is an imagined community.²⁸ He argues that by virtue of size and scale it is virtually impossible to know all the members of a particular community in which you imagine

²⁵ Bonny Norton, “Non-participation, Imagined Communities and the Language Learning Classroom”, in Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research, ed. Michael P. Breen (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001): 159-171.

²⁶ Ibid., 165

²⁷ Ibid., 163

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 2006).

yourself belonging, especially when speaking on the national level. Thus,

“all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”²⁹

Stuart Hall explores some of the effects of globalization on identity, when viewed individually and collectively in two articles titled “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Identity”, and “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities”. He postulates that unifying and totalizing concepts of identity are losing their influence in the popular imagination, and this includes the divisions based on nation and nationality. Notions of difference have become more complex and homogenized group identities that do not recognize diversity within groups, have become outdated and difficult to hold onto in light of the current global scene. They have lost their former completion and for many their former comfort, in terms of personal identification.³⁰ These critiques collectively challenge the continued understanding of nationhood as popularly conceived.

In “Old and New Ethnicities, Old and New Identities” Stuart Hall explores how the nature and structure of identity has shifted globally and how this relates to globalization. He suggests that identity is always shifting and is a process constantly in formation. But when it comes to identification, he notes that identity gains validity when viewed through the eyes of the “other”, or in his words, “This is the self as it is inscribed

²⁹ Ibid., 6.

³⁰ Stuart Hall, “Old and New Ethnicities, Old and New Identities”, in in Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 41-68.

in the gaze of the other.”³¹ Natasha Gentz and Stefan Kramer also expound on this in the introduction to a volume they co-edited titled “Globalization, Cultural Identities, and Media Representations.” They go a bit further in stating that “the experience of the Other always determines the perception of the self, which is derived from its differentiation from its Other. ‘At the moment of this experience, then, the Other has become an inherent component of the self.’”³²

By being able to exclude what we are not we are better able to understand ourselves. But this very act entails a taking in, or consumption of the Other, which forever alters both parties involved, because to know that you are not the “other” you must first know something about it/them. This speaks to the relevance of this study in terms of its relationship to the field of American Studies because by understanding how the participating transnational students and scholars “see” America, those who identify as Americans can (hopefully) come to better see themselves.

Images of the U.S. are distributed around the world via *mediascapes* and impact the *ideascapes* of peoples who have never seen the U.S. or met anyone from this country. That is a powerful interaction with significant ramifications. I want to focus on how people come to desire things that they have not themselves experienced, but that they have come to see as desirable or beneficial, and what this is based on.

This highlights the importance of viewing the availability and access to media images as a relatively recent phenomenon in China, and the necessity of understanding

³¹ Ibid., 48.

³² Natasha Gentz and Stefan Kramer, “Introduction”, in Globalization, Cultural Identities, and Media Representations, ed. Natasha Gentz and Stefan Kramer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006): 4.

how important this access is to the way the U.S. previously has been perceived, and is now perceived and understood. By talking with participants from different generations I aim to bring some of these differences to light as I present comparisons of the interview participants.

The differences in consumption based on generational differences are also important to note, for while all of the participants discuss the availability of media content in China, their level of media consumption varies greatly. The younger participants are able to recall the impact that popular media has had on their upbringing as children and youth. While for the older participants, this influence is significantly less, if mentioned as significant at all.

John Storey suggests that there is great importance to the issue of consumption when discussing cultural studies and popular culture in *Inventing Popular Culture*. He states that,

“we communicate through what we consume. Consumption is perhaps the most visible way in which we stage and perform the drama of self-formation. In this sense, then, consumption is also a form of production.”³³

Consumption is one avenue used to produce, and display identity. So, understanding the types of media that my participants mention viewing and enjoying is a window into how they prefer to present themselves (or at one time desired to present themselves). In addition, the fact that the media they discuss is foreign to them is not a contradiction because the “otherness” of these programs is a lens into both what they may desire themselves to be, as well as (perhaps more importantly) what they have excluded from their identity.

³³ John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2003): 78

The consumption of media becomes a means to connect with a particular “imagined community” (or “imagined world”), thereby making it an instructional tool regarding the codes of conduct and values of the community. In addition, providing a means to exercise agency concerning access to the community (i.e. the individual can choose when they want to sit and watch the program of their choice). The issue of consumption also extends to consumerist values and the connection between capitalist consumption and media access in China is an interesting one that is explored in the context of the thematic elements discussed by the various interview participants.³⁴

What Was, What Is...

Throughout its history of interaction with the western world, China has been extremely isolated with regards to its willingness for cultural and material exchange, and acceptance of cultural influences from other countries. This reluctance is understandable when viewed in light of the fact that China has mixed success regarding its experiences with trade involving western countries. China was forced to open up trade with Great Britain (and other western countries) in the mid-1800’s following what have commonly come to be known as the Opium Wars, which began after the Chinese attempted to prevent the smuggling and distribution of opium within its borders. However, China’s defeats in the Opium War (1839-1842) and the Second Opium War (1857-1860) arguably

³⁴ For an interesting take on the changes in consumerist values of contemporary China as viewed through the daily practice and experiences of one household comprised of three generations, see Noreen O’Leary, “Keeping Up With the Jiangs”, Brandweek 48 (Jan. 2007): 14-20.

stimulated China's quest for modern knowledge from the West.³⁵

Movies and TV shows from abroad (particularly the United States) were less prevalent in earlier generations than they are today. Due to the institution of policies supporting economic reforms and diversity (first introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, and solidified by improved U.S.-Chinese diplomatic relations in 1979) there has been a steady expansion of economic reforms leading to the exponential availability of satellite television and broadband internet access. The implementation of these policies has been comparable to a cultural upheaval, resulting in ever-increasing access to products from abroad, beginning in the late 1970's and increasing exponentially in the last 10-15 years.³⁶

There has also been a corresponding increase in the number of students from China studying abroad. This trend began in the late 1970's as China began to move toward an "open-door" policy with regard to economic development and relations with the West. China has gone through repeated phases of being open to student exchange and study abroad opportunities and then becoming strongly opposed. The most recent upward trend began in 1979 with China eager to initiate student exchanges by sending 500 students to the U.S. to study. The two countries eventually agreed upon fifty. In

³⁵ For historical significance of Opium Wars in China and why interest in modern, Western knowledge was directed toward the U.S. and not Great Britain see T.K. Chu, "150 Years of Chinese Students in America", Harvard China Review 5 (Spring 2004): 7-26.

³⁶ Michael Keane, "Television Drama in China: Engineering Souls for the Market", in Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia, ed. Timothy J. Craig and Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002): 120-137.

2002, the number of Chinese students in the U.S. was around 65,000.³⁷

According to the Institute for International Education, there were 89,634 international scholars and 565,039 international students in the U.S. in 2005, 264,410 of these were graduate students. China sent the largest number of international scholars to the U.S. in the year 2005 with 17,035, along with 62,523 international students--topped only by India.³⁸ In 2006, China sent 19,017 international scholars and 62,582 international students.³⁹ These numbers reflect the consistent increase in Chinese students studying in American universities.

The “Open Doors” website records that the number of international students in the U.S. began to drop following the 2002/3 year, and this trend held true for China. The generally accepted reason for this drop is the effect of tightened visa regulations on student exchange policies enacted after 9/11. This drop also coincides with significant improvements and advances in the higher education system in China which may have also contributed.⁴⁰ Within two years of this decline the University of Maryland had 3,646 international students and 1,140 international scholars in 2005, ranking in the top 30 of all U.S. institutions in the number of international students attending, and the top 20 in the number of international scholars. In 2006, the University moved into the top 20 of

³⁷ T.K. Chu, “150 Years of Chinese Students in America”, Harvard China Review 5 (Spring 2004): 7-26.

³⁸ Open Doors 2006 Data Tables, <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/>, 4/29/06.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Donald M. Bishop, “Chinese Students at American Colleges and Universities”, Speech, American Center for Educational Exchange, 26 January 2005, Beijing, China (<http://www.iienetwork.org/?p=56814>, 4/29/06).

international students attending with 3,476.⁴¹

The United States is considered to have the best educational system in the world by many students (graduate and undergraduate) around the world. Whether this status is merited or not, the above statistics show that Chinese students are eagerly seeking to come to the U.S. and take advantage of the educational opportunities available. In addition, the University of Maryland ranks high among universities establishing coalitions with institutions of higher learning and governments abroad, making it an ideal institution for international students, as well as for studying the impact of this recent surge in internationalization.

Simultaneously, China has made significant strides in improving its institutions of higher education in order to compete on a global scale with its global counterparts. Beginning in 1998, Jiang Zemin began an effort to transform China's universities and in a 5 year period China has "more than doubled state spending on higher education to 10.4 billion dollars, the last year for which an official figure is available" as well as "sharply increased the proportion of its college-age population in higher education, to roughly 20 percent now from 1.4 percent in 1978."⁴²

To put this in perspective, Madelyn C. Ross, who explores these trends in a report called "China's Universities Look Outward" written for the Institute for International Education states that,

"in 1998, when China had about 6 million college students representing about 7 percent of the eligible age-group. By 2002 this figure had doubled to 14 million college students..."

⁴¹ Open Doors 2006 Data Tables, <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/>, 5/11/07.

⁴² Howard W. French, "China Luring Scholars to Make Universities Great", New York Times, 28 Oct. 2005, newspaper on-line, accessed 11 May 2007.

The United States has some 16 million college students in about 4,000 institutions, about 50-60 percent of the eligible population. By contrast, China's 16 million college students are in about 1,500 institutions and are about 15 percent of the eligible group.”⁴³

China began to make structural changes to the university system as well as seek to establish international contacts with other universities back in 1978, but the fruit of this labor has recently spring forth in significant aspects. China's higher educational institutions are overseen by its Ministry of Education and in this oversight role, has sought to expand programs that collaborate with U.S. (and other) institutions abroad, as well as free up money that can be used to send more of its eligible student-age population to college. Ross describes the evolution of this process,

“The process of rationalizing and expanding enrollment began with a series of university mergers in the 1990s. Some schools that had focused on the sciences, engineering, or teaching, for example, were merged with other other schools to create larger "comprehensive universities." A second major factor has been the decision to allow private universities to develop. Finally, given the desire to accommodate more students and the state of extreme crowding in most Chinese cities, established universities have been encouraged to build new campuses on the outskirts of towns. Typically, a few core programs will remain at the old campus, while the bulk of the university will move to the new facilities.”⁴⁴

In fact, while China is sending significant numbers of students abroad to study at foreign universities, there are also a large number of students that China hosts in its own universities as study-abroad students or international scholars. The following tables show that not only has China steadily increased its number of foreign students (with a slight dip in the 2003 figure due to the SARS outbreak) but has specifically drawn a consistent number of students from the United States, which in 2003 was the 3rd leading country

⁴³ Madelyn C. Ross, “China's Universities Look Outward”, IIE Networker Magazine (Fall 2004), magazine on-line, accessed 11 May 2007.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

sending students to Chinese universities,⁴⁵

TABLE 1: Foreign students and scholars in China

| Year | Number of Foreign Students and Scholars in China |
|---------------|---|
| 1998 | 43,084 |
| 1999 | 44,711 |
| 2000 | 52,120 |
| 2001 | 61,869 |
| 2002 | 85,829 |
| 2003 | 77,715 |
| Goal for 2007 | 120,000 |

TABLE 2. Top three countries sending foreign students to China (2003)

| Country | Number of students sent to China |
|----------------|---|
| Korea | 35,353 |
| Japan | 12,765 |
| United States | 3,693 |
| Vietnam | 3,487 |
| Indonesia | 2,563 |
| Other | 19,854 |
| Total | 77,715 |

TABLE 3. International student population in the U.S. and China

| Year | Number of Students from China | % of Total Foreign Students in U.S. | Number of U.S. Study Abroad Students Going to China |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| 2002-03 | 64,757 | 11.0 | - |
| 2001-02 | 63,211 | 10.8 | 3,911 (+33%) |
| 2000-01 | 59,939 | 10.9 | 2,942 |
| 1999-2000 | 54,466 | 10.6 | 2,949 |

⁴⁵ Ibid.

| | | | |
|---------|--------|------|-------|
| 1998-99 | 51,001 | 10.4 | 2,278 |
| 1997-98 | 46,958 | 9.8 | 2,116 |
| 1996-97 | 42,503 | 7.8 | 1,627 |
| 1995-96 | 39,613 | 8.7 | 1,396 |
| 1994-95 | 39,403 | 8.7 | 1,257 |

Yet despite this recent improvement regarding the state of higher education in China, there are still large numbers of Chinese students that seek to study in the U.S., believing that the best opportunity for a quality education is in the U.S., and the best opportunity for career advancement comes after earning a degree from a U.S. institution of higher education. The above statistics are a window into simultaneous trends that are occurring with regard to Chinese students and advancement in higher education. This project is an attempt to bring these statistics into meaningful view by providing personal accounts from individuals negotiating this transition in order to establish a relationship between the lived experiences of these Chinese scholars and the national trends reflected in the statistical data.

Chapter 2: The Graduate Students

J:

J is a 26 yr. old, Ph.D. student in the Roberts H. Smith school of Business. She is originally from the People's Republic of China and has been in the U.S. a little over two years. J initially enrolled at the University of Maryland to pursue her Master's degree in Anthropology. After completing her requirements for the Master's degree she learned of an opportunity to pursue a Ph.D. in Information Systems and so she decided to pursue this opportunity instead of going for the Ph.D. in Anthropology. She has since been accepted to the program and is beginning her introductory year in the business school.

J and I were introduced through a fellow graduate student who was a mutual acquaintance, and after becoming aware of my project thought J would be a willing research participant. This was very fortunate because J was extremely helpful during the interviews and her contributions helped determine the direction of the project. Her responses to my questions, her evaluation of the quality of my questions, and how she expounded on my questions were all welcome cues that assisted with her own, as well as future interviews, and showed that she was at ease with the interview process. She was genuinely interested in the project, and wanted to reconcile how I understood ethnography as an American Studies student with how she came to define it as a student in Anthropology (she also anticipated using some ethnographic techniques to collect data for her Ph.D. projects in business).

Out of all the participants I worked with during the course of this project, J has

been the one with which I have had the most consistent and prolonged contact. The fact that she was knowledgeable about ethnography and interviewing techniques turned out to be a true asset to the project and to our ability to comfortably relate to one another. She also helped me to connect with other Chinese students at the university, helping me to locate other potential participants for the project.

When asked to discuss why she chose to study in the United States, particularly at the University of Maryland, she mentioned the quality of the education system in the U.S. as being a specific factor. She was interested in the Applied Anthropology program at Maryland, stating that there were maybe “two such programs in the States”, and that this type of program appealed to her because she did not see herself as a “person good at doing research, but I wanna do some practical stuff.” She explained that all the schools she applied to were in the United States and that she wanted to come to the U.S.,

“here you’ve got the best education in the world, I gue...I believe, and it’s very, attractive to...international students, every um, I mean, many people want, want to come to the states to take classes... and maybe after that to live here.”⁴⁶

She explains that many international students believe the U.S. has a superior educational system and that the myriad opportunities for a better lifestyle are attractive to Chinese students. She originally stated that she did not plan on living here, and that after graduating and working for a year or two here in the U.S., she would return to China in order to be close to her family and friends. In subsequent conversation she altered her original plan, still expressing a desire to return to China, but postponing her return until after she gained some experience teaching and researching. Her more open-ended timeframe for return was simultaneously more specific with regard to the goals that she

⁴⁶ J, interview with author, 6 May 2005

wanted to accomplish here in this country, suggesting a shift in focus.

J explained that she had some personal exposure to the U.S. and American culture prior to coming to the University of Maryland to attend graduate school. This experience consisted of two weeks spent in the U.S. during a summer, study abroad program she participated in during middle school. She describes exploring a range of cultural issues in an effort to maximize her time with the American students and get as much information as possible. She learned about cultural differences, “rituals” (i.e. weddings, or birthdays), religious beliefs, as well as hobbies and personal interests.

Ultimately, she mentions movies and television programs as significant in shaping her opinions of “America”. This is evident in the following response,

“Alright...well, actually, American culture is everywhere in the world (Q: ok...) in movies, (Q: umhmm) or, just uh, yea, I guess first from, I don’t know whether you know the television series, the sitcom, uh Growing Pains (Q: yes) it was a long time ago but (Q: uh huh) my, well my friends and I almost grew up with it, (Q: umm) it was a long series, several seasons, we liked it so much, and we think wow this is the, ideal family, uh that we can, we, we want to have. it’s uh, yea, uh, I mean, parents, well, educate kids, but there are also friends. This series is humorous, so there you can (*know*) what, American culture is, especially in school and how children grew up in that environment. Yea that series is very influential in my understanding of American culture, and after that, I guess there were movies like, *Titanic*, or, another, blockbuster movies I guess? (Q: umhmm) and also, popular songs, popular culture, (Q: umhmm) we could, we could see a lot of, um, music videos from America.”⁴⁷

It is interesting that when asked where she gained access to information about the U.S., this question was understood as being about the prevalence of “American culture” and was answered in such a way so as to foreground the linked issue of globalization. I believe this is due her cultural perspective on the U.S. as gained in her China, the way popular culture is presented and understood by many youth in China as an

⁴⁷ Ibid.

accurate portrait of American life, but also her educational background in Anthropology, which helped train her to understand the media as central to understanding culture and globalization.

I do not pretend that the influence of American media is simplistically or ignorantly consumed by viewers. Globalization should not be conceptualized as equivalent to “Americanization”. Yet J describes American culture as being “everywhere”, which is interesting given that fact that the presence of popular media in China, at the current level, is a new phenomenon.

Taking into account the impact of the Cultural Revolution in China on various forms of cultural expression, as well as the education system (which the country is only recently starting to recover from), J’s generation enjoys freedoms that were not afforded her parents, in terms of cultural expression as well as educational opportunity.⁴⁸ College was denied to J’s parent’s generation, many of them instead being forcibly moved into rural areas to work for government labor programs. As a result, there was a gap in the development of Chinese intellectuals, which resulted in different social attitudes among those considered to be intellectuals--particularly regarding attitudes toward media, popular culture, and the younger generation’s relationship to elders or authority.⁴⁹

For example, J mentions Titanic as an influential film for her, which is not surprising as the film had unprecedented success in China. There are distinct themes in the film that challenge issues of parental authority and social position. For J’s generation,

⁴⁸ For narrative accounts of Chinese students, their experiences in America, and various struggles they faced see Qian Ning, Chinese Students Encounter America (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Titanic offers insight into American culture as a means to explore the possibilities for youthful expression and love. The film opens up other life possibilities as a young adult that otherwise would not have been available in Chinese society. In light of its success among multiple generations in China, *Titanic* allows for examining multiple readings among multiple generations.

It is speculated that many middle-aged Chinese that lived through the Cultural Revolution could relate to the messages of lost love and applied the storyline to their own past experiences of missed opportunities and lost youth.⁵⁰ In fact, it was reported that some individuals sold tissues outside of Shanghai movie theatres for patrons entering to see *Titanic*, as many people went to see the movie multiple times. *Titanic* earned record profits that far exceeded previous box office earnings records in China, with approximately \$417, 046,787 earned in ticket sales alone.⁵¹ This does not include the 25 million pirated copies and 300,000 legitimate copies of the video sold.⁵² The key point is that these tremendous earnings were not merely due to the mass appeal of the storyline itself, but rather to the particular historical context for viewers in China and the cultural or ideological “space” opened by the film that allowed for some of China’s older population to use the experience of viewing the film as an opportunity to reflect on their own lives.

⁵⁰ James L. Watson, “Subjectivity of Meaning: The Case of *Titanic*”, in Encyclopedia Britannica, 2007 ed., Encyclopedia Britannica Online, accessed 26 March 2007.

⁵¹ Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, “Hero: China’s Response to Hollywood Globalization”, Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media 49 (Spring 2007), Online Periodical, accessed 18 May 2007.

⁵² James L. Watson, “Subjectivity of Meaning: The Case of *Titanic*”, in Encyclopedia Britannica, 2007 ed., Encyclopedia Britannica Online, accessed 26 March 2007.

J also describes how she and her friends enjoyed watching *Growing Pains*. Despite the fact that the sitcom portrayed a white, American family as the norm, and supported the individualism and freedom of the children in the family in ways that was in juxtaposition to families in China, this was not so “foreign” to J and her friends that it was not acceptable, in fact, it was their favorite show. The contradiction between this show’s portrayal of family life and her (and her friends) lived experience contributed to the appeal of the show. At one point she talks about how some parents in China want their children to be involved in certain things like playing the piano because they “want their children to fulfill their dreams.” The effect of the cultural revolution explains some of this, and while she says that her parents were not like this, it is interesting that she talks about the expectation that some parents place on their children as stifling and how the picture of family life that she received from *Growing Pains* was one where this sort of pressure was not present. She says that some of her friends that enjoyed the program with her were in this type of relationship with their parents and even though J was not, the thought of having the same freedoms as seen in the show was attractive.

Considering the characters of *Growing Pains*, the family in the show consists of four children, two brothers and two sisters, as well as a sort of “adopted” child that is a neighborhood friend. Demographically speaking, this show is an interesting juxtaposition to the way J describes the family structure in China as distinctly different and incompatible with China’s lifestyle and its government restrictions on family life. She specifically mentions the “one-child” rule as one of the features that distinguishes the “American” family from her native country, namely, the freedom to have any number of

children without government intervention.

The familial contrasts were compounded for J and her friends when taking cultural differences into account. For example, the scenes where children received “moral lectures” from their parents displayed a communicative and cooperative approach to child development which sought to treat the children as partners on equal footing, as J put it,

“we liked it so much, and we think wow this is the, ideal family, uh that we can, we, we want to have. it’s uh, yea, uh, I mean, parents, well, educate kids, but [*they are*] also friends.”⁵³

Of course, because J and her friends viewed this show from the perspective of children in families where the parents were in a more dominant position of power, this show represented their “ideal family” situation. J describes this show as being “very influential in my understanding of American culture”, and as I listened to her I realized that as an youth growing up in this country, I did not view this show as being a “representation” of American life, but rather with a disbelief that families like this actually existed. When I watched the show it seemed “ideal”, but was not a reality for me when compared to my personal life. For both me and J, this show highlighted profound differences in child raising approaches between two cultural settings: she viewed the main difference as between “national cultures”, but because I already considered myself “American”, I interpreted the differences as related to race and class.

David Morley suggests a useful framework through which to view the importance of media spectatorship in a meaningful way. By expanding on Stuart Hall’s theory in

⁵³ J, interview with author, 6 May 2005

“Encoding/Decoding” which suggests that audiences may have “dominant”, “negotiated”, or “resistant” readings of texts, Morley argues that spectatorship is “the moment when the discourses of the reader meet the discourse of the text.”⁵⁴ This means that “any comprehensive ethnography of spectatorship must distinguish multiple registers of spectatorship: 1) the spectator as fashioned by the text itself; 2) the spectator as fashioned by the technical apparatuses; 3) the spectator as fashioned by the institutional contexts of spectatorship; 4) the spectator as constituted by ambient discourses and ideologies; 5) the actual spectator as embodied, raced, gendered and geographically and historically situated.”⁵⁵ Who J and her friends were culturally (ex. Chinese youth) played an important role in how the show was interpreted and understood.

This cultural divide does not appear so readily when observing other areas, which became clear when J discussed her understanding of popular U.S. opinions about money, and how this was similar to the “big city” mentality that she noticed in her hometown of Shanghai,

“It’s just that, like, in, you see the Diamondback or whatever, and, you can have like, huge ads about making money like ‘instant cash’ or (Q: ummhmm) those kinds of words, it’s just very explicit. We don’t have that in China well, people love money everywhere, just, uh, but, well, my point is you cannot always focus on money, well, everyone needs money, but you, you , you should have some correct way to get money (Q: umhmm) from hard-working, or intelligence or whatever, but, sometimes in Shanghai, or in China, in Shanghai, um, people will be so cold to each other because of money, the interrelationship between?, interpersonal relationship maybe, is, umm, well not that bad, but, just like in public space, it’s um, you respect each other, maybe just Western civilization, Western way of life, you respect and you, are polite to strangers. Uh, well people in my hometown will considered a little colder, a little tough? But if you are very, you are, if you know each other, different thing, but if you don’t you um

⁵⁴ David Morley, The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding (London: British Film Institute, 1980)

⁵⁵ Ibid.

umm, some, uh, what's the, shop assistant? I mean people in grocery store, you know department store, those people? (Q: uh huh, uh huh) They, some of them are very kind, very warm, but some are just, cold. (laughing) Yea, so, maybe after several years, people will know, be aware of that, yea..."⁵⁶

She speculates that the kindness people show each other in the U.S. is unique to western civilization. This idea that "Americans" are nicer and kinder than those in her native country is interesting because it follows her statements about the importance of having a proper attitude about money and how there seems to be a more explicit desire for money in the U.S. (based on her observation of ads in the University of Maryland campus newspaper). She says that people are not as nice in her hometown as they are in the U.S., however, she later admits that this is based on how she is treated on-campus or in the surrounding area, whereas, she has heard that it may be different in bigger cities like New York (which she has heard people describe in similar terms to Shanghai).

In a later conversation, J describes her thinking on the issue of money and advertising in American society as changing as she gained a more balanced (and critical) understanding of capitalism. She describes the process that went into her change in outlook regarding this country's attitude toward money beginning with a sociology class she took in the summer of 2006,

you know sociology...they're pretty critical about this society. Um, so I think that changed my views about the country some? Um, yeah, so now I wouldn't, just, cause back in China when people thought about the U.S. they would think that it's a great country and everything is great. Uh, and uh, I mean I like the country, um, but at the same time I, I started to like, look at it from a another, different perspective or something, I won't take everything for granted, I will like uh, I think that class helped to taught me something...so like we looked at different forms of popular culture and critiqued them...one of the examples I remembered, and that I would always tell people about was um, the uh, casinos in Las Vegas, like how they attract uh, consumers. Like our prof-, not professor, the instructor

⁵⁶ J, interview with author, 6 May 2005

would say they um, they used all kinds of tricks to keep consumers to stay. So that was a pretty shocking to me, and I didn't expect that, and a lot of the time we would basically just criticize capitalism.⁵⁷

This sociology class helped her to form an alternative outlook on American society and culture. She became more critical of this country whereas before she was previously more accepting. She explains that people in China thought that the U.S. was a great country and did not confront the image of the U.S. as the ideal society. Without explicitly stating this, she includes herself in this category of people. With more time in this country and with the help of exposure to critical ideas, she describes herself as having a more balanced view of this country and capitalism. As she began to forming a critical eye toward this country as a whole, her ability to navigate her individual classes also became easier and interactions with her classmates became less strained.⁵⁸

Ironically, just when she began to establish some equilibrium with regard to navigating her way through her Master's program in anthropology, she decided to transfer into the business Ph.D. program, which required her to learn how to relate to a whole new set of people, and become familiar with an academic discipline that was entirely new to her. Her more critical eye towards this country which developed out of this sociology class may have been the catalyst for affecting other areas of her life, specifically regarding her hope and dreams for the future. When I first met J, she was enthusiastic about the anthropology program, she was in and when asked about her future plans she said,

"I'm interested in eco-museum, or community museum, uh, its basically about the

⁵⁷ J, interview with author, 15 September 2006.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

community development, so you...the museum is not like traditional museums...it's a museum about how, to solve the, problems in the community, like, if the community is threatened by, it's-, the environment or historical heritage is threatened by the outside forces, uh, somebody wants to take out their heritage or they wanna occupy this land, they want to get rid of them, and they will, well this is a problem that they have and they, the community, uh, work out a solution, they, they work together and they work out a solution, and to, to solve that problem, well they will use a building to...like, just like a traditional museum but they also can do other stuff the, the main point is that, um, this museum is not set up by a curator or something, they were brought up by people and people's participation is very important, so, but what I want to do in China is something like that, um, cuz in China most things are, are from up to below, when people in, have, who authority can ask you to do anything that they want, the people don't have that, initiative? they don't take the initiative to do something this is what I want to, make some changes in maybe part of, Shanghai or, so (...) people need to have that idea that they can, make some changes by themselves they don't have to wait for, those leaders to make decisions for them. Most of the time leaders don't know about the masses and they, tend to make wrong decisions."⁵⁹

This was a very ambitious vision. She connects her motivation for pursuing this goal to the social outlook facing those without power in her home country, and specifically in her local community. Ultimately, she mentions her desire to preserve cultural history/ies and use this museum as a vehicle to empower "the masses" to know that they themselves can influence and initiate social change.

In subsequent conversation, it seemed that her enthusiasm had waned regarding this earlier vision. This is how she describes the change in her outlook on her personal future,

um, originally it was anthropology or sociology, something like that and I never thought about going to business program but um, I mean cause this is a opportunity, um and so, I mean going to business school, cause I know the professors, that's a pretty good advantage, so I think um...and somebody told me if you like something and you make it as your career, it's gonna be very tough, like very painful. Like, I like anthropology, and then I do a doctorate degree in anthropology, and I spend my whole life in anthropology, maybe I, I won't enjoy it as much as I, um, if I just take it as a hobby or something, as a pastime or something, like I, I do something, but when I'm free, I'm off work, I can do

⁵⁹ J, interview with author, 6 May 2005

something related with anthropology. Then I've, that's great, but if I spend like 24/7 and just, on anthropology I might not like as much. So I think, 'that's a pretty interesting piece of advice' and I thought about it, and I think it, it makes sense to some extent and uh, I think, even though I, like I'm doing this business program, it doesn't mean I have to devote my whole life in it right. When I, whenever I am free, or I don't wanna think about business anymore I can think about anthropology, that works... Yeah this is like one of the dreams that, just like eco-museum, I still like it a lot, but at this stage, for me, it's not, it's not very um, practical? to do? But, in the future or something, I will still wanna do something related with eco-museums, or anthropology.⁶⁰

[I then asked her why the eco-museum idea was not practical]

Just, basically it doesn't give you, um, cause in the United States, in, even in the U.S. very few people do these kind of things. Eco-museums are more popular in Europe or Canada. So, first I don't, I can't find out if I wanna like, find a place is very hard, like I have to go out of the country. It's just not very practical, so... And, if I want to do something in China, I have to, like get fundings and everything, it's just not very practical for me.⁶¹

As time went on for J, and she began to research the idea of the eco-museum, the possibility of doing something so grand seemed to become out of her reach. Not only that, but after having tempered her imagination she saw her anthropological pursuits best suited as a hobby, as opposed to a full-time career or lifestyle. The eco-museum was no longer "practical" and instead the prospects of getting a job with a Ph.D. in business became the better option, given that she had certain advantages due to her relationships with professors in the program, as well as its usefulness in terms of leading to a more appropriate 24/7 type of occupation.

On the one hand, the loss of naiveté resulting from the sociology class with regard to her perspective on capitalism and American society is indicative of the type of influence that her time in the U.S. has had (in this case, her graduate courses). Her new

⁶⁰ J, interview with author, 15 September 2006

⁶¹ Ibid.

viewpoint may have made it easier to accept advice that sounded more realistic or “practical”, namely, to seek career options that provided more economic stability and ultimately to move away from her previous goals and ideals.

J is not the only international student from China to make this shift however. Apparently there are numerous other Chinese students who enter the U.S. with the intentions of pursuing advanced degrees and academic studies and later decide to shift and focus on pursuing a career in the business field, finding that the business world is more lucrative.⁶²

As an American Studies scholar, the potential and possibilities opened up by the “eco-museum” concept made it particularly interesting for me. By providing the community in question the opportunity, resources, and forum to establish its own museum, this gives the community the chance, not only organize the exhibit around “solving the problems in the community” as J put it, but also to determine its own manner of exhibition. When the eco-museum concept is understood as an opportunity for the organizing community of the museum to retain the power and position to exercise some agency with regard to the articulation and production of meaning, and social knowledge from the resulting exhibit, the possibilities are positive.

While a Foucauldian critique of museums would recognize the relations of power as always being in favor of the appropriating “collectors and organizers” of the exhibit as they display and exhibit “the other”, an eco-museum would (ideally) have the community standing in the position of power with regard to determining its own means of

⁶² See Qian Ning, Chinese Students Encounter America (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002): 95-115.

representation, as they display and exhibit themselves.⁶³ This would go far toward disrupting the traditional “poetics and politics” of exhibiting other cultures.

As a researcher I must admit that I had to suppress my desire to correct her view regarding the benefits of working in something that will provide more of a stable income and then pursuing your true interests as a “hobby”. I realized that the advice she was following ran counter to my personal opinion and yet I could not make it my goal to convince her that this was wrong (even though I politely mentioned that I disagreed, I posed it as something to think about as opposed to something that I desired to argue). Ruth Behar aptly explores the issue of objectivity and personal involvement in *The Vulnerable Observer* where she examines the differences between “distanced” ethnographic research and getting “down in the mud.” I realized that there had been change in J’s life and this was a good thing, even if I mourned the death of the idealistic dream from her former life that involved, among other things, nothing less than empowering the powerless of a nation.⁶⁴

Y2:

Y2 is a 29 yr. old Ph.D. graduate from the aerospace engineering department, currently working in Northern Virginia. When we first met in Spring of 2005 he had been in the U.S. for nine months, which coincided with the beginning of his Ph.D. program. He came to this country specifically to study at the University of Maryland

⁶³ Henrietta Lidchi, “The Poetics and The Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures”, in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage University, 1997): 151-222

⁶⁴ Ruth Behar, The Vulnerable Observer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996)

because, “America has the best quality education in the world and maybe I can get uh, more opportunity to my career after I graduating, and that’s the reason I come to America.”

Unlike J, he earned his Master’s in aerospace engineering in China and came to the U.S. strictly to earn his Ph.D. He had no previous personal experience with this country or interactions with anyone from this country, so coming to the U.S. as a student required major cultural adjustments and provided a tremendous learning experience.

In the case of Y2, his opinion that his opportunities were better if he studied in the U.S. was contradicted by some of his family and friends,

“umm, a lot of people that, before I came to America, a lot of people told me that, ‘you will have a good future in China, you don’t have to go to America to get a Ph.D. degree’ you know, uh, to them, Ph.D. like uh, the geek or something like that, uh but I think uh, this degree is uh, very important to the future. To my career, to my life, so, I, I came here, and actually I’m a, I’m a stubborn man (*laughs*) I, I don’t uh, I don’t take the, I mean I don’t, do the things people told you to do, just because they told you. I will, I will make my decision.”⁶⁵

In fact, their advice is not far off. While the quality of education in China may have some areas of needed improvement, the government provides far more money for students to attend college than has been previously available and there are greater numbers of students attending universities in China now than there have been in the past 30 years.

But Y2 decided he wanted to pursue the opportunities that were available on his own, apart from his family and friends advice. He believed that his chances of advancing his career were best served by gaining a Ph.D. here in the United States and possibly becoming a university professor. Since the University of Maryland had one of the top

⁶⁵ Y2, interview with author, 13 May 2005.

programs in his field (although his first choice was to attend the University of Michigan) he made plans to enter the Ph.D. program at Maryland when he received news of his acceptance.

Since he had not had any personal experiences with this country prior to arriving in the U.S., I asked him to reflect on his opinions of this country before arriving; to think about how much he knew and where he got his information from,

“yeah. But I would not say a lot. But uh, we did learn some of the, the facts about America. You know, we have the internet, we have the media, we, actually we watch a lot of Hollywood movies in China, so basically I have view of the society in America, but not very detailed...”⁶⁶

Although he admittedly did not have much first-hand knowledge of this country, he decided that what he had gained from the media and movies was convincing enough to pursue an advanced degree here in this county. He mentions the internet, media and movies as his main sources of information, and these were sufficient to support this major decision to relocate to another country. This may be a clue to how influential the media is, as well as the determination of Y2 to do what he thought would be most beneficial for his future.

He describes himself as being stubborn, so the resistance from his family and friends had the opposite effect and motivated him to come to the U.S. all the more. Nevertheless, the fact that the information he gathered from popular media and internet sources was enough to cause him to confidently make this type of major life decision speaks to their perceived credibility.

In an effort to better understand the knowledge base that he was drawing from when learning about the U.S. when in China, I asked him to describe specifically what

⁶⁶ Ibid.

movies he liked then and the difference between his preferences when he was younger and what he likes to watch now,

“yeah, uh, I would say that I like the action movie when I was young, but now I would say I like the movie like *Million Dollar Baby*. The type of, like that because they are telling the reality, right, of this society, ok...”⁶⁷

Whereas previously movies were merely for entertainment value, his later criteria regarding movie preferences represents a shift toward viewing films as cultural resources for learning. The mention of *Million Dollar Baby* represents a category of movies that deal with difficult, sometimes controversial, subject matter and do not end with the typical “Hollywood” ending. This movie in particular begins as a movie about a female boxer and her coach, but when the boxer becomes paralyzed the film moves into the question of whether euthanasia is an acceptable practice. These type of thematic elements and turmoil represent more of the “reality” of life, particularly in the U.S.

When he was younger, his favorites were action movies. Movies that usually have some sort of violence, but a “good guy” who fights the “bad guy(s)” and ultimately wins in the end. However, his entertainment preferences as he has matured reveal a desire to see representations of challenging issues and a curiosity about how Americans would handle the situations presented. While he mentions this film as telling the “reality of this society”, I do not include this quote to imply that Y2 has a naive belief in the “truth” of this plot, or even that he feels the film is based on an actual person’s life. But rather, as a representation, this film is a story that he has added to his repertoire of information sources that serve as an indicator of American viewpoints, behavior, choices, etc.--as he says, it tells the “reality of *this* society” (emphasis added).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

In “Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera”, Christine Gledhill studies soap operas and their audiences as a way to observe “how the social world enters fictional discourse.”⁶⁸ This means not just observing plot outcomes, but also “aesthetic form and emotional affect.”⁶⁹ One intriguing concept introduced in this article to discuss the relations between text and audience is that of “reading competence” which refers to, “the interpretive frameworks and reading skills employed by different social groups or ‘readerships’ to decode signs or representations.”⁷⁰ This “competence” is determined by “the specific interpretive frameworks and social practices of given groups” which then results in “differences in cultural usage.”⁷¹ This helps to put Y2’s comments into perspective so that we see he has not made an incorrect judgment regarding the “realism” of the movies he watches, he has made a choice about the possibility that this film could aid in his understanding of the social world he is now operating within.

One of the reasons Y2 found this type of “operational” knowledge important was because he recognized that there is cultural knowledge, regarding codes of conduct for example, that he simply did not know. For example, when asked what he likes about this country he said,

Y2: well I guess I would say it’s the freedom, or the, yeah the freedom in the U.S., you understand?

Q: give me an example of something.

Y2: Yeah, you know the Diamondback, the university’s newspaper? Yeah, the

⁶⁸ Christine Gledhill, “Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera” in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage University, 1997): 342.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 343.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 375.

⁷¹ Ibid.

students can make jokes on the president, you know the Mote. But in China you can't.

Q: about the, make jokes about the president of the university?

Y2: yeah , yeah, you can't [*in China*]. And you can't complain, the university complain, the university complain (*about*) the faculty, you can't. And you can't talk about bad things about the leaders of the nation. And, but here you can.

Um...basically you can express your, your thoughts, your feelings, uh...

Q: ok, um, let me ask you this question, um, what do you think would happen if someone in China did complain about the, the university...

Y2: yeah, they'll give you a penalty for it. Like, uh you can't get your degree.

That's uh, the more serious, case. But, I would say, that uh, we can't express our thought and our feelings freely, that uh, you know, that besides uh, the law, there will be other implicit rule underlying the law.⁷²

When comparing the United States with China, he noticed a difference when it comes to freedom of expression. Based on what he has seen in the Diamondback newspaper he feels that Americans enjoy the freedom to disrespect authority in ways that would be unacceptable in China. In fact, that is one of the things that he appreciates most about this country and helped him make the decision to come to this country. Despite the opinions of those in his sphere of influence, he decided to strike out and pursue his education on his own terms. As a result, it is not surprising that the individual freedoms enjoyed here in this country are personally appealing to him.

His intrigue about the fact that there were students that complained about, or made fun of, the president (as if they were special), showed that this type of expression was new to him and something that he did not feel able to do himself. He uses "you" when discussing the freedoms of American students, and "we" when discussing the conditions in China, implying that even as he is located in the U.S. as a student he does not consider himself eligible to be a partaker of the freedoms he admires as a U.S. resident.

⁷² Y2, interview with author, 13 May 2005.

This outsider status has been reinforced based on certain interactions with fellow students or faculty/staff as he states, “I mean, the language is as a obstacle. Maybe after a little while, my English is improving, I will talk to them a lot. Sometimes when I, when I want to talk to them, I can’t comprehend, so...”⁷³ For Y2, this isolation extends to those within his academic department regardless of age,

“well, uh, there’s a, this secr-, secretary in my department, and she’s in charge of the money, paychecks, and every two weeks, well we, not, not, not only me, when we, uh go to talk to her to get our paychecks, and she’s I, I would say she’s very rude to the foreign students and I, I don’t like it (*laughs*). I don’t like that. Just because I can’t speak English well doesn’t mean I...you mean, you can see them, this is a university, there’s such kind of people, I can’t understand it.”⁷⁴

Y2 describes this woman’s attitude as extending to other foreign students, two other foreign students in his department from India specifically. It is interesting that when describing these students he says that they speak English “very well” which implies that although he felt that she treated him a certain way due to his English speaking ability, this type of treatment extended to other students who he considered to be proficient English speakers. In fact, he later amends his statement once he reflects for a moment and concludes that her treatment is due to the fact that they are foreign students.

In the end he decides that the distinguishing issue is their nationality, and when asked whether he felt that this secretary would treat a first generation Chinese-American the same way she treats the international students in the department he said “no.” So, he has concluded that race is not the issue here, but it is instead their nationality. Following this line of argument, if he were to behave more as an “American citizen” than a “foreign

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

student” he would not receive the same treatment from this secretary.

In order to explore the issue of race further, I asked about how he views racial difference he said, “um, I don’t I don’t see any difference. Yeah, either Black or White...either Black or White. I mean, to me, they are all American.”⁷⁵ The mere fact of being born in this country is enough to mask (or erase) one’s “otherness”, and thus become acceptable. I decided to probe this deeper to determine whether this was consistent with the way that he viewed race in China as well, so I asked whether people in China treat others differently by how they look and he said,

“Uh, no, cuz uh, in China, everybody, I would say that almost everybody, look the same, look the same. Uh, we don’t have, you know, like in America you have Black, you have Latino, you have White, you have Asian. We don’t have, we, we just (...) in China, that uh, over 90% of the people, I would say, they are the, they are all the same race.”⁷⁶

In other words, his opinion is that race is not an issue because the majority of the people are the same race and therefore is not an issue the way that it is in America. This is a similar trend with regard to other Asian countries and how they view the issue of race in their country, specifically Japan.⁷⁷ However, when the discussion moved to women/gender, he did make some comments that reflected a racial binary with regard to his attitude about women. As I began asking about his friendships and who he spent time with the conversation moved to his relationships with women. In the midst of this, he

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ For more information on how the Japanese view the outcasts in their society known as Barakumin, as society considered to be ethnically homogeneous, see Barbara Finkelstein in “Educating Strangers: A Comparison of Cultural Education Policies and Practices in Japan and the U.S.” Patterns of Value Socialization: A Comparative Study. Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1998.

began to describe how he (and his friends) views American women,

“yeah, um, we, we will say that American women are open-minded, and, (*laughs*) some of them are very hot, and some basic uh, I would say basic view, and naturally we don’t know too much about America. Yeah, I don’t know too much before I came here...Yeah, they [Chinese women] are more conservative and, that’s uh, compared to the American women. (Q: Um) But, but most of the, most of the Chinese women work, all their lives, ok, so, that’s not the case in America. In America, when you’re married and you’re mov-, women, uh, you will stay at home and be a housewife, or some other, ok, but most of the Chinese women will work. They are more conservative.”⁷⁸

He was open about the fact that he was not currently in a relationship with an American female and that he had never been in one. He also admitted that he did not know much about America before coming to this country, but then he follows this statement by venturing to discuss his views of the differences between the two groups of women. His view of American women is consistent with the traditional view of the American housewife--attractive “girl-next-door” as stay-at-home wife and mother. His limited knowledge of this country provided a basis on which to form his opinions regarding the differences between American and Chinese women.

I found it interesting that he began by discussing general characteristics of American women themselves, and then moved into a comparison *between* American women and Chinese women. This sort of binary construction is investigated in Ferdinand Saussure’s work on linguistics. When discussing the meaning of words and language he theorizes that, “The value of a word will be the result only of the coexistence of the different terms.”⁷⁹ There came a point for Y2 in the course of his response when he

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Saussure, Ferdinand, “Brief Survey of the History of Linguistics” from *Third Course of Lectures on General Linguistics*, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/index.htm>, accessed 16 March

could not speak about American women on completely independent terms because he did not have the a cultural vocabulary sufficient to speak about them in that way. He had to describe them in a way that made sense to him, and in a way that he felt he could speak intelligently about; something he had some personal experience with that he could draw from--his knowledge of Chinese women. In comparing Chinese and American women, Y2 was able to use a series of comparisons to make up his definition of these two groups of women by exploring the differences between them.

When comparing American women to Chinese women, his main descriptor is that Chinese women are more “conservative”. He specifically mentions this twice and in the context of the conversation in which he makes this statement, we were discussing attitudes women have toward work. However, he later shared that this statement was also describing their attitudes toward sex. He has come to believe that American women are more promiscuous and sexually uninhibited than Chinese women, and this was based in part, on his year of living in the U.S.

However, he mentioned popular culture (TV shows, music, movies, etc.) as the main source he utilized to gain information about the U.S. So he is drawing from his previous understanding of American life based on what he learned from popular media in China. This is again a case where his views of the sexual activity of American women is not based on personal experience, but how he has come to interpret the messages he has viewed and the meaning he has prescribed to them. Based on this information, he then compares what he has observed of Chinese women to what he has come to learn about American women, and forms the conclusion that they are more promiscuous.

This is not an unreasonable conclusion to reach when looking at some of the ways women are portrayed in popular movies and TV shows. Y2 mentions that one of his favorite artists to listen to while in China was Mariah Carey. Mariah Carey has been in numerous videos where she has made a point to put her physical body on display with various outfits and choreography (ex. *Fantasy* remix video). Carey has frequently performed songs about relationships with men and has alluded to sexual activity in the process. Comparatively speaking, she could be considered one of the more “conservative” artists as she is not the only American R&B singer who chooses to sing about relationships and romance. Taking this into account, it is not hard to understand why Y2 would come to believe this, especially when he observes the relative absence of similar types of music from native Chinese artists.

As his Ph.D. program progressed, he shared that his interactions with classmates and others in his department were difficult to manage because he misunderstood their behavior and conversation. He regularly participated in a weekly English conversation class in order to practice and improve his English skills because he saw this as the main barrier to his ability to make friends and participate in conversations in a relaxed manner. These exchanges came up while participating in the English conversation class, as well as with friends in his Engineering classes and through the Chinese Student Association. He states that the majority of his opportunities to make friends are with his Chinese classmates since his studies take up the bulk of his time. But because of his anxiety about his English ability he does not feel comfortable interacting or conversing with others in English,

“my English is not so good, so far, but I’m keeping practicing, so, I guess the

language is an obstacle for to make friends or (Q: right) uh, you know, people, some people I met in the swimming pool are much older than me, and the guys in the weight room are much younger than me (*laughs*) (Q: right, right) so that's the problem, yeah."⁸⁰

Y2 describes going to the gym and the swimming pool (he is referring to the facilities at the Campus Recreation Center, which are free for Maryland students because the fees are included in tuition) but finds that he is unsuccessful in finding people to interact with that are the appropriate age for him. The younger, undergraduate students usually make up the majority of those who go to the weight room, while he finds that those who are older than him are the ones he encounters at the swimming pool. As a result,

“most of the people I talk to are my [*Chinese*] friends, and not many, in my department. Some of the people in my department are very old, and sometimes we don't have too much time, because we have to spend time on our research, so we don't have too much time for the activities. Basically, I will talk to some friends about the school, at night, so, and yeah...”⁸¹

This shows that for Y2, activities outside of class are not fruitful areas where he has developed associations, and even his department has lacking since he feels isolated from other students due to age differences and the rigors of graduate study. These experiences became the first indications to Y2 that the cultural knowledge that he gained from the media was insufficient. In the end, social aspects to the university are lost on Y2 as he feels unable to access the social circles available to him,

“the language is as a obstacle, maybe after a little while, [as] my English is improving I will talk to them a lot. Sometimes when I, when I want to talk to them, I can't comprehend, so, some of them are very nice and as long as you want

⁸⁰ Y2, interview with author, 13 May 2005.

⁸¹ Y2, interview with author, 13 May 2005.

to talk to them, they would like to talk to you.”⁸²

The University of Maryland sponsors various English conversation programs and other activities that provide opportunities for social or cultural exchange and interaction to international students and scholars. However, in the wake of restrictive immigration policies enacted after 9/11, a number of programs and departments that offered these types of services were severely affected by the resulting decline in enrollment. This has made it difficult for students like Y2 to find assistance with improving their conversational English.

An article in the May 12th, 2005 issue of *The Diamondback* titled “ESOL Programs Financially Burdened” cited a report from the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs which estimated that “at least 1,000 professors at collegiate intensive English language programs across the country lost their jobs and a quarter of teachers are no longer full-time.”⁸³ The reports also states that “enrollment in intensive English language programs at colleges across the country decreased 19 percent from 2002-2003” and while the number of international students coming to the U.S. has increased exponentially over the past 5 year period when compared to the previous 10 years, international student enrollment has been on a decline since the 2002-2003 academic year.⁸⁴

The effects of this drop in enrollment on the national level has been borne out at

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Sara Blumberg, “ESOL Programs Financially Burdened”, *The Diamondback* 140, 12 May 2005, p.1.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

the University of Maryland as the article states that the number of graduate applications received dropped from 10,674 in fall 2003 to 6,777 in fall 2004, with a number of students complaining of waiting over a year for acceptance of their visa applications.⁸⁵ This led to enrollment in the Maryland English Institute's English immersion program dropping 40% in 2003, forcing a reduction in M.E.I. faculty from 16 to 6 since fall 2001.⁸⁶ These types of programs would have gone a long way toward helping Y2 become more confident with his English speaking ability.

University President Dan Mote has spoken out regarding the stricter Visa regulations and the importance of international student education at Maryland (particularly students from China). He has sought to make connections with Chinese universities to establish student exchange agreements and partnerships, as demonstrated by recent agreements made with Beijing Normal University, Zhejiang University, and Sichuan University; as well as pending agreements with Tsinghua University.⁸⁷

In fact, following Mote's trip to China in the summer of 2006 when he established these agreements and discussed further plans to expand on the existing relationship between the University of Maryland and Chinese colleges, there appeared another *Diamondback* article called "Bridging Two Cultures" which discussed the expansion of the University's relations with Chinese Institutions.⁸⁸ The article credited this expansion

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "UM President Mote Builds Ties to China's Top Universities", Maryland International: Connecting the University of Maryland and the World (Summer 2006).

⁸⁸ Arelis Hernandez and Kevin Rector, "Bridging Two Cultures: University Expands Its Relationships With Chinese Institutions", Diamondback 56, 16 November 2006, p.1.

to President Mote, as well as the work done by the Confucius Institute and The Institute for Global Chinese Affairs, which have received such a reputation with Chinese students seeking educational opportunities in the U.S. that one graduate student was quoted saying “Chinese students know about the university before even applying here.”⁸⁹

This type of acclaim and promotion sheds some light on the motivation expressed by Y2 and his willingness to endure the short-term difficulties of social discomfort in order to gain the long-term satisfaction of what many consider a superior education in an American institution.

Chapter Summary:

Both J and Y2 described gaining much of their understanding of the U.S. from movies and TV shows while in China. In fact, they identified movies and popular culture from the U.S. as their main source of knowledge and information about life in the United States. As a result, they both created versions of what America and Americans would be like based on images from sitcoms like “Growing Pains” or films like Million Dollar Baby.

Popular culture provided them with the material necessary to form juxtapositions between life in the U.S. and life in China, particularly concerning family life and the role of children in the family, as well as the value and quality of education. “Growing Pains” provided J and her friends with a different perspective on family structure and that appealed to them because it appeared that children in the U.S. were more privileged. When compared to their position in their own families in China, the children in this TV

⁸⁹ Ibid.

sitcom had more freedom and respect within the family and they assumed this was a reflection of the typical “American” family structure.

J describes typical parents in China as restrictive and controlling about their child’s activities (“living their lives through their children’s lives”) and while J says that her parents were not the same as her friends, it is telling that she describes her parents as very supportive of her graduate studies given that J’s parents had their college education interrupted due to the Cultural Revolution in China. Their lack of ability to continue their education could motivate them to support J in pursuing hers.

In turn, Y2’s interest in Million Dollar Baby is a progression from the action movies he was interested in as a child. Action movies are typically characterized by action for action’s sake. However, as his curiosity about the U.S. grew he sought out movies that informed him of the opinions and decision-making (i.e. culture) of Americans. Y2 sought movies with mature content in an effort to determine how Americans handled situations based on their background and cultural environment. This was a type of cultural education. But both Y2 and J began to describe their initial understanding of life in the U.S. as either inaccurate or inadequate, particularly when it came to classroom discussions and personal interactions with other Americans.

The mediascapes created from the available media content J and Y2 had access to in China provided images which in turn became the material for representations of American life. The narratives they formed in China, based on the images picked up from electronic media, provided multiple elements that congealed to create scripts of imagined life in the U.S. These scripts included Y2 and J as future U.S. occupants, however their

imagined representation was later amended once further cultural information was gained after a further period of stay, and new imagined lives were created as a result of first-hand experiences.

I find Appadurai's assessment of the collaboration between media and imagination and their impact on individual's perspectives worldwide to be one of the most intriguing concepts from the book. J and Y2's accounts provide support to the claim that mediascapes influence the perspective one has of societies and lands unseen, and the images they viewed assisted in the formation of ideas about the "other" that would otherwise have been impossible.

Chapter 3: The International Scholars

C and K

C and K are both international scholars currently taking advantage of the opportunity to gain some knowledge of American culture at the University of Maryland while on sabbatical. They are professors from Chinese universities located in the southwest region of China where they teach English and American literature, and incorporate aspects of American culture as central themes in their classroom instruction of literary texts. They both have earned Ph.D.'s in English and American literature. Their stay at the University of Maryland was actually one stop among several universities throughout the United States to departments related to their subject areas. They just finished a visit at the University of California, Pomona for 4 months and planned to visit one other university on the east coast before returning to China. They were using these visits as an opportunity to observe classroom structure, student-teacher interaction, and teaching styles utilized in U.S. university courses in the hopes of finding techniques they could utilize in their own classes.

I conducted joint interviews with them as opposed to doing separate, individual ones. My initial contact with them was by e-mail and when we were able to organize a face-to-face meeting based on our schedules, they requested that I interview them together because they felt more comfortable. Once I met with them and conducted the first interview, we decided to keep the same interview format, which I think helped the interviews remain tension free. I recognize there are drawbacks to conducting the interviews this way, particularly that there may have been some reluctance to express

certain ideas or recount certain experiences in front of the other participant. On the other hand, I found that there were some advantages when I observed the way that the participants bounced ideas off each other and utilized the presence of another person in the room who could provide missing information or finish incomplete thoughts.

C is a 42 yr. old male professor of American and British literature (as well as American and British culture). He received a B.A. in liberal arts, with a specialization in English, British and American literatures. He went on to complete a Ph.D. in history, focusing on American history and American culture. He has been a professor of English and literature for over 15 years, and he currently teaches at an institution which specializes in science and technology. Because of this, his department is somewhat neglected in terms of funding and recognition; in fact he described the situation as “prejudiced.” This is a national trend in China as the country tries to improve its educational system and university rankings among the world’s top institutions. To spearhead this push, Chinese institutions have focused on improving in those subjects with easily quantifiable results, mainly science and technology. In addition, these are areas that they feel will bring the most prestige and opportunity for university expansion and growth.

I should note here that there is more of an authoritarian system in China than in the U.S., where speech that criticizes government policies and practices is censored, which in turn stifles academic debate. The impact of these restrictive practices may be most evident in the liberal arts where scholarship can “often involve critical thinking about politics, economics and history, and China's government, which strictly limits

public debate, has placed relatively little emphasis on achieving international status in those subjects.”⁹⁰ So those in the sciences (both students and faculty) have directly benefited from the recent advances and funding increases in China compared to those in the humanities or social science areas.

K is a 44 yr. old associate professor of English and American literature at the same university as C in southwest China. K completed her undergraduate degree in liberal arts with a focus in English language, American popular culture and literature and her Ph.D. was in English. K has been a professor for over 20 years, teaching courses on American popular culture, and was in the process of conducting research while at the University of Maryland. K describes her university as more “balanced” with regard to the institutional support for all of its subject areas, so she enjoys a certain amount of freedom in the way she instructs her class because it is a popular course with many students. C also describes that his course is a popular one with students, despite the particular emphasis toward the sciences. They both explained this success as stemming from a fascination that they notice many undergraduate students have with “all things American.”

During the course of the interview, we talked about a growing trend that they noticed from the students in their courses in China, both undergraduates and graduates, becoming more interested in coming to the United States to attend universities. K describes this trend and has allowed this interest to inform the content of the courses she teaches,

K: Because I think that most of the students, practically speaking some of the

⁹⁰ Howard W. French, “China Luring Scholars to Make Universities Great”, New York Times, 28 Oct. 2005, newspaper on-line, accessed 11 May 2007.

students want to study in the U.S., so they just want to know how to do that, educational opportunities and...so what I've done is try to introduce some of the history of the American educational system, and the difference in the present educational system, and how to apply, and some differences in the students in the U.S. Because, the education system between the U.S. and China, and some students have this kind of idea that if they study very hard and are very diligent, they will make progress. But they don't know that there's a different kind of system that is...different from lecture. But I think that they think it interests more...*[tape fades, but she mentions that students think there will be less work]*.

Q: so, you think that they think that there will be less homework here than...?

K: YES!

Q: ok...

K: some of the students will think this way, and, but they will be interested in study, they think there will be more interesting study and more popular..."⁹¹

It is telling that she says the students believe courses in U.S. colleges will be easier. Not only does she think her students believe the workload will be lighter, but also that the courses of study will be more interesting. K has worked hard to reach the level of academic achievement that she has, so it is frustrating to hear that her students do not desire to take on the academic challenge and rigor required to succeed. While in China she had to work hard to learn English language and literature with minimal resources or access to sources of information. On the other hand, her students have a wealth of knowledge at their fingertips that was unavailable to her.

It is not hard to understand why some of her students would assume that there would be less homework in the U.S. considering the way U.S. schools are portrayed in popular culture. Many times, schools and classes are presented as the gathering place to socialize with friends, in-between parties held outside school. I would venture that this is not far from the attitude some students in this country have toward school. So, when Chinese students compare this image to the way schools are structured in China, the logical conclusion is that school in the U.S. is easier because it appears to be so different

⁹¹ K, interview with author, 24 April 2006.

from their school experiences.

Both C and K observe students in their classes that believe school will be easier in the U.S., which disappoints them because they remember the struggles and difficulty they had as students in order to progress in their study of “Western” society and culture. C and K instruct their students on the differences between the two systems of education to cause their students to be better prepared for these differences when they encounter them. A common problem encountered by international students from China is the difference in classroom structure, mainly the fact that at the university level (especially at the graduate level) discussion is encouraged and/or required. Because this is not the case in China, this level and type of participation is difficult for many students to handle.

Both C and K mentioned this as a challenge that they plan to better prepare the students in their classes for, since C and K state that many of their students are interested in pursuing an education in the U.S. Even though the classroom culture is different, they both enthusiastically describe students that are extremely motivated to come to the U.S. and seem undaunted in their decision.

C had some additional reasoning behind the interest many Chinese scholars have in coming to study at American institutions,

“So uh, well actually in my country, a lot of people will take coming to the U.S. as the dream. Uh, a lot of people are dreaming of coming here, just like a lot of immigrants are coming here to realize their American dreams, but a lot of scholars and for a lot of students, they wish to come here to study, to learn more, to learn what’s new. For the governments, they want these people to learn what’s new to give them better service back home. so, that’s why, that’s what makes us to come here.”⁹²

The comparison he makes between students and immigrants coming to the U.S. to

⁹² C, interview with author, 24 April 2006.

realize their “American Dreams” is a fruitful one because the implication is that both groups are coming with a sense of urgency. In fact, he himself mentions that his main motivation for coming on sabbatical to tour the U.S. was due to the fact that he teaches on American culture and yet had never personally been to the United States. He hopes to be able to utilize the experiences he gains to enhance the quality of his classes by supplementing his course material with first-hand knowledge, something that he says many professors in Chinese universities are lacking. C desires to provide his students with the best, and believes that his time spent in the U.S. will go a long way toward achieving this goal.

I was intrigued by his statement that the Chinese government supports the aspirations of students that want to study abroad, in the hopes that they will bring their expertise back to China. In lieu of providing college institutions that can directly compete with those in the U.S., the goal of the Chinese government in the meantime is to encourage (or recruit) top Chinese/Chinese-American scholars in the U.S. to come to China and help establish prestigious programs in their respective areas of expertise. Both C and K know of scholarship programs that support sending students to universities in English-speaking countries, and anticipate that the number of these scholarship programs will soon increase. Whether for temporary stay, or permanent residency, there are many involved in the shifting *ethnoscape* of potentially international, migratory individuals with interests pinned on “American Dreams”.

In order to get a better understanding how C saw his personal role in influencing his students, I asked whether he felt the courses he taught on English, literature, and

“American culture” contributed to fueling his students interests in pursuing academic studies in the U.S. He initially responded with skepticism,

“uh, I don’t think so. Yeah, it could be that...but uh more important, uh, the U.S. has been the image in my country, in my countrymen’s minds, that it seems that this is a very powerful country, wealthy, and so a lot of people who wish to come here will have different motivations. For students, they like to learn more, for the rest of the other people they like to make money, for the other maybe still other for the political reasons, it depends, but uh, so, but uh in general people will think that this country is wonderful in many, many aspects, so that is what attracts them.”⁹³

However, K had felt that the types of courses they taught had more of an impact on the students,

“actually, I think it’s the teaching of American studies, or American culture or literature, will help the students to come, to wish to come here. So I think the propaganda always is very important, and I think that, apart from that, students can , how to say, learn much from the internet...from the books, TV, there are a lot of ways, uh in China, some students are, how to say, subject to the teachers, that is they want to listen to what the teacher said. Ok, teacher also have the authority, so if we introduce something that is about America, ok, culture, heritage, this kind of thing to students, it will help students to understand more and they will have this kind of motivation to want to know much about it. Because all, the student always listen to what the teacher said, to what they write, or...”⁹⁴

In the long run, C and K see the increased interest in American culture and study as a good thing. While they are both critical scholars, they have a deep personal interest in the study and development of American culture. C even enthusiastically stated that newspapers and other media outlets in China advertise the benefits of study abroad in an attempt to generate interest. He said that there are a number of journalists in China that understand the importance of a democratic atmosphere on college campuses and seek to promote this drive in others. The convergence of the journalist’s personal interests and

⁹³ C, interview with author, 24 April 2006.

⁹⁴ K, interview with author, 24 April 2006.

the fact that some newspapers still receive state-sponsored funds has led to a multitude of inducements regarding graduate study in English-speaking countries, as well as a sense of urgency about improving the state of the educational system in China.

K has made teaching about American culture an integral component of her classes stating that “I could not teach this course without talking about culture. There would be no context to understand.” However, one thing that makes this context difficult to convey is the traditional structure of classroom instruction in Chinese culture. K specifically describes the format as “teacher-centered” which does not allow for student discussion, dialogue, or exchange. So students are not used to speaking in class. K describes the importance of this difference and how it motivated her decision to take her sabbatical here,

“students in America are more active. They are used to talking in class. In china, students are more passive. They are not used to talking in class and they are not comfortable talking in public, in the open, when in class. This makes it difficult to take the teaching style here in the U.S. and do it in my classroom. It would take some time...the purpose of coming here is to have more experiences, and uh, so, that’s the reason why I transferred from California to this state. A lot of the, being a teacher, I also wanted to know the teaching styles, there are so many differences between U.S. teaching and China. So, in California also, I want to observe the differences in teaching a class, and try to first of all, learn something about how, the teaching is organized in the class and then just compare the differences and then try to find some methods that will be suitable for China too. And also I want to learn something about American culture. It’s very difficult to define the word “American culture”. But I think that it relates to perhaps the way of people or people’s behavior, I think there are so many differences between the actual behavior and the examples in books.”⁹⁵

This cultural adjustment would be difficult for a new Chinese student in the U.S., particularly a graduate student where classroom discussion is expected. While it may vary depending on the academic program, this transition period is common and requires

⁹⁵ Ibid.

negotiation. While Y2 felt that his English speaking ability was more of an issue outside the classroom, J mentions difficulty operating within both settings and the struggles she had becoming confident speaking up in class. K says that she tries to highlight this difference, particularly because this is not often something that students factor in when comparing the difficulty between courses in China and those in the U.S. But because it is so different from what is normally done in classes in China, students do not readily involve themselves in this type of participation. So, she plans to take incremental steps to integrate this type of teaching style into her classes for the benefit of her students.

C agreed that he had difficulty with in-class discussion as a college student. He explains that his shyness was overcome while in an English course taught by a visiting professor from the United States who emphasized course participation and discussion, which many of the students struggled with initially. It took time for him, and the other students, to adjust to this type of teaching style and be successful. He described this course as a “valuable learning experience”, one that he hoped to replicate by creating an atmosphere of classroom engagement for his students and pass on some of his enthusiasm and drive.

While K recognized the benefit of incorporating a classroom format that was more conducive to open dialogue, she emphasized that this would be extremely difficult considering the way classes are conducted here in the U.S., and the adjustment required to utilize these techniques in her courses in China. This difficulty has become clearer as she has observed courses at the universities she has visited while on sabbatical,

“I remember a class I went to in California, it was a history class, the teacher did a very brief lecture of history, like, that class was just an introduction of the Asian, the Asian history. Uh, and the teacher asked the students, especially the

students of the Asian country's how much they knew about they know, how much they knew about their Asian history. And then, after the student's first of all discussed, had discussion, and then asked students to ask the questions in class, and then divide the students into groups to discuss some questions...and I still remember last month, when I went to a class, it was interesting class, the students asked so many questions in class. And one of the female students and one male students were selected to answer the questions, and it doesn't matter whether the answers were right or wrong, but just to express the ideas, so I was very interested by that. But, in China it's very hard for us to do this kind of presentation, students are very I think, not so active, very passive, and we see, well, they are reluctant to speak or especially before the public, before the teachers especially."⁹⁶

Even though K found the discussion style seminar to be ideal, and expressed interest in the type of open format that she observed in these classes, her recognition of the difficulty of this task became evident. This was not due to a lack of enthusiasm or progressive thinking, but rather her perception of her student's readiness to accept this type of change in classroom structure. Because she has observed that Chinese students are resistant to participating in classroom discussion, getting her students to overcome this barrier would require significant time and effort.

C expounds on this relationship in an attempt to provide some explanation for Chinese students' resistance to classroom discussion,

"The Chinese students are more reserved, in the class. Maybe, certainly they need to be inspired to give uh, they need to give(n) uh, much encouragement before that can be active. I think this is, has something to do with uh, Chinese culture in the way to raise their children, usually the older generation will regularly tell their kids not to open their mouths very often before, I mean, before they have a careful thinking. Not to say anything, anytime that they want, just thinking before they speak, think before you leap is the prophesy (*laughs*) That's the old generation usually, they're very traditional, so this certainly will lead to our students being more reserved, more, I should say, to themselves."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ C, interview with author, 1 May 2006.

When reading the assessment C and K make of their students in China with regard to their classroom behavior, and their contrast of the American educational system with that of China, it would seem contradictory to note that Chinese students were considered among the “model minority” with regard to educational achievement. The classroom structure in China is designed with an authoritarian relationship between teacher and student. It has been said that this power relation serves to reinforce the authoritarian nature of the Chinese government, as well as the Chinese family structure and the relationship between children and parents (or even elder family members).

It is this hierarchical structure that was considered a strength to scholars studying Asian students and their academic achievement in the U.S., because it was “teacher-focused”, and therefore supported the “lecture format” used in most U.S. high school (and college undergraduate) classrooms. The divergence from this lecture format is usually not fully implemented until the latter years of the undergraduate curriculum, if at all (depending on the major).

What *has been* considered a strength in terms of the cultural values and traditions that many believed to be responsible for the success and achievement of Chinese/Chinese-Americans, is considered by C and K to be a hindrance. Which is interesting when considering that C and K present their opinions from the vantage point of professors within humanities/English field, which is a specific area that depends on the student’s ability to effectively communicate their ideas; in writing as well as verbally.

The “model minority myth” is explored adequately in a literature review by Sau-Fong Siu, titled “Toward and Understanding of Chinese-American Educational

Achievement”, where the issues of data collection, who is considered an “Asian-American”, and the social, cultural (and particularly) historical context which surrounds the question of educational achievement by Chinese-Americans is well explored. Siu particularly highlights that the educational advances made by Chinese-Americans are best understood in light of the historical context surrounding the statistics in question, especially when taking into account federal laws or university policies that hindered their access to schools (ex. racial quotas or restrictive racial policies).⁹⁸

Conversely, it can be argued that the reasoning behind cultivating multicultural classrooms and diversity in class composition as well as educational content is that this creates a nurturing and optimal learning environment. While there are language proficiency issues that can be a hindrance to academic success, gaining the ability to negotiate multiple cultural contexts can be liberating and enriching in and out of the classroom.⁹⁹ So it can be argued that having a multicultural background is a strength that allows one to understand situations from a unique and comprehensive perspective.

When looking at C and K’s comments, it is interesting that J mentions having issues with classroom participation and Y2 does not. While there may be issues in considering J and Y2 Chinese-Americans, since the traditions and cultural values of mainland China are relevant to the success of Chinese-Americans, J and Y2 should have benefited. This discrepancy between J and Y2’s experiences, and the apparent

⁹⁸ Sau-Fong Siu, “Toward An Understanding of Chinese-American Achievement: A Literature Review”, Report #2, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children’s Learning, February, 1992.

⁹⁹ For case studies examining the educational advantages to cultural diversity see Anne Campbell, “Cultural Identity as a Social Construct”, in Journal of Intercultural Education 11, (2000): 31-39.

contradiction with the Asian educational achievement literature, leads to two interesting points: one is that J and Y2 studied different subject areas--J started in a humanities/social science field and Y2 was in more of a “hard” science; the other is the fact that J is a female and Y2 is a male.

The structure of classroom interaction is significantly different with regard to science and humanities graduate courses. Y2 explicitly states that his difficulty with language barriers came with people *outside* of class because his courses did not require much active participation in terms of class discussion. It was the exact opposite for J and her courses, which led her to feel doubly frustrated and uncomfortable conducting classroom discussions and interacting with classmates and departmental colleagues. Her communication barriers were consistently foregrounded during her daily exchanges.

In addition, there is the fact that J is a female and the struggles that many Chinese females face engaging in classroom dialogue was something that C made a point to emphasize when recounting his experiences as a Chinese student with an American teacher who emphasized class participation,

“yeah, at first, at first, and, especially for the Chinese students, it was especially difficult for them to open their mouths. A lot of them, *especially the girls were shy*. One thing, the second thing was that there were...in that kind of culture, so it’s hard and difficult for them to open their mouths, difficult for them to adjust, but later on I think um, most of the people change in one way or another to some degree. Like me, uh, I was promoted to um, open my mouth anytime I want, anytime I want to speak the difference, anytime I want to express myself, so, uh, especially for, I think later on I realized the goods to open your mouth very often, especially students to learn a foreign language, they need to open their mouth very often to practice their oral, to practice orally I think we should so we have a lot of problems teaching English in China because they won’t open their mouths. They can read, they can write, but can never speak.”¹⁰⁰

The practice of speaking out in class is one that was particularly difficult for the

¹⁰⁰ C, interview with author, 1 May 2006.

female students to engage in. But C goes on to point out that it was an essential component to succeeding in the class he took, as was the case with J. After a prolonged period of struggle, J said that she was able to become more comfortable with sharing her ideas in class and this translated to being comfortable outside of the class. Y2 was not forced to do this and although he sought opportunities to practice his English conversation skills, he never felt comfortable holding a prolonged conversation in English and he carried this discomfort throughout his graduate studies.

C and K also come with their evaluations from a particular perspective as professors of English and literature. So their observations about Chinese student's reluctance to engage in discussion in the courses they teach is connected with a simultaneous a part of their recognition of the importance of classroom participation. C and K have accepted classroom discussion as essential to becoming successful students, learners and ultimately teachers of American culture. They desire to equip their students with a richer appreciation for American culture than is commonly found.

Speaking of American culture, they noticed a heightened interest in American popular culture, particularly popular movies. When asked to give an example of a specific movie, one such movie was *Titanic*. When speaking of this movie K said, "female students were interested in understanding this kind of love. They were interested in the love story of this film as a way to know American culture."¹⁰¹

What has now become an epic type of film, *Titanic* is a love story that takes place on a ship that sinks after running into an iceberg. While the sinking of the Titanic is somewhat of a cultural icon, in Britain as well as the U.S., this movie really foregrounds

¹⁰¹ K, interview with author, 1 May 2006.

the love relationship of the two main characters while the sinking ship becomes more for dramatic affect than an essential element to the film. This was also a movie that J mentioned as a favorite, and the explanation for why these female students were interested in this film lines up with Y2's interest in American movies and a window into the "reality of this society." The way love is portrayed in American popular culture is typically idealized and, the film *Titanic* is no exception.

What is interesting to me upon reflection of this film is that while there are key points in the film where the female star of the film (Kate Winslett) is framed as the object of the "masculinized gaze" (particularly love scenes or scenes where she is portrayed nude), the interest that K describes these female students having in this film supports the argument that there is a feminine subject-position which appeals to the female social audience. The way love is presented in this film provided an avenue to understand American culture, and these female students saw this presentation as reflecting values that most Americans hold dear.

K recognizes differences in the way males and females approach movie spectatorship. She made a point to emphasize that the particular interests that her students may have when it comes to popular movies is gender specific,

"for the female student, I think that most of the students tend to lean toward the emotional type of movies. Those that deal with love and relationships. Although some of the male students enjoy these types of movies as well...but I think it more strongly appeals to the female students. For the male students, they prefer more action movies. Those fast-paced with action and fighting."¹⁰²

They both described boys as being more interested in action movies and remarked how the action movie is a very popular genre in China now. In fact, these films are so

¹⁰² C, interview with author, 24 April 2006.

popular that films released in China now are adapting their traditional techniques and plot sequences to meet the demand for these types of films among Chinese youth and young adults. As C describes,

“films in China now have car chase scenes that before were only seen in American films. Now there are shootouts in cars done like Hollywood style. It has become a common theme in action movies today.”¹⁰³

As these types of movies are distributed abroad, the abundance of similar thematic elements then creates a demand that filmmakers scramble to meet. It is no coincidence that as the opportunity to display American movies began to open up, there was an over-abundance of products available to fill the void. Indeed, as Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto observes in an article tracking “the connection between global circulation of images and national and regional boundaries” he says,

“No matter how increasingly the autonomy of nation-states is being eroded, a cinema’s national specificity cannot be subsumed under the general uniformity of global image culture or, put more bluntly, the global hegemony of contemporary American mass images”¹⁰⁴

Following up on the repeated duplication of the traditional Hollywood plot, as C and K observed taking place in the Chinese cinema, is the simultaneous abundance of Hollywood films in general. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, discussing the abundance of

¹⁰³ For a thorough examination of the changes in Chinese cinema as a result of Hollywood influence which supports C’s observations, detailed outline of the simultaneous growth of documentary and experimental cinema by Chinese filmmakers for films termed “intercultural cinema” because they mediate multiple cultures, textual and contextual analysis of various films to illustrate shifts in the portrayal of the Chinese Diaspora, and analysis of the expansion of Chinese cinema globally, see Gina Marchetti, From Tiananmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens, 1989-1997 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, “Real Virtuality”, in Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 108.

Hollywood films on global market, state that even though Hollywood produces only a fraction of the worldwide production of feature films,

“Hollywood films...often cover their costs in the domestic market and can therefore be profitably “dumped” on Third World markets at very low prices”¹⁰⁵

Accompanying this increase in the availability and abundance of American movies C and K mention related cultural influences, particularly on the younger generation. Now certain things are becoming more popular or standard, which conflict with traditional values. One thing C mentions is the notion of privacy,

“In China, privacy has never been a guarantee. In China, cities are crowded and people have traditionally not had the idea of privacy like here in the U.S. But now, especially among younger generation, there is the idea of privacy. Children expect privacy from parents, where before this was not so. This is result of the influence of American culture.”¹⁰⁶

This issue of privacy seems to play out most prominently in the home and with regard to family relations and relationships. The idea that children deserve privacy is new and one that conflicts with traditional, Chinese family values. In an article entitled “Keeping Up With The Jiangs”, Noreen O’Leary examines a contemporary Chinese family’s consumerist values and progression of these values through multiple generations represented in a single household (grandparents, parents, and youngest child).¹⁰⁷

The article discusses the impact of changes in attitude toward consumerist culture and the adoption of a capitalist mentality. Throughout the article, there are moments

¹⁰⁵ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “From the Imperial Family to the Transnational Imaginary: Media Spectatorship in the Age of Globalization”, in Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 148.

¹⁰⁶ C, interview with author, 1 May 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Noreen O’Leary, “Keeping Up With the Jiangs”, Brandweek 48 (Jan. 2007): 14-20.

when the family members reflect on the impact of these changes on family values. In fact, while the parents and grandparents each claim that traditional Chinese values are firmly fixed and in place, there are numerous instances when they contradict themselves with comments that highlight the differences between the younger and older generation.

For example, this quote from the article supports the continuation of traditional values,

“Yu Sheng, the household's elder patriarch, has no doubt that day will occur. He says that while Chinese lifestyles may be changing at warp speed, the country's values are not. "Kids still maintain the family spirit. You must educate them, have them get married and then have a baby. Harmony for the family is the most important thing.”¹⁰⁸

However, juxtapose this with the following statement made by his wife,

"Of course our life is not traditional Chinese, like my parents who worked hard and saved money. Unlike my parents who make plans for the future, we can't plan because we have no savings. Life is a short time. I have the energy to make money and I want to enjoy life and take good care of that time to have a better life”¹⁰⁹

What becomes evident is that the changes in China's social and economic structure have had profound effects and the impact remains unclear, even to those in the midst of them.

The fact that C mentions privacy as noticeably different is only one change in Chinese family relations, family structure and everyday family practices.¹¹⁰

C also mentions the difference in certain types of freedoms and relates this to the field of academia,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ For background on shifts in consumerist values as a result of mass media influence see Hye-Jin Paek and Zhongdang Pan, “Spreading Global Consumerism: Effects of Mass Media and Advertising on Consumerist Values in China”, Mass Communication & Society 7 (Fall 2004): 491-515.

“In China, as a scholar, your work cannot go outside of the boundaries of your discipline. If you do, it is possible that your work will not be published by your publisher or the government will sanction you, will not allow it. This is somewhat different from the situation here in the U.S.”¹¹¹

What is interesting to note here is that C and Y2 both have a similar understanding of the implicit rules regarding forms of expression regarding authority, or that might provoke the reaction of authority. Their concerns and possibilities are basically the same in respect to the affect that tradition has on censorship, as practiced at the university level. I do not doubt that their description is accurate, nor am I criticizing their description of the available options. Rather, I want to note that they both described the differences in freedom between the U.S. and China as amounting to different ideals of respect for authority. This particular difference sheds some light on the explanation that C provides with regard to why he believes Chinese youth are attracted to American popular culture and media,

“it’s much more of an admiration, and there are a lot of fans to those stars. Actually, for example, the U.S. is a superpower, we say that in China. (*laughs*) Because with, it’s mostly well-known for it’s advanced technologies as well as its culture. So its culture will certainly draw a lot of attention from other cultures, not just from China. And the American culture also stands for progress or the most advanced, so a lot of young people will just try to worship such as the most modern, something like that, so that’s why they would like to, or we say that sometimes they try to imitate what the American people do without much thinking and therefore there is a lot of misunderstanding and they’re eager to learn about this country, but they can just learn it from the media, and the media sometimes are quite prejudice from side-to-side. So uh, this young people for example they also mimic from the movie, and they judge everything according to what they have seen in the movies, they judge the...of the American people...”¹¹²

C receives confirmation of this statement each semester because, although he teaches his courses at a science and technology focused school, the multitude of students

¹¹¹ C, interview with author, 1 May 2006.

¹¹² Ibid.

who enroll in his course are doing so on an optional basis. Therefore, their registration and attendance demonstrates their interest in the topic covered; namely American culture. He says that the courses well attended, and that students often come with questions about American culture related to particular movies, ways of living, classroom structure in the U.S. and other topics that show an interest in more than just literary texts. The interest on the part of his students reflects the importance of generational differences when observing media interest and influence as it relates to globalization.¹¹³

C was also very interested in discussing what he saw as the differences between American and Chinese culture. He had an interesting and fairly exhaustive list of differences: from shopping habits, to meal preparation, to the municipal government structure, to average city size and living conditions. I believe the most fascinating were those that involved cultural attitudes toward family relationships. Here is an excerpt explaining his perception of American's views on marriage,

“uh, generally, or we say morally they are different too, like when they, when we come to marriage for example, uh, in Chinese minds, the American people take their marriage take their marriages not so seriously, so there are a lot of divorce and since their divorces are very easy for them and marriage is something like a game. But in China, when you want a divorce, there is a lot of persuasion which will make you become very difficult to decide to divorce, like the property is certainly one thing, and a lot of friends, especially family and relatives, family members, most of them will come to persuade you and ask you to think it over...”¹¹⁴

So as explained here, there is considerable social pressure from family members and friends to prevent married couples from getting divorces.

¹¹³ For an outline of the connections between youth culture studies and globalization research see Sunaina Marr Maira, “Planet Youth: Asian American Youth Cultures, Citizenship, and Globalization”, in Asian American Studies After Critical Mass, ed. Kent A. Ono (Massachusetts: Blackwell publishing, 2005): 144-165.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

When asked to describe their own interests in American culture, both C and K present it differently than what they observe operating in their students. Their answers to this question can be categorized in three ways: their childhood interests, their decision to major in English or literature, and their current academic interests in teaching and researching American culture. Each of them has been speaking and learning English or American literature for a while...as K put it,

“It’s been a long time (*laughs*) because English literature is my major and, I’ve been speaking English since I was very young, and uh, at first I liked to study English literature, and then I learned American literature...because, as you know that, when you learn the language you must learn the culture of that language...I think at first, 15 years ago, the word culture was not used as it is today, not so much as American literature, but it was maybe one way to represent the culture. So I think that is a long time for me to be exposed to American culture and literature...because I’m interested in literature and American culture, especially American women’s culture because I like it...I liked it from when I was young and when it came time to choose a major I said, “ok, English literature and language...I liked literature before that, but just as Chinese literature. Sometimes I would read some novels, some English novels, so, also some English literature, I think this is the main reason for me to choose that...Now I teach a course that, it’s literature, but it also has American culture and history, popular culture.”¹¹⁵

I thought it quite illuminating that as she was recounting her experiences learning “American culture”, she also included a brief disciplinary history of American Studies and the use of the term “culture”. In fact, her speculation that literature and culture are used interchangeably is accurate given that the disciplinary beginning of American Studies was essentially a combination of History and Literature. She utilizes the flexibility afforded department to incorporate culture as a contextual way to understand literature, as well as use literature to provide an understanding of “American” culture. She specifically mentions her interest in “American women’s culture”, and at the time of our interview she was working on a project examining the differences in men’s

¹¹⁵ K, interview with author, 24 april 2006.

and women's writing styles in Western literature.

C makes it a point to describe the scarcity of material that was available as he began to study English language and literature in college, but his initial motivation for pursuing subjects with a documentary he saw back in middle school. Although a documentary is assumed to be more historically accurate than a Hollywood movie, it can equally fall into the realm of representation as a particular *interpretation* of historical events. So though we are discussing the impact of mediascapes on the imagination, mediascapes include the whole of the available information that makes up the representation of the region in question. This includes texts other than movies and sitcoms as well.

As far as his decision to choose English language and literature as his major in college, he humorously described the deciding factor to be his poor scholastic performance in math and sciences up to that point.

One of the main goals of each of their courses is to help students become more culturally critical in an effort to compliment their existing proficiency with technology and media literacy...

“Uh, I think my students are knowledgeable about basic information like, maybe not in English, but in modern things, like you find on computer, things like that. So, about the American culture, we talk about the relation to Britain, American customs, religion, traditions, occupations, they are very interested in American occupations...and uh, Some of them are very interested in American movies, so the focus is not on , how you say, the movies themselves, but on what they say about American institutions and then what this says about culture.”¹¹⁶

The interview data collected from C and K provided an alternative lens through which to understand the circumstances and challenges expressed by J and Y2. They also

¹¹⁶ K, interview with author, 1 May 2006.

added a historical context through which to better understand the social and cultural changes in China as experienced by multiple generations.

L:

L is a 42 year old female from the city of Guangzhou, the third largest city in China. She came to the University of Maryland through a special program offered through her job as a government official. She is able to come to the U.S. for a year and take courses on government administration and policy. This is an opportunity afforded select Chinese government officials to allow them to learn valuable information that can assist their professional advancement. In addition, the government has the opportunity to utilize growth in their employee's knowledge base once the participant returns home and starts back at work. So the desire to promote the development of transferable skills by the government through study at U.S. institutions is not limited to those in academia, but extends to its government officials and representatives as well.

L is also the single-mother of an 11 year old boy named Scott. He came with her on this trip and during the academic school year he attended a Greenbelt Middle school near the university campus while L was in class. This was extremely convenient for L since she did not have a car. She expressed a strong concern for Scott's well-being, and although she knew that their current living conditions and circumstance were temporary, she was pleased when she was told that he could accompany her. She felt it was important that he have school accommodations and she was pleased that he was able to join his grade in the school.

Of course, Scott is a priority for L and she has made every effort to make this experience as fulfilling as possible for him. She understands her son's interest in America as common among Chinese youth his age,

“EVERYTHING about United States is so...is so popular in China. I think so...I don't know why, maybe one is America's military influence, the other the cultural influence, you know, for example, America's...I just give you an example, [Scott], my son, he is 100% pro-American. Ha-ha, he hate any people say anything bad about America. Why? I don't know why cause, cause, we live a different life than we did here. In China, we are...we are, we are belong to a little, upper class. But here, cause we are developing country and our exchange rate is 8 to 1, so, our government just, just sponsor us some, \$1000-something dollar here, so we just live here, we just live a poor life here...I don't know why because, I think, it's, it's the cultural influence, they, they watch American movie, American movie. They eat American food, American just, American just take root in their mind from, from their babyhood...maybe that's just, that's just a long-term influence, you cannot do it overnight, but you cannot change it, once they develop the idea you cannot change it for the rest of their lives”¹¹⁷

As she tried to scroll through the potential reasons for Scott's fascination with the United States she could not fully explain it based on criteria that she could logically understand. Although she does initially mention that this is the case for others in China, she attempts to trace out the motivation for this attachment in her son. She mentions that the military influence was not a sufficient explanation (as he may not be so interested in this quality). As a matter of fact, the social status and affluence is not exact key either because when comparing their standard of living in the two countries, she feels that this would favor their lifestyles back in China. In the end, she can only offer an explanation that the media's ability to culturally influence viewers “takes root from childhood.”¹¹⁸

Without lending credence to the “Americanization as globalization” argument I should mention that I have noticed similar behavior in my 9 year old cousin. She is

¹¹⁷ L, interview with author, 14 August 2006.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

extremely consumer savvy and media literate for a 9 year old. I came over their house to visit one day and she convinced me to watch “The Chronicles of Narnia” DVD with her. Before the beginning of the movie she gave me background knowledge of the storyline, including extensive details explaining not only what would happen, but how. At one point I left the room and when I came back I lost track of what was happening. She proceeded to fill in the blanks, along with some information about what was coming up (in fact, eventually I had to tell her to stop talking about the movie because it was ruining the suspense of the film).

The film also involves a number of fantasy creatures that only exist in the land of “Narnia” and she was all too eager to describe who and what they were, and their place in the storyline. Indeed, she was keenly aware of who were the “good” vs. the “evil” characters, even if they did “bad” things, because she “read” their faces and learned that movies always clue you in to who the “bad” people are by whether they “look” scary (i.e. clothes, lighting, setting, as well as faces, makeup, hair, and especially facial expressions).

With L’s son being with her during her stay in the United States, they must go through the difficult situations they face together. She recalls one difficult moment where the difference between their lifestyle in the U.S. and China became painfully clear,

“But after my son, after my son was here, I felt, I felt very frustrated twice. One, one day is that, you know I use the same computer as my son, and I received an e-mail from his classmate. The classmate is a Chinese one, but she lived here for many, six years. She told my son that, “oh you know, you don’t have to wear the same clothes again and again”, some people’s gossip about you. About this things of you. I, but my, you know my son is young, so he, he, it didn’t have any impact on him, but when I read this e-mail I just felt very upset, and I, I even cried, I even cried myself, and I just saw we are, we uh, lived a, such a good life

in China.”¹¹⁹

This experience highlights the jarring realization that they occupied a different social standing and status than what they enjoyed in China. While L says that Scott was virtually unaffected by this incident, she shares that she was brought to tears due to her inability to provide the same affluent lifestyle in the U.S. that they enjoyed in China.

She explains why their economic status is different which demonstrates knowledge of the social forces involved. Namely, the unequal economic status her country has compared to the U.S. leads to a reduced amount of money her government can provide as well as the spending power of her dollars. Unfortunately, this knowledge does not make the circumstance any easier to bear,

I just think I lived a better life than I did here. In China I’m a governmental official, so I lived a better life than we did here. Cause we are developing country so we cannot, our government cannot afford us to live, to live a middle-class life here.¹²⁰

Unlike the other participants that described the U.S. in terms of its superiority both globally *and* personally (i.e. their access to a better education, or quality of lifestyle), L is somewhat different in that she knows that her lifestyle in China was more privileged socially and economically. While in China, she believes her economic and social status was “better” and therefore, her personal power in everyday life was more apparent. But in the U.S. she does not feel empowered, which means that although she is aware of the dominant position that the U.S. has in relation to China, this power and the full realization of “the American Dream” is inaccessible. Due to the temporary nature of her stay in the U.S., L is involved in both dominant and subordinate group activity

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

simultaneously,¹²¹

you know, in we, for my family, we got familiar with United States very much because we all like to learn English and, when we learn English, most of the learning material are about the United States. But in China, for, when it comes to the mass, to the regular people, I think American movie are very influential, but it went to TV series, it is not so influential to the, in the mainstream, in the mainstream people, but it is very, it is very popular among the well educated people, for example the university students, and the things like that, they are not, maybe some American, I don't know why, maybe some American TV has some, sexy word or, or, and they are, have so many puns, so many humors, and it is difficult to have a Chinese version...but when it comes to the university students, they like to watch the English version, it's very popular.¹²²

So while L felt on the one-hand that she was disadvantaged socially and economically in the U.S., she also considers herself and her family to be separate from “the regular people” for whom American movies are more influential. She describes herself as set apart from the mass. She also separates the university students as a distinct category due to their level of education, so that while the masses may not view certain types of TV shows or sitcoms, university students are able to watch them and interpret their meaning in unique ways.

Going back to the story about the e-mail L's son receives from a classmate, it was interesting to me that she expresses slight confusion about the fact that the classmate that shared this information was Chinese, possibly feeling that the girl should have understood their living situation. But stating that the girl had been in the U.S. for six years equated to saying that this girl had ample time to become sufficiently materialistic (the girl also shared with Scott that she herself had built a moderately sufficient wardrobe of “40-something shirts and 30-something pants”). The pain of this experience was

¹²¹ Weber, Lynn, Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework, (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001): 25.

¹²² L, interview with author, 14 August 2006.

multiplied by the fact that she felt she could not share her feelings with anyone. The only person she feels sufficiently close to that is nearby is Scott's godmother. In the end, she was able to have a conversation with Scott, with the help of her godmother, to convince him that he should ignore those types of things and focus on his education. But L explicitly says that she was frustrated by her isolation. I actually think this contributed to her willingness to share this experience with me.

She describes the social isolation as being especially painful when she first arrived in the U.S. She recalls this as a period of depression, when everyday occurrences would bring back her ignorance regarding how to navigate her new environment. As time went on she says that she has been able to become more independent as a result of having to make it on her own. She is actually able to pinpoint the moment when she changed her outlook began to build her independence,

“you know in my first several days when I'm here, I just felt very frustrated. I come here and everything was so expensive and nobody have time to talk with you, I just felt very, very frustrated. But one day when I did my shopping in Beltway Plaza, I met a very old American woman. Maybe [s]he is just 80-something, but [s]he look, SHE, she, but she just look like more than 100 yrs. old. But you know, but guess what, he, *she* was looking for something to evacuate...She was worrying about how to evacuate when any emergency happens. I just got very touched and very moved, I think “you know, I'm 40, 40 yrs. younger than her, and I am just felt frustrated, but she is 40 yrs. older than me, and she just look much older than, look more than 100 yrs. old, and lived by herself, did everything by herself, and she even like to worry about the evacuate things, by herself. In China you know, every-, everything, everybody thinks this is the govern-, this should be done by government, but government should save us from the emergen-, from the difficulty if any emergency happen, I think, “so, I learn to be independent.” You, you don't, you don't have to be dependent on anybody else, you've go to depend on yourself. I think that's very important, that's very important for me here.”¹²³

L considers it to be a privilege to have been selected to come to the U.S. and she

¹²³ Ibid.

does not take it lightly. She knows that there are many people in China who are dreaming of the opportunity to visit the U.S. and she wants to maximize this opportunity. As she says, “Not so many, not so many people are so lucky to be, to be in, to live in another country for a year, not to say a leading country in the world.”¹²⁴ L’s experience highlights the fact that she lived a very different lifestyle of privilege and social status in China compared to what she has in the U.S. In the course of becoming more independent there is the constant reminder that any ordeal she and her son may face is only temporary until they return to China.

This is not to say that L trivializes her struggles, but rather she appreciates them as learning experiences that she has earned,

“it’s a hard job for me because I, I got, I think it’s really a wond-, it’s really, sometimes I think I am won-, I am wonderful, even to, not just live here, but just support my son here for one year. It’s wonderful to live in such a foreign country, so yeah. I felt very frustrated in the first, in the very first days, and then I, I learned from American people and I felt better.”¹²⁵

L has been inspired to make full use of her available time and to learn to use the resources available to her. She has been taking courses throughout the year, but at the same time she found opportunities to travel with her son to Chicago, Philadelphia, Orlando, and Buffalo. She conducted internet research to plan her trips, booking hotels near public transportation routes. This exhibited resourcefulness on her part, but she reported that her plans did not always work because she thought the level of service in the U.S. is of poorer quality than in China, which was something she had not anticipated,

“in China, not so many people can afford the high-end products. We just use the regular...even for me, I am a government official, but I don’t even use the high-

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

end products too. The, they are nearly the same but the price is quite different in China...even [if] you don't have a car, the public transport system is very, you could say perfect. The bus come, comes to the stop every 3 or 5 minutes. We, even, even after the school term begins, [at UMD] the shuttle bus comes every 20 minutes. So, when we were in China you don't have to read the schedule, you just go there even, even [if] the last bus went off, the next bus is on the way...uh huh, yeah, so we waste, we wasted many times in waiting for the bus, [here] we just forgot to read the schedule and just went to the shuttle stop and just wait and wait, the last, the last shuttle just went off and the next shuttle is still following...in United States, if you don't have car, you, it leaves you nowhere...it's incredible, in my, you know we are, where, where we were living is uh, where I'm living is a, big city, so the service is very, the service is very good. But when we were here, maybe we, we don't have so, we don't have so much money to enjoy the service here. It just mean, when, in, in the level, when it comes to the level of my economy, my finance, the service not, not good at all.”¹²⁶

Again, L's economic status in the U.S. becomes a factor as she considers her access to quality goods and services. L mentions her differential access to “quality service” multiple times, not just with regard to travel, but also restaurants and the proximity of stores and restaurants in relation to her apartment in the U.S.

L does not have access to whatever she wants in China however, she compares prices for certain brand name merchandise and laments that even she cannot afford these high-end products in China, meaning that they are particularly expensive to buy. In the U.S., she describes the price of these products as less (since there is not as much of an import tax paid on them here) but her ability to get them is limited due to her lack of transportation.

Because L is not a full-time student, nor making a permanent living in the “world of academia”, but rather taking professional development courses on somewhat of a short-term basis (a 12-month term), she has a different mindset toward her scholarly pursuits than the other participants. She is not completing a degree program, or

¹²⁶ Ibid.

conducting research...she is on vacation. With that said, her objective for being here and taking the courses in this program was professional development and this is similar to the reasoning of C and K as they described wanting to enhance the quality of their courses with the knowledge gained while abroad. When I asked her what she wanted to learn as a result coming to the U.S., not just from the classes but from the experience of being in this country, L had this to say,

“I am responsible for making public policy. So I like to know, because America is just, several years, several steps ahead of us, so, you’ve got to know your...you got to know your, success and your failures. And, if you are successful with something, and the condition is the same, we can learn from you. But if you failed to do something, then we can, we can, I just like to learn the bright side and the dark side, uh huh, I think that’s helpful for us to make the decision. If you are, if you are, if you fail to do this thing, and we don’t, we don’t need to follow, we don’t know, we don’t need to follow you, to be, to fail again.”¹²⁷

Her goal is to be able to incorporate the best practices of U.S. government policy and practice and implement them in China. She qualifies this by saying that the “condition” must be the same, meaning that there are going to be some things that will be useless to her because the context will be completely different. But she hopes to apply what she learns of the good and the bad decisions in this country’s history to strengthen her government at home.

L demonstrated a breadth of knowledge, especially when discussing China, ranging from Chinese history to the global situation facing China today...

“some Chinese overseas students, they learned the new technology here and, they, they thought they, they could not, they could not be promoted to manager, to the, to the decision-making people here, but if they come back to China, it’s very easy for them to be to be somebody to, to make the decisions. So this people come back to China and they run a enterprise and uh, just, just this way...”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

L describes the situation facing the Chinese economy and how many professionals and scholars trained in the U.S. are returning to China to pursue employment opportunities. Many different types of people, in all sectors of China's economy, see the benefit to spending time in the United States to learn some transferable skills that could benefit the country in some way. So, even though L enjoys somewhat of a privileged life as a government official in China she knows that she may not have another opportunity to come to the U.S. again, especially with her son. Because of this, she made a decision to take advantage of this opportunity and get the most out of it that she can. This trip becomes a developmental opportunity for herself (professionally and personally), for her son, and ultimately for her country if she can utilize the knowledge she learns to improve her performance on the job.

Even though L said that she did not watch many movies herself, she did say that the media was very influential in China. She also had some illuminating information in response to my question about the types of media she thought people watched,

“American movie is the, is very popular....*Titanic*. *Titanic*, even, you know *Titanic* was released in 1998. So, even, because in *Titanic* there are, there are, they get into humans mind, when humans, got, human beings go to save, live with living and death, what, what did they react to those situations, so even our president, Jiang Zemin, the number one in United, in China in those days, commanded every Chinese people to, when he made a public speech and he even said that, every people should watch *Titanic*, so *Titanic*...so every organization buy the tickets for their employees to watch *Titanic*”¹²⁹

The fact that every respondent interviewed mentioned *Titanic* as an influential film in China is less surprising when viewed in light of the fact that the president of China gave it an endorsement and told everyone in China to watch it. Apparently, Jiang

¹²⁹ Ibid.

invited the entire Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party to a private screening in order to inoculate from the film's effect, believing that the film carried the seeds of American imperialism.¹³⁰ The film was extremely successful in China due to the myriad of ways it could be interpreted, or “decoded”. While Jiang was cautious of the American cultural influence, K describes the young women in her classes being interested in learning about the way love is understood in this country, and L says that many were drawn by its glimpse into the “human mind”.

In a way, this U.S. trip has helped to serve as a “myth-busting” experience for L because she admits that before coming to the U.S. she used to imagine a highly advanced country where modern technology was evident everywhere and at every turn, but,

“when it comes to some visible thing, America is just so-so. The house, the lawn, the car is so everywhere. But it's great, in some invisible things... uh huh, the military influence, the Hollywood, McDonalds, even with the McDonalds, we have many McDonalds in, only in our city. Just in our city, we have scores of McDonalds may-, I mean 20 or 30, I cannot remember the figure as well. America is very, very influential in the world. Before we come here and after we come here the, the idea, our idea is quite different, uh huh. When we are here we like to get, get into the life of American people and know something behind, under the surface.”¹³¹

So, even though the “outer appearance” of the U.S. appeared normal, because of what she knew of the influence and power of the U.S., she desired to learn more about what was “under the surface”, believing that the power and influence emanating from this country was evidence of things unseen. Whether there is cultural power and influence is questioned, the issue is what powers it...what lies under the surface of the dominance of

¹³⁰ James L. Watson, “Subjectivity of Meaning: The Case of *Titanic*”, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2007 ed., *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed 26 March 2007.

¹³¹ L, interview with author, 14 August 2006.

the U.S. L followed up on this idea when I asked how she got information about the U.S. in China,

“Ah, we don’t, we don’t need to find information about the United States, it just comes to us. From TV, from movie, you, you cannot imagine how America...how influential America is. In...especially in some Asian countries, I don’t know why...because maybe from, maybe from the WWII America was getting more and more influential in China...from 1949 to 1972 we nearly don’t, we, we didn’t have any relationship, so American is a litt-, America is, is really a mys-, mysterious to, to Chinese people...uh, yeah, it’s, the...it’s, I think we, we, after we are open to the, the outside world, especially to western, western world, we call it western world, and, and uh, United States is the leading, the leader of the western world, we changed, we really changed a lot.”¹³²

Without using the exact same terminology, L provides some insight into the importance of *ethnoscapes* to the spread of American culture in China as well...

For example, now the, the governor official is becoming more and more confident. Before, they just say “we are poor and the westerners are rich” and they are not so confident, they are not so confident. But now, the visitors, the tourists, Chinese visitors, Chinese tourists, start becoming more and more confident, and when it comes to their clothes, their conversation, yeah, they’re all becoming so confident. That’s one thing...uh huh. And...you know American, you know so many American people are, English people in China, so they spread American culture too.¹³³

The confidence that L describes emerging from government officials coincides with the influence of American culture. For her, the fact that the influence of the West has become more commonplace coincides with the change in governmental ideology and as the economy of China has changed, so has its position in the world. China is on the verge of becoming a global superpower and the Chinese government is both well aware of this positioning, and makes persistent efforts to solidify it.

When I asked about Scott’s schooling and his experiences with school here, I

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

learned there were some barriers that prevented his being able to make friendships.

Whether due to the structural make-up of the school, the cultural differences in parenting, or distrust on behalf of the other students parents...

“uh, yes, he made some friends. But not in the, but not in the same sense in China, you know China is, Chinese people focus very much on interpersonal relationships and, if we make friends with, with someone the friendship will last very long. But in China, everybody goes through the same room, to, to have all the lessons. yeah, for example, the mathematics teacher, the, the language teach-, the reading teacher, all the teachers come to the same classroom to teach all the lessons. So this, this 40-something students stay together all-day long, so they are, they can develop a very long friendship. Here, you go to this classroom, with this group of students to take this lesson, and go to that classroom with that group of classmates to take that lesson, so they, they can’t develop a very long friendship. And Sam is a for-, was a foreign student so it’s, it’s more difficult for him. But [Scott] is an open, an open child so he tried his best to make friends, but no, not a friend, not a long friend. They all, I don’t know why they, they don’t have many, they don’t have e-mail!”¹³⁴

The fact that the students in Scott’s classes did not have access to e-mail was shocking to her and akin to saying that they were not free to communicate with other students in a meaningful way. It seemed outrageous to her that anyone in this country would not utilize e-mail, but this is in large part due to her class perspective.

Nonetheless, while the school Scott attends is not a particularly affluent school, the availability of e-mail may not have been the sum total of what was preventing him from having substantive interactions with other children from school. L made a point to say that she thought the other students, and parents, were uncertain about how to talk to and relate to Scott. This became clearer when L described an incident that happened when a friend from school came to the house to watch TV,

I don’t know, in, let me, let me give you some other example, in my opinion American people is ‘sposed to be very open. But when one of Sam’s friends came to my, came to my room, my house, to watch TV with, to watch TV with

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Sam, his mother, his mom felt very nervous. [S]he, [s]he told [her] son that [s]he felt nervous every second, about [her] son's day with a foreign kid. I don't know why, 'cause we, 'cause I think Chinese people are very, are very peaceful, very peaceful ones. We don't, I think we don't have any bad name, we don't have any bad name in international community, but they just felt a little nervous.¹³⁵

This exchange with the student's parent intrigued me and I was curious about why L thought this parent was so nervous, The following excerpt summarizes her feelings on the matter,

L: yeah, yeah, the mass media, the mass media demonize China, very much I think...

Q: really?

L: I think. Uh huh, especially the politicians, the politicians demonize China to a, to an extent.

Q: what, is there some things that you've seen that um, that made you say that, or that make you say that?

L: oh of course. You know, for example, our, we exported many products to the United States, but this...through exporting these products, we make very little money. American business make the lion share of money. But we do all of the work, and we pollute our environment, and we make so little money. But, that's really unfair, but we have no other choice. You know, we are on the process of urbanization. 80% of our people were farmers before. Now, they went to the city and you've got to have something for them to do, so we cannot lose the job opportunity. We just by, paying the cost of polluting our environment and doing, do so many labor extensive industry. And I think, America *should* make the bigger benefit from our economy relationship, but some politicians still say that it's China who...who is the very ones who make so many American workers jobless. I think the things like that, I think some things is our, like the ideology. The, uh yeah, our ideology is different from each other, so when it comes to a different ideology you just cannot understand their end. I think...¹³⁶

In the end, I see L as trying to bridge the gap of understanding between the two ideologies that she contends with on a regular basis in the hopes of coming to some sort of reconciliation. Even though she states that "you just cannot understand their end" when speaking of Americans due to our differences, she continues to try...

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Summary:

Each international scholar in this study greatly appreciated the opportunity to visit American institutions of higher education. They each became interested in American culture at an early age and waited for the chance to come to the U.S. since childhood. The improvement in international relations between China and the U.S. created opportunities that were previously unavailable. Because each scholar lived through times of cultural and educational restrictions (particularly during the Cultural Revolution) and the more recent affluence and growth, they see the benefits that generations to come will enjoy. They are able to see the changes that have occurred in their country and in Chinese society, in terms of cultural norms and attitudes, and contrast them with their own experiences as children and youth.

These shifts have led C and K to determine (with disappointment) that the students in their classes are expecting U.S. institutions to be easier than in China and to imply that Chinese students do not appreciate the opportunities afforded them (such as increased access to Western media and educational institutions). While at the same time L recognizes that her son, and other Chinese children, has become fascinated with all things American and she herself believes that increased knowledge of American culture can bring about improvements in Chinese society.

C and K describe their initial interest in Western media as beginning in their childhood years, but their access to books and movies was limited due to the political climate in China at that time. Their trip to the U.S. was truly a long time in the making, given their childhood experiences and struggles to becoming professors of Western

literature and culture. It became clear that while they believed the students in their classes had a keen interest in certain aspects of American culture (popular movies, music and TV shows) they did not appreciate, and in some cases squandered, the resources available to provide a richer (i.e. more academic) understanding of the U.S. They desired to see the same commitment in their students that they possessed at that age.

One of the goals C and K had as professors of American culture in China was to somehow translate their experiences in the U.S. into the classroom so as to communicate their enthusiasm, as well as inspire their students. In their opinion, this involved using different classroom techniques than was traditionally used in China, and K in particular felt this would be difficult to manage. However, C provided anecdotal evidence that he himself had to navigate this type of adjustment from lecture to discussion format and thrived, suggesting that it was a matter of enduring some short-term hardship for long-term gain. He also shared that American popular culture influences were causing a shift in cultural values among youth with regard to their role in the family and respect for elders, highlighting some of the negative consequences he associated with access to American culture and comparing youth abandoning these principles with his commitment to them as a youth as well as an adult.

L also believed that Chinese youth were fixated on American popular culture and, with C and K, believed that this led to superficial changes in China that did not reflect the possibilities as a result of collaboration with the U.S. For example, L's observation that McDonald's were on every corner in China, or C stating that Hollywood influences have led to car chases in every action movie made by filmmakers in China and Hong Kong.

All three saw this trip as an opportunity to expose some myths about their own beliefs in American culture, but also gain valuable knowledge that they could take back to their respective fields and utilize for the improvement of China. L hoped to take the knowledge she gains and improve her performance as a government official, and perhaps that is why she was somewhat disappointed when she said that her courses and training did not provide an opportunity to work with the experts on her job and engage in meaningful dialogue. C and K hope to leave with useful strategies that could increase classroom dialogue among their students.

Chapter 4: Concluding Thoughts

In her book, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework* Lynn Weber discusses the American system of education and its affects on individuals as an institutional support to the American Dream ideology, “the American Dream ideology, a fundamental belief system rationalizing the current social hierarchies, is intricately intertwined with education.”¹³⁷

When C compared scholars in China to immigrants from China, and all over the world, that seek to come to the United States to achieve their “American Dreams” he was not only bringing the motivation of many scholars into a clearer focus, but he was also (without knowing it) commenting on the educational system and its interconnected nature with the search for upward mobility in the “land of equal opportunity”.

Each participant describes the U.S. in terms of its superiority and made it clear that this was the way the U.S. was represented through media in China. Implicitly or explicitly the U.S. was displayed as more powerful and wealthy, but also more expressive, caring and loving. This made the U.S. very appealing, especially to children and youth.

In “Chapter One: Introduction”, I introduced the main topic of this thesis by discussing the intricacies of exploring globalization and the importance of considering the role of images and media representation. I also introduced the participants of the study as students and scholars from China of varying age studying at the University of Maryland. I recounted my research methods, including my process and theoretical framework. By remaining self-reflexive and utilizing ethnographic/life history methods,

¹³⁷ Weber, Lynn, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001): 122.

I explored my participant's experiences and social location. I identified the main academic fields relevant to this thesis as cultural studies and media studies. I then reviewed the scholars and literature relevant to this thesis, particularly in the area of globalization, and media studies.

“Chapter Two: Graduate Students” and “Chapter Three: International Scholars” focus on my participants lives. I discuss biographical information, key experiences and viewpoints. I use long block quotations to provide voice to my participants' experiences and understandings. I decided to select a small sample of participants and conducted in-depth interviews to explore their experiences and conceptualizations in detail.

This study is a modest beginning toward examining the intersections of mediascapes and globalization in individual's lives using ethnographic techniques as a means to understand some of the manifestations and recognition of these influences by the individuals themselves. I hope that the framework and interviews presented offered rich material toward this goal. My intention was to provide validation to the numerous statements made by Appadurai emphasizing the connection between globalization and the importance of the imagination. The review of various forms of media was intended to sketch a framework of how mediascapes are at work in these individual's lives. By getting multiple perspectives on the same phenomena (popular movies and TV shows, *Titanic* in particular) the responses provided representations of the social practice of the imaginations of the Chinese participants and their perception as belonging to the imagined community of “American” society. *Titanic* became a means to understand “American” culture, interpersonal relationships and romance as popularly conceived in

the social imagination.

Also, the media consumption of the participants was an indication of their acceptance and participation in capitalist consumption and the shifting nature of ethnoscaples. Movies and media act as informational sources and provide information about the “other” that would otherwise be unavailable. In the end, recounting the influence of mediascapes on the imagination is a means to challenge unified concepts of identity and, specifically in the case of this thesis, to challenge unified concepts of globalization. Overly simplistic concepts of identity ignore the multiple social locations and cultural traditions that individuals occupy at one time. One example of this is L, who enjoyed a privileged status in China but struggled as a part-time student while in the U.S.

When considering globalization, the process of studying mediascapes and the imagination is a means to challenge the oversimplification of viewing globalization as an entirely macro-social process and ignoring the importance and influence of individuals. That was the purpose of relying heavily on direct quotations, so that the individual perspectives of my participants and their views of the social world they inhabit are foregrounded. This was done to disrupt the traditional view of globalization that deemphasizes the impact of individuals on this process. Appadurai was sensitive to the importance of individuals and the role of ethnography in studying globalization and this thesis was an exercise of that proposal.

Movies are one aspect of the overall operation of mediascapes and serve to transmit cultural information about national identity as well as everyday life. This is the type of information that my participants sought to learn when they viewed selected media

texts. Of course, this varied among the participants. The graduate students readily admitted that mass mediated films and TV shows were their main source of information in learning about the U.S. and that they sought texts that answered or addressed issues that they were curious about learning. The older scholars on the other hand, were inclined to be critical of viewing movies as message systems and felt that the messages that came through played a part in subverting traditional values.

The impact of media sources is determined by the type of U.S. media that is allowed into China and that involves some national policy and censorship practices. There are governmental policies that support the censorship of material that threatens the authority of the government, however, this has become increasingly difficult over the years and is halfheartedly enforced. While there is some U.S. media that was not available to the participants in this study, the purpose was to understand their perspectival construct of the U.S. based on the mediascape they were able to form, based on the media which they did have access to.

This study has definite means for improvement and offers opportunities for future research. One would be to have more participants involved from multiple cultural traditions. For example, in this study all the participants were from China and each participant was somewhat privileged, either to have the opportunity to pursue completion of a graduate degree, to have completed an advanced degree already, or to enjoy privileged status as a government official. Each of my participants, whether stated outright or unacknowledged, occupies a privileged position; both in the U.S. and in China.

The opportunity to earn a graduate degree, take professional development courses, or just take an extended period of observation at a U.S. university as a resident of China, (even as a resident of the U.S.) is one that few are able to partake of. When taking into consideration the fact that there are large numbers of people that are eager to take advantage of a similar opportunity if it were available to them, it highlights the privileged position that they occupy. This privileged position also comes with a certain mindset and perspective and this was apparent in some of their responses. I do not view this as a drawback, but an illumination on the way they viewed the world and others.

On the other hand, while learning their perspective on globalization and media was beneficial for this project, I do not claim that their opinions are representative of all Chinese in America. A future study would benefit from the ability to survey other individuals from China that span multiple social classes, those with college educations and those without, from urban and rural areas. This diversity would provide a different perspective on the influence of U.S. popular culture in China.

In addition, similar studies of individuals from different geographic regions would provide the opportunity to examine the historical and cultural traditions specific to an alternate geographical region and collection of social groups, but remain cognizant to influence of mediascapes and the role of the imagination in influencing the flow of individuals in ethnoscapas.

The thought of returning to China was a given for my participants and they never spoke of being completely settled. I am reminded of the way Appadurai describes the characteristic lack of stability when discussing *ethnoscapas*, for while there are periodic

stabilities for these migratory individuals they are “everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move.”¹³⁸

I believe all the participants can be considered a part of the group of shifting individuals that make up *ethnoscapes* and the manner in which media images of the U.S. were displayed in China played a crucial role in influencing their lives with regard to their interest in the U.S. This can be seen in Y2 and J deciding to pursue advanced degrees in the U.S. Both made it clear that they had not considered studying anywhere except at an American university due to the superior quality of education they expected to receive.

While L, C and K may have some maturity and historical insight to support their belief that the U.S. universities are the best in the world, their view concurs with a vast majority of popular images shown in China that promote U.S. cultural hegemony. Each international scholar attests to the influence of these images when they discuss the mass appeal of U.S. popular culture, whether it is L discussing her son or C and K talking about the students in their classes. But they also discuss the influence of the media on themselves when describe what their expectation of American life was, like when L says that the U.S. is “so-so” because it does not appear on the surface to fit her expectation of what she believes to be the most influential country in the world, or when C and K discuss their belief that Americans do not value marriage because of the various movies that portray extra-marital affairs.

The media constructions of the U.S. that my participants formed while in China

¹³⁸ Arjun Appadurai, Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 34.

inspired them to pursue available opportunities for graduate education and professional development in a place with which they had no personal experience. The transcultural connection to the U.S. they formed transcended national boundaries because it was created and cultivated in the imagination.

The admission by each research participant of the influence of media images in the formation of imagined constructions of the U.S. is itself substantiation to the influence of the global on the local and vice versa. Again, Appadurai's proposal of the importance of the imagination is fascinating in that the global is represented by the mass media content used to comprise the individual's imagined construction and the individual represents and embodies the local and the global since the individual's construction exists in their imagination. Combined with his suggestion that mass media provide the conditions for a "community of sentiment" a group that begins to imagine and feel things together, it is easy to see why this complex relationship between the media and the individuals such an important one.¹³⁹ After all, arguably all communities are now imagined communities.¹⁴⁰ In turn, those studying the intersections of culture and globalization should inevitably take into account mass mediated images, since this contributes a significant cultural aspect to globalization and the imagination.

As a researcher and American Studies scholar, I have read many critiques of constructing research, especially ethnographic research, that objectifies through the manner in which the author presents "the other". In the course of presenting my participants stories and opinions, I noticed that I was placing my own interpretation on

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 2006): 4.

them by the way I organized the quotes, and material, as well as by the way I expounded on or explained their comments, in light of other things we discussed in the interview that went unquoted, or because of the meaning that I drew from their words (though I believed I did this in a careful and balanced manner). This was a difficult task and although I will not say it was the perfect way, it is the way that I chose based on my time with the interviewees and the transcribed data.

There was a large amount of material left out and a number of different ways that the things I explored could have been presented alternatively. One suggestion explored by James Clifford is that of “plural authorship” which seeks to open up “to collaborators not merely the status of independent enunciators but that of writers.”¹⁴¹ However, Clifford describes this possibility as a “utopia” due to the fact that ultimately there are times when the interests of the researcher take the “executive, editorial position.”¹⁴²

Enthusiastically, I set out to share this project with all the participants interviewed in the hopes of eliciting their input and incorporating it into the project. I quickly realized that this was going to be difficult for a number of reasons, but two very important ones to be specific: one, some of my participants returned home during the course of the writing of this project and keeping in touch by e-mail has been particularly difficult. Consequently, getting responses from them has been a difficulty with regard to answering short questions, let alone reading the entire thesis to evaluate issues of organization, formatting, and word choice. Which leads to the second issue, in the course of presenting the idea of sharing the research with them, participants were either

¹⁴¹ James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority”, Representations 2 (Spring 1983): 143.

¹⁴² Ibid.

indifferent, not interested, or felt they were too busy to offer critique. This is less an attempt to make excuses as it is to say that although I utilized extensive quotations in an attempt to produce a “multi-vocal” text that provided the participants with an equal amount of “space” as my own, I ultimately acted as the sole decision-maker.

In future scholarship it would be illuminating to pursue a more inclusive role for the participants by stating this as a requirement for participation from the onset. I believe by offering it as an option for my participants, the idea was initially appealing but later became lost in the midst of other life circumstances and events. Thus, losing its priority.

I appreciated the opportunity to simply update the status of my participants toward the conclusion of this thesis given their responsibilities and disparate locations. C, K and L have returned to China with the enthusiasm that their experiences in the U.S. will enrich their personal and professional lives. Both Y2 and J have decided to stay in the U.S. in order to give themselves more options for economic success and stability. Even though J planned to return to China soon after completing her M.A. program, she instead decided to move on and complete a Ph.D. in which she had no previous experience, and then to stay for a couple of years after completing *that* program in order to gain some teaching experience. In addition, her perspective on the U.S. changed as she formed a more critical outlook on the U.S. and capitalism. This transition is similar to what L experienced with regard to her independence and assessment of the simplicity of the visible American environment, the more time she spent in this country the more L appreciated the cultural, economic and military affluence of the U.S.

It seems that the more L and J stayed in the U.S. and became comfortable

negotiating their social surroundings, the more they became comfortable with the idea of staying in the U.S. longer, the more analytical and the less mesmerized they were about American culture and capitalism and the more comfortable they became navigating within these systems. Unfortunately, L was not able to take advantage of any opportunities to remain in the U.S. in the manner that J was, as evidenced by her subsequent decision to enroll in a business Ph.D. program.

At the same time, Y2 says his desire to come to the U.S. intensified when people around him were telling him not to, and he wanted to exercise his independence. He is now working in the U.S. and has not expressed a specific timeframe for when he will return to China. He can return home and utilize his expertise in China just as easily as staying in the U.S. and continue to work here. During the initial interview, he was closed off to the idea of staying in the U.S. too much longer after his graduation because his student visa status would affect his ability to remain in the country. But since then this has changed...he has permanent employment status and it does not appear that he will have to worry about his visa status anytime soon.

In the end, while initially both Y2 and J found it difficult to negotiate the difference between their understanding of the U.S. and the environment they found themselves within, their naiveté about the U.S. faded while their belief in the possibility for social mobility and economic opportunity in the U.S. remained.

This project has developed and unfolded a personal interest in the stories of my participants and I began to learn more about my national identity by the way my participants viewed it. The way these students and scholars expressed their experiences

with and understanding of the United States helped me to learn more about how to view myself. At the same time, the narratives presented throughout this project provide glimpses into the intersections of various cultural traditions in the understanding and re-telling of lived experiences.

Gaining an understanding of the concept of cultural traditions in order to best represent the individuals in the context of global, cultural flows has been essential. Therefore, my utilization of ethnography/life history has been fruitful for this project as I sought to present rich and culturally sensitive data. It is my hope that this thesis has served to underscore the importance of taking individual experiences, and the individual imagination into account when examining the effects of globalization.

Bibliography

- Alfred, Mary V. and Raji Swaminathan, ed. Immigrant Women of the Academy: Negotiating Boundaries, Crossing Borders in Higher Education. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2004.
- Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities. London: Verso, 2006.
- Angus, Ian. "Circumscribing Postmodern Culture." Cultural Politics in Contemporary America. Ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally. New York: Routledge, 1989, pg. 96-107.
- Angus, Ian. "Media Beyond Representation." Cultural Politics in Contemporary America. Ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally. New York: Routledge, 1989, pg. 333-346.
- Angus, Ian and Sut Jhally. "Introduction." Cultural Politics in Contemporary America. Ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally. New York: Routledge, 1989, pg. 1-14.
- Appadurai, Arjun. Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, ed. The Postcolonial Reader. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Behar, Ruth. The Vulnerable Observer. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Bhaba, Homi. "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences." The Postcolonial Studies Reader. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, 206-209.
- Bhaba, Homi. "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." The Postcolonial Studies Reader. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, pg. 176-177.
- Bhaba, Homi. "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency." The Cultural Studies Reader. Ed. Simon During, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1999, pg. 189-208.
- Bishop, Donald M. "Chinese Students at American Colleges and Universities." American Center for Educational Exchange. Speech, 26 January 2005. Beijing, China. Accessed 29 April 2006 <<http://www.iienetwork.org/?p=56814>>.
- Blumberg, Sara. "ESOL Programs Financially Burdened." The Diamondback 140.

12 May 2005, p.1.

- Campbell, Anne. "Cultural Identity as a Social Construct." Journal of Intercultural Education 11. 2000, pg. 31-39.
- Caughey, John. Negotiating Cultures and Identities: A Life History Approach. AMST Course Packet I, Spring 2005 (pending).
- Chu, T.K. "150 Years of Chinese Students in America." Harvard China Review 5. Spring 2004, pg. 7-26.
- Chuh, Kandice. Imagine Otherwise: on Asian Americanist Critique. Durham: Duke University, 2003.
- Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Authority." Representations 2. Spring 1983, pg. 118-146.
- Craig, Timothy J. and Richard King, Ed. Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia. Vancouver: UBC press, 2002.
- Dirlik, Arif. "The Global in the Local." Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary. Ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, pg. 21-45.
- During, Simon. "Postmodernism or Post-colonialism Today." The Postcolonial Studies Reader. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, pg. 125-129.
- Emerson, Robert M., ed. Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Waveland Press, 2001.
- Feng, Peter, ed. "Introduction." Screening Asian Americans. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002, pg. 1-18.
- Finkelstein, Barbara. "Educating Strangers: A Comparison of Cultural Education Policies and Practices in Japan and the U.S." Patterns of Value Socialization: A Comparative Study. Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1998.
- French, Howard W. "China Luring Scholars to Make Universities Great." New York Times. 28 Oct. 2005. Newspaper on-line. Accessed 11 May 2007.
- Gentz, Natasha and Stefan Kramer. "Introduction." Globalization, Cultural Identities, and Media Representations. Ed. Natasha Gentz and Stefan Kramer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.

- Ghymn, Esther. "Asians in Film and Other Media." Asian American Studies: Identity, Images, Issues, Past and Present. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000, pg.135-150.
- Gledhill, Christine. "Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera." Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage University. 1997, pg. 337-386.
- Griffiths, Gareth. "The Myth of Authenticity." The Postcolonial Studies Reader. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, pg. 237-241.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews. Ed. N. Mirzoeff. London: Routledge, 2000, pg. 21-33.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, Decoding." The Cultural Studies Reader. Ed. Simon During, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1999, pg. 507-517.
- Hall, Stuart. "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'." Cultural Studies. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1992, pg. 227-240.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Identity." Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity. Ed. King, Anthony D. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997, pg. 19-39.
- Hall, Stuart. "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity. Ed. King, Anthony D. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997, pg. 42-68.
- Hernandez, Arelis and Kevin Rector. "Bridging Two Cultures: University Expands Its Relationships With Chinese Institutions." Diamondback 56. 16 November 2006, p.1.
- Jhally, Sut. "The Political Economy of Culture." Cultural Politics in Contemporary America. Ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Keane, Michael. "Television Drama in China: Engineering Souls for the Market." Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia. Ed. Timothy J. Craig and Richard King Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002, pg.120-137
- Kellner, Douglas. "Reading Images Critically: Toward a Postmodern Pedagogy." Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics. Ed. Henry Giroux.

- Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Lai, Him Mark. Becoming Chinese American: A History of Communities and Institutions. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004.
- Lau, Jenny Kwok Wah. "Hero: China's Response to Hollywood Globalization." Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media 49. Spring 2007. Online Periodical. Accessed 18 May 2007.
- Lee, Jennifer and Min Zhou, ed. Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Lidchi, Henrietta. "The Poetics and The Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures." Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage University, 1997, pg. 151-222
- Lin, Jie. "China's Media Reform: Where to Go?" Harvard China Review 5. Spring 2004, pg.116-121.
- Louie, Andrea. Chineseness Across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identities in China and the United States. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Maira, Sunaina Marr. "Planet Youth: Asian American Youth Cultures, Citizenship, and Globalization." Asian American Studies After Critical Mass. Ed. Kent A. Ono. Massachusetts: Blackwell publishing, 2005, pg. 144-165.
- Marchetti, Gina. From Tian'anmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens, 1989-1997. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).
- McDougall, Russell. "The Body as Cultural Signifier." The Postcolonial Studies Reader. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, pg. 336-340.
- Morley, David. The "Nationwide" Audience: Structure and Decoding. London: British Film Institute, 1980.
- Norton, Bonny. "Non-participation, Imagined Communities and the Language Learning Classroom." Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research. Ed. Michael P. Breen. Harlow, England: Longman, 2001, pg. 159-171.
- O'Leary, Noreen. "Keeping Up With the Jiangs." Brandweek 48. Jan. 1, 2007.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. Racial Formation in the United States: From the

- 1960's to the 1990's 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Open Doors 2006 Data Tables. Accessed 11 May 2007.
<<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/>>.
- Paek, Hye-Jin and Zhongdang Pan. "Spreading Global Consumerism: Effects of Mass Media and Advertising on Consumerist Values in China." Mass Communication & Society 7. Fall 2004, pg. 491-515.
- Polan, Dana. "Globalism's Localisms." Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary. Ed. Wimal Dissanayake and Rob Wilson. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996, pg. 255-283.
- Ning, Qian. Chinese Students Encounter America. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002.
- Novas, Himilce and Lan Cao with Rosemary Silva. Everything You Need to Know About Asian-American History. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- Robertson, Roland. "Social Theory , Cultural Relativity and the Problem of Globality." Culture, Globalization and the World-System. Ed. Anthony D. King. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 69-90.
- Ross, Madelyn C. "China's Universities Look Outward." IIE Networker Magazine. Fall 2004. Magazine on-line. Accessed 11 May 2007.
- Said, Edward. "Orientalism." The Postcolonial Studies Reader. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, pg. 87-91.
- Saussure, Ferdinand. "Brief Survey of the History of Linguistics." *Third Course of Lectures on General Linguistics*. Accessed 16 March 2007.
<<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/index.htm>>.
- Schwoch, James and Mimi White, ed. Questions of Method in Cultural Studies. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Shohat, E. and R. Stam. "From the Imperial Family to the Transnational Imaginary: Media Spectatorship in the Age of Globalization." Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary. Ed. Wimal Dissanayake and Rob Wilson. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, pg. 145-170.
- Siu, Sau-Fong. "Toward An Understanding of Chinese-American Achievement: A Literature Review." Report #2. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning. February, 1992.

- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The Postcolonial Studies Reader. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1995, pg. 24-28.
- Storey, John. Inventing Popular Culture. Malden: Blackwell, 2003.
- Takaki, Ronald. A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.
- Takaki, Ronald. Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989.
- _____. "UM President Mote Builds Ties to China's Top Universities." Maryland International: Connecting the University of Maryland and the World. Summer 2006.
- Chow, Karen Har-Yen. "Imagining Panethnic Community and Performing Identity in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*." Contemporary Asian American Communities: Intersections and Divergences. Ed. Linda Trinh Vo and Rick Bonus. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002, pg. 178-190.
- Watson, James L. "Subjectivity of Meaning: The Case of *Titanic*." **Globalization**. Encyclopedia Britannica. 2007 ed. Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Accessed 26 March 2007. <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-225011>>.
- Weber, Lynn. Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001.
- Wilson, Rob and Wimal Dissanayake. "Introduction: Tracking the Global/Local." Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary. Ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, pg. 1-18.
- Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro "Real Virtuality." Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary Ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, pg. 107-118.