CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS OF CHINESE GRADUATE STUDENTS
AT A MIDSIZED U.S. UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored the patterns of interactions and networks of interpersonal support of Chinese graduate students during their study abroad experience at a midsized university in the Midwest of the U.S. Eleven graduate students from the People’s Republic of China were interviewed to address three research questions including: 1) what are the goals of Chinese international students for their study abroad experience?, 2) what kinds of groups and networks do Chinese international students interact with at graduate school?, and 3) what barriers to interaction and participation do the students perceive in these environments?

The findings show that the students had primarily academic and professional goals and their academic goal orientation shapes their daily lives and interaction with others in the U.S. The students interacted primarily with other students from China in academic and social settings. However, some of the students built relationships with Americans who were able to relate to them through intercultural understanding and utilize intercultural communication techniques.

A better understanding of Chinese international students’ interaction with others and their new environment in the U.S. can enhance the ability of academic institutions in the U.S and American students, faculty and community members to help international students from China achieve their goals and facilitate their process of adaptation in the U.S.
Dedicated to the students from China and all other countries who bravely leave their home country to pursue their studies abroad.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The number of international students studying in U.S. higher education institutions continues to increase and much of that growth is due to the rising number of students coming from the People’s Republic of China. In the 2010-11 academic year, over 700,000 international students studied in U.S. higher education institutions contributing over $20 billion per year to the U.S. economy (IIE, 2011). Over 157,000, or almost a quarter of those students came from mainland China, excluding Taiwan and Hong Kong. China, India and South Korea currently send the largest number of students, but the 25 countries sending the highest number of students include nine other Asian countries, five European countries, five countries in North and South America, two Middle Eastern countries, and one African country (IIE, 2011). China and Saudi Arabia have shown the largest increases in the number of students studying in the U.S. at 23.5% and 43.6% respectively, but in regard to numbers, students from China make up 21.8% of all international students studying in the U.S., while students from Saudi Arabia still make up only 3.1% of the total (IIE, 2011). International students from China chose to study in the U.S. to gain educational experience they feel will contribute to their future academic and professional success. The U.S. universities also benefit from increasing their numbers of fee-paying students and contributing to the diversity of their campus with high-caliber international students.

Rising Numbers of Chinese Students Studying in the U.S.

In the late 1970s the People’s Republic of China (PRC) began a process of political and economic reformation that has transformed the country from a relatively secluded and underdeveloped nation to a major actor in the global political economy. Changes were needed as Mao Zedong died in 1976 and the end of the Cultural Revolution saw the rise of reformer Deng Xiaoping. Deng considered improving the Chinese economy of utmost importance and
introduced policies that “greatly altered the socialist system he inherited from Mao by reintroducing capitalist principles into various facets of the economy” (James, 2007, p. 463). Deng enacted the “reform and opening” which sought to reestablish political and economic ties with other countries and transitioned the China to a market-oriented economy, which has continued until present day. The past four decades have seen China retake its seat in the United Nations (UN) from Taiwan and increase its international trade to become the world’s second largest exporter and the third largest importer. In the same period, GDP growth has ranged from 7-13% annually, the country’s average income per capita has quadrupled and more than 270 million people have been lifted from poverty (Qin, Cagas, Ducanes, He, Liu, & Liu, 2008).

Higher education in China has also undergone a series of important changes due to changing political and economic policies; from the Cultural Revolution in the 1970’s, when education was vilified and most universities were closed, to 2010, when more than 6 million students graduated from higher education institutions (Dexter, 2010). In the late 1970’s, after the death of Chairman Mao, China’s universities reopened and began to increase enrollment. Admissions were highly competitive and based on a rigorous admissions exam, the Gaokao, students’ political performance and their class background. In 1999, due to new policies removing upper limits on tuition and abolishing the job allocation system, university enrollment around the country increased by 40%. However, universities were not prepared for this rapid increase and there have been many negative consequences. Universities took out substantial loans to expand school facilities, but many schools were still overloaded. Class sizes increased, housing was substandard and facilities were insufficient (Bai, 2006). In addition, there is little diversity or flexibility in university curricula and students and employers complain about the “teacher-centered and exam-oriented approach” (Guo & van der Heijden, 2008, p. 293), which
has resulted in “the inevitable mismatches between the curriculum of higher education and market demands, and between graduates’ aspirations and their employability” (Bai, 2006, p. 139). In order to raise the standards of the Chinese higher education system, the “211” project was enacted by the Ministry of Education allowing universities to draw most of their funding from the central government in order to “become world-class universities in the 21st century” (Bai, 2006, p. 139), but it only included 100 elite universities.

With intense competition to attend elite universities in China and a distrust of the quality of other Chinese universities, more and more students are choosing to pursue their studies abroad, in the U.S. and other countries. Also, because of the rising middle class that has resulted from economic reforms, increasingly more Chinese families are also able to afford to send their children to study abroad. Students from China choose to study in the U.S. because students and families in China believe that they can get a high quality education that will be valued by future employers in China. U.S. universities are known in China to be on the forefront of their research fields with advanced technology and experienced professors; American universities are also known to promote creativity and critical thinking (Mong, 2012). This interest of the Chinese students has been matched by the of U.S. universities’ interest and willingness to admit them.

**Significance for U.S. Universities**

Over the past several decades in the U.S., “the proportion of college budgets that come from the state generally has not kept pace with enrollment, growth and inflation” (Hebel, 2010) and most recently, economic recession has brought significant cuts in public funding to state higher education institutions. Federal stimulus dollars for education were set aside to help to alleviate funding pressures on public universities, but they are also running out and universities are being forced to make tough decisions (Hebel, 2010). Schools are seeking more private funds,
cutting courses and services for students and other strategies to spend their remaining funds more efficiently, but another strategy that many U.S. universities are pursuing is to increase the number of fee-paying international students they admit (McMurtrie, 2011). International students pay the full tuition and fee rates as out-of-state students and institutions that can significantly increase the number of international students they enroll each year can bring much-needed funding to the university.

International students make another significant contribution to U.S. higher education institutions in graduate programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) where there are not enough interested American students to fill enrollment slots for the programs. Graduate programs in the STEM fields “provide the advanced skills needed for a competitive workforce and…the research capability necessary for innovation” (National Science Foundation, 2012) and these programs can only continue if they can enroll enough students. The National Science Foundation (2012) found that about 60% of all international graduate students and 32% of international undergraduate students studying in the U.S. were enrolled in science and engineering fields. International students earned about one-third of all degrees awarded in science and engineering fields in 2009, including over 50% of the doctoral degrees awarded in engineering, computer science and physics and just under 50% of the master’s degrees in the same fields.

International students also contribute to the diversity and internationalization of U.S. higher education institutions at a time when globalization necessitates that students have exposure and experience interacting with students from diverse backgrounds. Especially for some universities who struggle to find diversity in their local recruitment pool of students, international students are one of their only sources of diversity (McMurtrie, 2010). However,
this is mainly a secondary benefit and financial benefits to the university serve as the main
motivation for U.S. universities recruiting international students (McMurtrie, 2011).

Based on their need for funds and desire for the academic excellence and cultural
diversity that international students bring to campus, the U.S. federal government and U.S.
higher education institutions have been increasing their efforts to recruit and enroll international
students. President Obama addressed the need to simplify and streamline the visa process for
international students in order to encourage more international students to study in U.S. higher
education institutions. He has called on Congress to make it easier for international students to
work in the U.S. after they graduate and his administration has also launched the Study in the
States website, which will serve as “an interagency information hub for the Department of
Homeland Security (DHS) and its partner agencies to use new, innovative ways to streamline the
international student visa process and to encourage foreign students to study and remain in the
institutions have also been investing more heavily in recruitment efforts by adding staff members
or developing international collaborations in order to increase their international enrollments
(McMurtrie, 2011). Some universities focus their recruitment efforts on Saudi Arabia and other
Middle Eastern countries where the number of students studying abroad in the U.S. have been
increasing, but in raw numbers, China contributes the largest number of students and many
universities feel that by focusing their recruitment efforts on China they “can often get the best
bang for their recruiting buck” (McMurtrie, 2011, p. A17). U.S. universities have sought to
increase the number of students from China they enroll through a number of strategies including
forming partnerships with Chinese universities, attending college fairs in cities in China, and
translating and improving their online resources.
International students make up a subpopulation of the campus community with specific needs and circumstances. As universities have actively recruited international students from China and other countries and because they directly benefit from their presence academically, culturally and fiscally, they have a responsibility to provide support and services to international students so they can have a successful and satisfactory experience studying abroad in the U.S. International students need support in the areas of immigration, language, cultural adaptation, academic success and physical and psychological wellbeing. With the support of the university’s faculty and staff, international and domestic students can have a successful university experience and contribute to the campus community.

**Acculturation and International Students at U.S. Universities**

When two cultural groups come into contact with each other, the groups will change culturally as a result of that contact and interaction with individuals and institutions of another cultural group. This process is called acculturation (Berry, 1970). Acculturation has consequences for both groups, but the impact is much greater for the nondominant group and its members (Berry, 2001). In the case of Chinese students studying in the U.S., the Chinese students comprise the nondominant group that comes into contact with the dominant U.S. cultural group.

**Chinese Students Adapt to the U.S. Environment.** As a result of contact with the individuals and institutions of the dominant U.S. cultural group, the Chinese international students change and adapt. The students must adapt in many ways in order to successfully complete their academic and other goals for their study abroad experience and to maintain their physical and psychological wellbeing while living in the U.S. (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). To complete the program of study that they have enrolled in, international students from China must
use English for written and oral communication and take courses that are taught in the style of U.S. universities. The students must also adapt to use local U.S. institutions in areas of their daily lives including accommodation, food, health, and recreation.

**U.S. Universities Make Accommodations for International Students.** Overall, U.S. universities have not made foundational changes or ideological adaptations as a result of their contact and interaction with international students from China and other countries, but they have made adjustments and additions to their institutions and services in order to accommodate international students. Many campus have offices and/or staff members who are responsible for international students services. These may include support and assistance with immigration, English language and more. Many campuses also have cultural student groups where students can interact and build relationships with other students from their same cultural group and put on cultural festivals and events for the entire campus community. Many universities have chapters of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA), which help Chinese students to network and interact with each other and also put on campus-wide cultural festivals like the Mid-Autumn Festival and Spring Festival or Chinese New Year.

Other lectures and programs on campuses may have international themes including International Education Week (IEW). IEW is a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education to celebrate international education and exchange. It generally entails a week of cultural programs at schools around the U.S. in November and the purpose is “to promote programs that prepare Americans for a global environment and attract future leaders from abroad to study, learn and exchange experiences in the U.S.” (U.S. Department of State/U.S. Department of Education, 2012).
U.S. campuses may also have intercultural student groups. They differ from cultural groups in that they do not focus on individuals of one particular culture, but bring domestic students together with international students from a variety of countries and cultural backgrounds for the purpose of cultural and cross-cultural learning. These groups provide a venue for students to interact and build relationships with students from different cultural backgrounds. However, in spite of the number of cultural and intercultural clubs and programs that are organized on U.S. university campuses, they tend to be limited in scope and participation, especially on the part of domestic students, faculty and community members.

Interaction Between Individual Chinese Students and Americans

Central to the concept of acculturation is the occasion for cross-cultural interaction between individuals of different cultural groups. This occasion occurs when U.S. higher education institutions admit international students from China and other countries and those students travel to the U.S. to enroll in an academic program of study. The Chinese students and Americans live within the same campus and local community environment, but the depth and frequency of cross-cultural interaction that occurs between individuals is affected by the individuals’ desires for cross-cultural interaction as well as cultural and environmental factors (Berry, 2001). Interaction between individual Chinese students and Americans can be a source of cultural and cross-cultural learning and an opportunity to expand their networks of interpersonal support for both parties. For Chinese international students, it can also contribute to the ability to adapt to the U.S. environment and successfully complete their goals for study abroad experience (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). However, despite the benefits of cross-cultural interaction, interaction between Chinese students and American students, faculty and community
members is limited by barriers to interaction resulting from language and cultural differences and a lack of individual interest (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a growing body of knowledge about the lived experiences of students studying outside their home country and to better understand the interactions of Chinese international students with Americans and other international students. Because international students generally come to the U.S. for a limited period of time and in order to meet specific academic and professional goals, a better understanding of Chinese international students’ contact and participation with others and their new environment in the U.S. can enhance the ability of academic institutions in the U.S to help international students from the People’s Republic of China achieve their goals and facilitate their process of adaptation to BGSU. Both institutions and students can move beyond common stereotypes and barriers and improve the educational experiences of Chinese students in the U.S. and contribute to the diversity the university environment by better integrating the Chinese students and their experiences into the campus community.

Research Questions

Research questions to be answered are 1) What are the goals/expectations of Chinese international students for interpersonal and intercultural learning and adaptation?, 2) What kinds of groups and networks do Chinese international students interact with at graduate school, and outside of required coursework, what activities do they participate in?, and 3) What barriers to interaction and participation do the students perceive in these environments?
**Significance and Scope of the Study**

The study is limited in scope by its design as a qualitative case study because it focuses on the patterns of interaction and support networks of Chinese graduate students at a Bowling Green State University (BGSU), a mid-sized, Midwestern university. However, the study contributes to a body of knowledge about the lived experience of international students studying in the U.S. because it explores the interactions of the Chinese students qualitatively from their perspective. The study also compares the students’ goals for their study abroad experience with their perceptions about whether they are achieving their goals and the impact this has on their patterns of interaction.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have contributed to an understanding of the study abroad experience of international students from China and other countries. International students move to another country for a specified amount of time in order to complete a program of study and usually the culture of the new host country environment is different from their home country. Because of this difference in environmental culture and cultural patterns, they respond and adapt in order to meet their goals for their experience. This chapter will describe prior research on the process of acculturation and adaptation for international students and how it relates to international students from China studying in the U.S.

Primary Motivations for Studying Abroad

There are many reasons why a student decides to study abroad and most students have multiple reasons that lead to their decision. These reasons can be personal, academic, professional, social, and/or economic and include the pursuit of an international job or career, learning a foreign language, experience living in another country, making international friends, for enjoyment before graduating and seeking full-time employment in their home country (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006). However, the most common goals that students have for their study abroad experience are academic goals. The choice to study abroad is ultimately aimed at furthering one’s academic studies and completing an academic program. Graduate students in particular tend to emphasize their academic and professional goals in relation to their decision to study abroad.

For international students from China, pursuing higher education abroad is a way for students to grow academically and professionally and to differentiate themselves from students who have pursued their higher education studies at Chinese universities (Wan, 2001). Chinese
culture highly values educational achievement as a means to better career prospects and upward social mobility as well as building character, and as a result, families often pressure students to succeed academically (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Chinese students who obtain a degree abroad can also benefit professionally because increasing numbers of foreign and domestic companies in China need students not only with practical and academic knowledge in their fields, but also with foreign language proficiency (Guo & van der Heijden, 2008). A degree earned abroad is seen as a good source for both (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006). A study by Spencer-Oatey & Xiong (2009) found that undergraduate students from China rated academic goals as most important, over goals for cross-cultural interaction and adapting to daily life and other studies acknowledge the academic goal orientation of international students (Bochner, McLeod & Furnham, 1977; Trice, 2004), including those from China (Wan, 2001; Zhang & Xu, 2007).

The motivations and goals that international students have for their study abroad experience will impact their experience abroad and adjustment to the host country environment as it will drive the choices in their daily lives of how to spend their time, who they interact with and more (Bochner et al, 1977). Students who have primarily academic goals devote their time to successfully completing their coursework and program requirements (Zhang & Xu, 2007) and form relationships that can facilitate and support their academic success (Bochner et al, 1977) while students who emphasize other goals like improving their foreign language ability or making international friends may devote more time to other types of activities. Understanding the goals and motivations of international students contributes to a study of the process of acculturation that international students undergo as they complete their program of study in the host country.
The Acculturation of International Students

Acculturation is the process of sociocultural and psychological change or adaptation that results from the contact and interaction of individuals and institutions from different cultural groups (Sam & Berry, 2010). As international students interact with people and institutions in the U.S., they change or adapt in order to operate within the cultural patterns of their new environment. The environment in the U.S. is also reciprocally affected by the cultural patterns of the international students; however, the effect of the environment on the students is greater and generally international students must adapt to the dominant U.S. culture more than the host environment will adapt itself to the individual students (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999). Individuals employ different strategies throughout the process of acculturation and these acculturation strategies can be categorized based on two components, an individual’s desire to maintain his or her cultural heritage and identity and his or her level of interaction and participation with the larger, dominant society (Berry, 1970). Acculturation strategies used by an individual are also influenced by the type of group undergoing the process of acculturation, or acculturating group, the individual belongs to and the nature of the larger society (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). For international students studying in the U.S., the acculturation strategies they utilize will affect their psychological and sociocultural adaptation to the host country environment and their study abroad experience.

Acculturating Strategies. Acculturating strategies for international students and other individuals who are members of the non-dominant culture and come into contact with another, dominant culture are first defined by cultural maintenance or “to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered to be important [to the acculturating individual], and their maintenance striven for” (Segall et al, 1999, p. 305). Berry (2001) defines cultural identity is
defined as “a complex set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about themselves in relation to their culture group membership” (p. 620). Acculturating individuals can be placed on a scale ranging from a high value and great effort placed on maintaining their original cultural identity to a low value and low effort. The second defining factor for acculturative strategies is contact and participation or “to what extent should they become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves” (Segall et al, 1999, p. 305). These two characteristics are independent of each other and although most individuals will fall somewhere in the middle, four different strategies are classified according to the extreme ends of each scale (Segall et al, 1999).

The four acculturation strategies defined by Berry (1970) are assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. Assimilation describes a strategy of individuals from the non-dominant cultural group who do not have a strong desire to retain their own cultural identity and patterns and seeking a high level of interaction and participation with people and institutions of the dominant culture. A second strategy, separation, describes those who place a high value on retaining their cultural identity and heritage and avoid interaction with the dominant culture. Integration is a third strategy where individuals place a high value on retaining their cultural identity and a high level of interaction is sought with the dominant culture. The final strategy, marginalization, is employed by individuals who are not able to or do not wish to maintain their cultural heritage and also avoid contact with the people and institutions of the dominant culture (Berry, 1970). Any variation of these strategies could be chosen by individuals who are free to independently navigate their own identity and contact; however, they are also affected by the nature of the acculturating group to which the individual belongs and environmental factors of the larger society, including its orientation towards individuals of other cultures (Berry et al, 1987).
Five general types of acculturating groups have been identified by their “variations in the degree of voluntariness, movement and permanence of contact” (Berry et al, 1987, p. 494). The first two groups are ethnocultural groups and Indigenous peoples. They are both sedentary minority groups whose cultural heritage and identity differs from the dominant culture, but vary in general as to whether they voluntarily or involuntarily came to reside in their current environment, respectively (Segall et al, 1999). In general, ethnocultural groups are considered to be voluntarily settled, while Indigenous groups are involuntarily settled, but in the U.S., some ethnocultural groups, namely African Americans and some Mexican Americans, did not voluntarily come to live within the U.S. population (Blauner, 1972). The last three types of acculturating groups are all migrant groups and are comprised of immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers and sojourners. Immigrants are defined generally by Segall et al (1999) as migrating to a new country voluntarily to permanently settle there, although some can be defined as migrating involuntarily due to economic hardship or other adverse circumstances in their home country. In contrast, refugees and asylum seekers are defined as migrating involuntarily (Segall et al, 1999). Sojourners are those who voluntarily travel to a new place for a limited time period in order to accomplish a certain purpose (Berry, 2006). International students, including international students from China, fall into the group of sojourners because they travel abroad to complete a program of study, whether a short-term certificate program or a doctoral program. As such, international students are generally expected to return to their home country after the time allotted to complete that program, when their student visa expires, although some choose to immigrate after completing their program of study. The acculturating group to which an individual belongs is relevant to acculturating strategies as groups who voluntarily come to new environment, like international students, may have a more favorable outlook towards change and
contact (Berry et al, 1987). On the other hand, international students and other groups whose migration is temporary may have less social support in the new environment (Berry et al, 1987).

In addition to the type of acculturating group that the individual belongs to, the multicultural ideology and makeup of the host country is a second important factor in the process of acculturation because individual acculturating strategies can only be employed within the relations that the host culture allows between dominant and non-dominant groups (see Figure 1) (Berry, 2001). Integration strategies can only be pursued if the dominant society is tolerant and open to cultural diversity. A society pursuing multiculturalism “requires non-dominant groups to adopt the basic values of the larger society, while at the same time the dominant group must be prepared to adapt national institutions to better meet the needs of all groups living together in a plural society” (Berry, 2006, p. 36). On the other hand, a melting pot ideology means that the dominant society favors assimilation and pressures a non-dominant group to conform to one cultural standard. When the dominant group pressures non-dominant groups to have little contact with the dominant group, but maintain their cultural identity, the individual strategy of separation becomes a societal norm of segregation. Finally, marginalization becomes a societal strategy of exclusion when the individuals of non-dominant groups are allowed little contact and participation in the dominant society and are also pressured to abandon their own cultural identity (Berry, 2001). For a society to be multicultural and allow non-dominant groups to integrate, there must be “a widespread acceptance of the value to a society of cultural diversity, relatively low levels of prejudice and discrimination, positive mutual attitudes among ethnocultural groups, and a sense of attachment to or identification with the larger society by all individuals and groups” (Berry, 2006, p. 36).
Acculturative Stress. International students find themselves interacting with foreign people and institutions in an unfamiliar environment and this can cause challenges and conflicts for students. The food, living spaces, language, academic culture, communications styles, patterns of interaction, and more in the host country can vary greatly from their home country and international students can feel strain as they encounter these differences. The issues arising from cultural differences are a source of what Oberg (1960) termed “culture shock” or Berry (1970) called “acculturative stress”. Both terms describe the psychological impact of environmental stressors resulting from intercultural contact on an individual. This study will use the term acculturative stress because it is more general and does not have the same negative connotation implied by the word “shock” (Segall et al, 1999).

In comparison to domestic students, international students face more challenges and stress in their academic and daily life due to cultural differences as they undergo a process of
acculturation. In a study with domestic students and international students from 37 countries studying at a medium-sized mid-western university in the U.S. international students reported less adjustment and more strain than domestic students in a measure of adjustment that focused on general conditions, interaction with host nationals, and academic adjustment, as well as, less social support compared with domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002). In a study of Chinese international students in Canada, greater difficulties in “work, family and child, language and communication, discrimination, national problems, health and disease, accident, homesickness, and loneliness” were reported by Chinese international students compared to Canadian students (Zheng & Berry, 1991, p. 460).

The stress arising from differences between the cultures of a student’s home and host countries can put strain on a student. To navigate the new host country environment and manage their acculturative stress, international students employ coping strategies. They adjust and adapt to the cultural norms and patterns of the host country in order to maintain their physical and psychological wellbeing and to successfully complete their program of study (Wang, 2009).

**Psychological Adaptation.** Psychological adaptation “refers to feelings of well-being and satisfaction” (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, p. 131) and involves the internal, psychological outcomes of the acculturation process, both positive and negative. In addition to negative outcomes like homesickness and depression, some outcomes include “a clear sense of personal and cultural identity, good mental health, and the achievement of personal satisfaction in the new cultural context” (Segall et al, 1999, p. 309). Zheng & Berry (1991) found that the Chinese international students reported lower levels of health behaviors like eating right, preventing illness and taking medicine and they experienced poorer physical and psychological health compared to their pre-departure health. Studies addressing psychological adaptation have used
measures of depression or other global mood disturbances to determine students’ psychological adaptation and they have found it to be “affected by personality factors, life changes and social support” (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, p. 131). Levels of psychological adjustment are highly variable over time, although studies have shown that students face more difficulties just after they arrive in the host country (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

The length of time in the host country and self-reported level of English language ability were both found to affect the psychological adjustment of international students from China. A student’s length of time in the U.S. and self-reported level of English language ability were both significantly negatively associated with psychological distress for 104 Chinese and Taiwanese international students studying in the Midwestern U.S. (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Students with higher levels of self-reported English language ability tended to report lower levels of psychological distress and students who had been in the U.S. for longer periods of time also tended to show less psychological distress. Another study of Chinese international students in Canada, found that levels of psychological stress followed a U-curve pattern in relation to how long the students had been in the host country with levels of psychological stress increasing from the pre-departure measure until three to four months into their stay abroad, after which time the stress abated (Zheng & Berry, 1991).

Personality traits related to attachment, which leads to “an internalized sense of security that enhances their ability to explore the environment” (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006, p. 424), and resilience characteristics, which are “personal abilities to cope with change (Wang, 2009, p. 26), were found to be related to the psychological adaptation of international students studying in the U.S. Wang & Mallinckrodt (2006) found that psychological distress was significantly higher for students who reported high levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance in their
study of 104 Chinese and Taiwanese international students studying in the Midwestern U.S. Additionally, a negative correlation was found between resilience characteristics and problems with adjustment in a study of 207 international graduate students at a southern U.S. university. Resilience characteristics were found to be better predictors of adjustment problems than background characteristics like gender, age and country of origin (Wang, 2009).

Cultural factors can also affect the psychological adjustment of students like health behaviors, expectations for coping with stress and help-seeking behaviors that vary by culture. Yan & Berliner (2009) found that “cultural factors, such as the shame and disgrace associated with admitting to having emotional problems, as well as the handling of problems within the family rather than relying on outside resources, prevent Chinese students from seeking outside help” (p. 2).

These studies provide a few examples of the psychological adaptations that students develop and some attributes that have been found to moderate and decrease the negative psychological outcomes that can result from acculturation. Overall, it has been found that psychological adaptation is highly variable and can fluctuate with time based on cultural and personal characteristics. These internal processes are more difficult to measure than social and behavioral adaptations, which have studied more extensively.

Sociocultural Adaptation. Sociocultural adaptation encompasses the more external psychological outcomes of acculturation including “the ability to ‘fit in’ or negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture” (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, p. 131) and to deal with the challenges of daily life (Segall et al, 1999). Gaining cultural knowledge, social and communication skills, interpersonal and intergroup relations, and family and community relations also fall under this category (Segall et al, 1999). Many studies have measured sociocultural adaptation in terms of
social difficulty and determined that it is moderated by other individual factors like “general cultural knowledge, length of residence in the host culture, and amount of contact with host nationals” (Ward & Kennedy, 1993, p. 131). Unlike the highly variable nature of psychological adaptation, sociocultural adaptation “predictably follows a learning curve with rapid improvement demonstrated over the first few months of cross-cultural transmission and then a gradual ‘leveling-off’ of newly acquired culture-specific skills” (Ward & Kennedy, 1999, p. 661).

**Cultural Distance, Cultural Knowledge and English Language Ability.** The students’ cultural distance from the host country culture, general cultural knowledge and level of English language ability were all found to affect their sociocultural adaptation to the new environment in the U.S. In a series of studies, Ward and Kennedy (1999) found that problems with sociocultural adaptation seem to decrease if the culture of the host country is more similar to the student’s own culture, or the cultural distance is shorter between the home and host countries’ cultures. They found that a sample of Chinese students studying in Singapore reported less difficulty adapting compared to non-Chinese students from the U.K, the U.S. and New Zealand and whose native cultures are less similar to that of Singapore (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Lee & Rice (2007) found significant differences between the experiences of European students and students from other world regions, including East Asia. The European students felt they were able to adapt and “fit in” within U.S. culture with less difficulty. The cultural patterns of Chinese students are more different from the dominant cultural patterns of the U.S. making sociocultural adaptation more difficult for them than for students who find their cultural patterns more similar to that of the U.S. (Deal, 2002).

The general cultural knowledge about the U.S as well as English language ability that students have before they arrive have also been shown to affect their adaptation. Deal states that
“knowledge of the host culture obtained prior to and after arrival in the host society is vital in making predictions about both the probable response to certain messages and the general behavior of others” (2002, p. 2). Students who have prior knowledge about the cultural patterns of the host country can better respond and adapt to their new environment. Similarly, having a higher level of English language ability before arriving in the U.S. also helps students to successfully adapt to the new environment (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988). Wang & Mallinckrodt (2006) found that English proficiency was associated with fewer problems with sociocultural adjustment for 104 Chinese international students in the U.S. Similarly, Kwon (2009) found that having a higher self-reported level of English proficiency was associated with less feeling of isolation and intimidation in a study of 165 international students completing their course of study in the U.S.

*Environmental Factors of the Host Country.* Environmental factors of the host country have also been shown to affect the sociocultural adaptation of international students including the treatment and receptivity towards strangers by individuals and institutions in the host country and the conformity pressure of the host society. Receptivity toward strangers refers to “the openness of the social climate and level of acceptance enjoyed by strangers” (Deal, 2003, p. 3) and includes the lack of or presence of discrimination. Discrimination in the host country has been found to have a negative impact on the adaptation of international students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Conformity pressure is “the degree to which the hosts explicitly or implicitly expect or require strangers to follow their [the hosts’] customary cultural and communication paradigms” (Deal, 2003, p. 3). As mentioned earlier, open and pluralistic societies tend to have a higher tolerance for cultural diversity, while more homogeneous societies often put more pressure on individuals to conform to the cultural values and practices of the host country.
Mono-cultural Support Networks. Another factor that affects the adaptation of international students is the student’s connection to and friendships with other international students from his or her home country, which can serve as a primary support network. International students temporarily move away from their family and friends in their home country, but reestablishing a support network in the host country is important for the students’ success and satisfaction in their daily lives (Winkleman, 1994). Building relationships with conational students enables the student to have a network of friends that can help him or her “adjust to a different culture and face the difficult task of communicating in a second language and they can also provide insight into how to negotiate within the dominant culture and, when necessary, provide protection from the effects of discrimination” (Trice, 2004, p. 675). In a study with 30 international students at a U.S. university, Bochner et al (1977) found that almost half of the students’ close friends and associates were from the same home country as the student in spite of the fact that there were only small numbers of international students from each country present at the university. These relationships with conational students “provide a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed” (Bochner et al., 1977, p. 291). Trice (2004) also found that over half of 497 graduate international students at one U.S. university interacted with conational students on a regular basis. This was greater than the number that interacted with other international students and American students.

Numerous studies have also explained the benefits to international students of forming relationships with host national students (Bochner et al, 1977; Deal, 2002; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Trice, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Williams & Johnson, 2010); however, this does not diminish the role that a mono-cultural support network plays in helping an international student to adapt socially, culturally and academically to the new host country environment.
Interpersonal support can come from a primary group of “close ties” that provides close friendships and support, as well as secondary or tertiary networks that build weaker ties (Winkleman, 1994). Bochner et al (1977) suggests that international students’ primary support network providing close friendship is mainly made up of conational students who can better understand and relate to the student, while the secondary support network is bicultural and made up of conational and host national students who can help the student to adapt and be successful in the host country environment. A tertiary, multicultural network serves for companionship and recreational activities and is made up of conational, host national and international students from other countries (Bochner et al, 1977).

A process of acculturation occurs when international students move to a foreign country and come into contact with individuals and institutions of a different cultural group. In order for international students studying abroad to complete their program of study and to meet other individual goals, they must employ strategies to cope with acculturative stress and adapt to their new environment. Adaptation can be psychological and related to their satisfaction and mental wellbeing or sociocultural and involve learning behaviors and cultural patterns to help international students to fit in and be successful in the host country environment. International students’ adaptation in affected by numerous variables related to the multicultural ideology and makeup of the host country, cultural differences between the student’s home country and the host country and individual characteristics of the student.

The Acculturation of Chinese Students Studying Abroad in the U.S.

The acculturation process of Chinese international students studying in the U.S. differs from that of international students with different home countries or in different host countries because of the acculturative stress and barriers to adaptation arising from the differences between
the cultural norms and patterns of the U.S. and China and the multicultural ideology and makeup of the U.S. society. The cultural distance between the U.S. and China is considerable (Zhang & Xu, 2007) and students face acculturative stress in communication, academic life and daily and social life while living and studying in the U.S.

**Communication Barriers.** A significant portion of the acculturative stress perceived by Chinese students studying in the U.S. can be attributed to limited English language abilities and the challenges of intercultural communication. Since 2001, national school curriculum in the People’s Republic of China has specified that English language education will start in third grade for all students (Lam, 2008). In promoting the study of English, schools in China utilized teaching methods that fit with their traditional exam-based, teacher-centered style. Curriculum and class structure was based on the perception that “language learning consisted mainly in studying the grammar and vocabulary of the language, largely at a written level” (Ma & Kelly, 2009, p. 406). Students did study pronunciation and practice recitation, but exams did not include oral sections (Ma & Kelly, 2009). More recently, reforms in required exams and teaching styles have stressed communicative skills, but change has been gradual and limited (Ma & Kelly, 2009). Because of this many Chinese students feel that although they can do well on a written exam, like the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) which is required for admission at most U.S. universities, they lack the communicative skills necessary to interact with native speakers of English in the new environment (Wan, 2001).

In addition to challenges with English, Chinese students in the U.S. must face different patterns of nonverbal communication, social interaction, emotional communication and social reasoning (Winkleman, 1994). Patterns and formulas for relating and interacting with others can vary widely between cultures and the students’ familiar patterns of communication may not be
successful in the new environment. Acculturative stress from a student’s perception that their English language and intercultural communication skills are inadequate is especially significant because of the impact it has on a student’s academic success and daily and social life (Olivas & Li, 2006).

**Acculturative Stress in Academic Life.** Chinese students who study abroad have proven themselves academically in the Chinese education system by completing their program of study, but education in the U.S. differs in a number of ways, including in pedagogy, curriculum, classroom setup, relationships between students and faculty and expectations of students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). The academic strategies that students employed to be successful in the Chinese education system may not provide the same results in the U.S. (Roadblocks to Success, 2005) and this can be a source of stress and struggle for students.

In China, competition to succeed professionally and economically is fierce and this competition has been complemented by a “traditional education system, in which learning is fragmented, linear, competition-oriented, and authority centered and in which there is little collaboration, creativity or communication among students” (Holmes, 2005, p. 291). The education system has been based on a system of high-stakes testing and teachers and students must focus considerable energy into training and preparing for exams (Zhao, 2009). This is in contrast to the U.S. education system, which tends to be more inquiry-based. It requires “interactive and cooperative communication strategies, and emphasizing critical thinking and practical application” (Holmes, 2005, p. 292).

Classroom teaching styles also differ in the U.S. and China. In both countries, lecture is a common teaching method, but Chinese students have found that lectures in U.S. universities tend to be less formal, more interactive and less structured (Holmes, 2005; Wan, 2001; Zhang & Xu,
Students are expected to actively participate in class by asking questions and sharing their own original ideas and interact with professors informally both in and out of the classroom. U.S. universities also assign more presentations and small group projects that require the performance of skills that Chinese students may have had few opportunities to develop (Zhang & Xu, 2007). Additionally, Chinese students may have difficulty in forming relationships and communicating effectively with their professors due to “culture and education disparities between China and America, together with Chinese students' language deficiencies” (Yan & Berliner, 2009, p. 27).

Additionally, another difference is found between the U.S. and Chinese education systems in the expectations for involvement in extracurricular activities. The U.S. education system values student efforts to foster diverse talents and educational accomplishment can be defined in variety of ways. American students have more extensive extracurricular activities to choose from and a more open schedule, which allows time to participate in activities of their choosing. Extracurricular activities range from student government and academically themed clubs to athletics and social groups and students in the U.S. are also more likely to get internships or work part-time while in school. In contrast, students in the Chinese education system are expected to spend the majority of their time outside of class doing homework and studying for their exams, after which students are individually ranked according to their scores (Zhao, 2009). They have fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities and only a small fraction of students seek internships or part-time jobs while they are in school. These differing expectations about academic time and effort mean that Chinese students in the U.S. are likely to be evaluated not just by exam scores, but by the full range of their academic and social accomplishment (Zhao, 2009).
While it is important not to overgeneralize the different styles of teaching and learning that can be found in China and the U.S. because they can vary greatly by institution and by instructor, but looking at systemic differences overall can nonetheless provide insight into the stressors and challenges that Chinese international graduate students face as they pursue their academic degree in the U.S. (Holmes, 2005).

**Acculturative Stress in Daily and Social Life.** In addition to challenges they face in a new education system, Chinese international students also face acculturative stress in their daily and social life in the new U.S. environment. Students leave behind family and friends, and a familiar environment, and must learn to get along in a society where people have different living styles, traditions, values and expectations (Gu, 2009). They may not be able to find the brands and styles of food, clothes and other products that they are used to and institutions like banks and rental companies may operate differently than they would expect. Additionally, the students must to learn to live independently in the U.S., a challenge when few have done so in China (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

Chinese students must also navigate patterns of social interactions in the U.S. that can be different from what they are accustomed to in China. Chinese culture “emphasizes formality, politeness, respect, and non-confrontation in interpersonal relations, while in contrast, Americans are much more informal, spontaneous, direct and confrontational” (Deal, 2002, p. 2). Americans are also socialized to be assertive and self-confident because those are traits valued in U.S. mainstream society, but to Chinese students, assertiveness may seem aggressive because Chinese culture generally values self-restraint over self-confidence (Deal, 2002). Differences in values and patterns of behaviors between the U.S. and Chinese cultures add challenges and obstacles for Chinese students as they work to interact and build relationships with people in the U.S.
Environmental Factors of the U.S. Due to the socio-historical context of the U.S., universities seek to provide for the specific needs of international students within a context of promoting multiculturalism, but international students still face discrimination and pressure to assimilate, though the degree of acceptance has been found to vary by the student’s country and culture of origin. One study of 30 international students at a research university in the U.S. Southwest found “a divide in the experiences of white international students and those of color” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 393). Chinese students fall within the group of international students of color. White international students in their sample were from Europe, Canada and New Zealand, while international students of color were from Asia, India, Latin America and the Middle East. Many international students of color had been part of the majority culture in their home country, but suddenly found themselves a member of a “minority” group and encountered difficulties like negative comments about their home country, hostility towards their lack of fluency in English, and isolation in and outside of the classroom (Lee & Rice, 2007). Students perceived Americans as lacking a desire to understand other cultures and whether intended or not “such apathy and unwillingness to attempt understanding translates to a rejection of international students’ cultural identities” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 399).

Coping with all of the differences between their home culture in China and U.S. culture, coupled with absence of their support network and familiar environment from home can put considerable pressure and stress on Chinese international students while they pursue their academic and professional goals in the U.S. (Gu, 2009). In response to the uncertainty and anxiety of the new environment, they act to reduce those feelings and adapt (Deal, 2002). For example, while classroom communication styles in the U.S. differed greatly from what Chinese students were accustomed to, over the course of a year, students reported that they were able to
adapt and better negotiate relationships with faculty members and perform communication patterns that were expected of them in the classroom (Holmes, 2005). Cultural differences between the U.S. and China and the multicultural ideology and makeup of the U.S. impact many aspects of the daily life of Chinese international students in the U.S. and affect their ability to meet their academic, professional and other goals for their study abroad experience.

**Integration: Cross-Cultural Interaction and Participation**

While international students cannot control the cultural or environmental factors of the host country that affect their process of acculturation, they can choose the acculturating strategy they employ based on their desire to maintain their own cultural patterns and identity and the level of interaction and participation they seek with the individuals and institutions of the host country (Berry, 1970). Berry (1970) defined four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization, based on the two approaches above, and in general, integration is the most favorable because it was found to be associated with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Sam & Berry, 2010). Integration involves a high level of importance placed on maintaining one’s cultural heritage and a high level of interaction with the individuals and institutions of host country society. This strategy may be preferred because “it entails a form of double competence and the availability of double resources” (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 478), resources from their cultural group and from larger society, which help to the student to cope with acculturative stress (Berry, 2006).

**Desire to Maintain Cultural Patterns and Identity.** Looking deeper at the effects of acculturating strategies, studies of international students in the U.S. have shown that whether or not students place importance on maintaining their cultural patterns and identity, it has little impact on their adaptation to the host country environment. One study with international
students in the U.S. found that assimilation to the U.S. culture has been negatively correlated with problems in both psychological and sociocultural adaptation, while identification with the student’s home culture was not significantly related to adaptation (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). This is unsurprising as sociocultural adaptation is measured as an individual’s ability to “fit in” and requires behavioral changes in order to interact with people and institutions of the host country. Adaptation requires some level of identification with the host country nationals (Ward & Kennedy, 1999), but this does not necessarily come at the expense of a student’s original cultural identity and heritage.

**Interaction and Participation with the Host Society and Host Nationals.** The second factor in acculturating strategies, interaction and participation with the larger society, was found to be highly related to both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Separation and marginalization are the two acculturating strategies associated with low levels of interaction and participation with the larger society. Separation, when a strong cultural identity is paired with a low level of contact with the host country culture, is related to low levels of sociocultural adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Marginalization, with little value placed on maintaining their cultural identity and limited contact with the larger society, is generally the least favored acculturation strategy and has been correlated to a higher risk of difficulties in adapting to the new environment because the individual generally lacks cultural competency and social support (Berry, 2006).

Berry et al (1987) found that higher levels of participation in the host society were correlated with less stress and better psychological adaptation for Chinese international students studying in Canada. Perrucci and Hu (1995) found the same relationship between interaction with host national students and satisfaction with their study abroad experience with international
students studying in the U.S. Ward and Kennedy (1993) also found that the more international students rely on the host culture as the primary environment for interaction and support, the stronger the relationship between psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Interaction with individuals from the host country can

provide friendship and thus help meet people’s social/affective needs; it can be a source of practical help; it can help improve language proficiency when the interaction is with speakers of other languages; and when it occurs across cultures/nationalities, it can provide opportunities to learn about other cultural groups (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 48).

All of these potential results of contact contribute to the social and cultural learning necessary for sociocultural adaptation. Therefore, students who are separated or marginalized and seek little contact with the larger society are much less likely to obtain the same level of sociocultural adaptation.

Although results across many studies have shown that integrationist and bicultural attitudes are predictors of better adaptation to the host country environment (Berry, 2001), a number of studies have shown that international students seek limited interaction with host nationals (Bochner et al, 1977; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Trice, 2004; Zheng & Berry, 2006). In a study of international students in the U.S., Trice (2004) found that with the exception of students from Canada and Western Europe, most international students had limited interaction with Americans. East and Southeast Asian students tended to be especially isolated from Americans and most felt concern about befriending and relating to them (Trice, 2004). Chinese students studying in the U.K. also reported that interacting with local British citizens was the most difficult aspect of their experience and that most of their relationships were formed with
other Chinese students (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Interviews with 20 of the same group of Chinese students emphasized and discussed their challenges in interacting with local British people. Students stated a “clash of values and lack of things in common as reasons for their low level of social interaction with British people” (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006, p. 50). They felt they had too few opportunities to interact with host national students and that the majority of their social interactions took place either with other Chinese students or international students from other countries, especially from other Asian countries (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

**Facilitating Cross-Cultural Interaction.** Efforts can be made to facilitate and increase the interaction between international students and local students in order to help international students better adjust and integrate into the new host country environment. It is not easy for international students to reach out and make connections with individuals from the host country as they navigate a new environment with different cultural patterns for communication and interpersonal interaction. Host national students, faculty and community members can help the process of cross-cultural interaction by reaching out to the international students, learning about cultural differences and about the students’ home countries (Wan, 2001). Campus and community-based programs that are designed to bring international and domestic students together for intercultural learning and socializing have been successful in facilitating cross-cultural interaction (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Winkleman, 1994), although Bochner, Hutnik & Furnham (1984) noted that this is not always the case. It is also helpful for host nationals to be patient with students’ English language difficulties and learn intercultural communication techniques like those associated with Special English.

**Special English.** Special English was developed in 1959 by the Voice of America (VOA), the official external broadcast institution of the U.S. federal government. Its purpose is
“to communicate by radio in clear and simple English with people whose native language is not English” (VOA, 2012). Special English programs have become the most popular VOA programs and English-language learners around the world use them. There are three features that differentiate Special English from Standard English. First, that Special English has a small, core vocabulary of 1500 words. These are “simple words that describe objects, actions or emotions. Some words are more difficult. They are used for reporting world events and describing discoveries in medicine and science” (VOA, 2012). Second, Special English uses short, simple sentences without idioms and only uses active voice. Third, the broadcasters read at a speed that is about two-thirds the speed of Standard English (VOA, 2012). All of these communication practices help non-native speakers of English to understand the broadcasts more clearly and thoroughly. Special English is much easier for non-native speakers with limited English language ability to understand compared to Standard English. It can facilitate cross-cultural communication by reducing the language barriers to communication between native and non-native speakers of English and reducing the pressure on international students to assimilate to Standard English.

While the degree to which international students wish to maintain their cultural patterns from their home country has been shown to have little effect on the adaptation of international students, cross-cultural interaction with students, faculty and community members from the host country has been shown to have a significant positive impact on their adaptation and ability to meet their goals for their study abroad experience. Many international students express interest in building cross-cultural relationships, but they struggle to overcome cultural and language barriers. Individuals and institutions in the U.S. can facilitate interaction between international students and host national students and others through intercultural learning and communication
and programs that bring people of many nationalities together. For international students to integrate into the environment of the U.S. university, the campus and community environment must also adapt to understand and accommodate the needs of international students from China and any other country.

Summary

The process of acculturation that occurs when international students come to study abroad in the U.S is not static or unidirectional. From the time that students from China arrive in the U.S. and throughout their stay, they are constantly learning about, reevaluating and adapting to the situations they face in the new environment. At the same time, American individuals and institutions are also learning and adapting to the international students from China and other countries, although they face less pressure to adapt since international students make up only a small minority of the campus and community population. International students face acculturative stress as a result of cross-cultural contact and language and cultural barriers must be overcome in order for international students to meet their goals for their study abroad experience and for international students and Americans to have successful cross-cultural interaction.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Case Study

This study is designed as an illustrative case study. A case study is a type of qualitative research “in which the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). Because this type of research looks in detail at a specific group of participants, in a specific context, findings are not generalizable to other populations in other contexts, nor do they describe cause-effect relationships. The aim of an illustrative case study is to explore and describe in-depth the circumstances and experiences of a small sample of individuals in a specific context that have not been studied before around a specified topic (Merriam, 1998).

A case study design was chosen for this thesis project because while many previous studies have looked at the experiences of Chinese and other international students studying in the U.S., few have focused on the interaction of international students with local Americans in a qualitative way. In addition, many studies addressing the acculturation of international students have taken the perspective that integration, defined by Berry (2006) as individuals placing a high value on retaining their cultural identity while seeking a high level of interaction with the dominant culture, is the most desired strategy. However, these studies do not address how acculturation relates to the specific goals and values of the students themselves. By exploring the cases of 11 individual Chinese graduate students studying at BGSU through semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to describe the cross-cultural interaction of the students in relation to their specific reasons and goals for their study abroad experience and their perceptions of whether they are achieving their goals.
Participants

Participants for this study were graduate students from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) who had completed one year or more of a graduate program of study, and were still enrolled in a master’s or doctoral degree at a medium-sized university in Northwest Ohio (n=11). The students were all from mainland China, which excludes Taiwan and Hong Kong, and came from cities or towns in Eastern China ranging from large metropolises of Beijing and Tianjin to small towns in the countryside of Henan or Anhui Provinces. Five students were male and six were female and their ages ranged from 23 to 34 with an average age of 26. None of the participants were married.

Six participants had been in the U.S. pursuing their current program of study for more than one year, four participants had been in the U.S. for more than two years and one for more than three years. One student was pursuing a Master of Arts degree, two students were pursuing Master of Science degrees and eight students were pursuing doctoral degrees. Their programs of study are Photochemical Sciences (n=4), Biological Sciences (n=2), Computer Science (n=2), Accounting (n=1), Media and Communication (n=1), and Statistics (n=1). All of the students received funding from the university to finance their studies in the form of teaching assistantships (n=7), research assistantships (n=3), or a research fellowship (n=1). All participants were native speakers of Putonghua or Mandarin Chinese, and upon arrival to the U.S., ten of the eleven students were required to take English courses through the university based on the results of an English placement test. During the time of this study, eight students had completed their required English courses, and two were still enrolled in those classes.

All of the students had previously completed Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degrees at Chinese universities. Three students had also completed a Master of Arts or Master of
Science in China before beginning their current program of study in the U.S. None of the participants had lived outside China before beginning their current program of study at Bowling Green State University. Ten of the eleven students had never traveled outside China; one participant had traveled to Singapore and Malaysia on one occasion for tourism.

Each student was assigned a pseudonym to protect the identities of the participants. The aliases selected were Chinese given names chosen from a list of the most common given names in China. Although it is common in China to address a person by their family name and given name or their family name and title, many Chinese students studying in China will be addressed only by their given name as is customary in the U.S. For this reason, as well as for simplification, the aliases used in this study do not include a family name (see Table 1).
### The Eleven Participants in this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Time at BGSU</th>
<th>Degree Level</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Assistant-ship</th>
<th>English coursework in the U.S.</th>
<th>Prior Education*</th>
<th>First time in U.S.</th>
<th>Prior Experience Abroad</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Martial Status</th>
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<tr>
<td>Qi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Xiamen</td>
<td>&gt;2yrs</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA in Public Management</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>&lt;26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lei</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Zhejiang Prov, Taishun</td>
<td>&gt;1yr</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BS Computer Science</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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*All students in the study completed their prior education in Chinese universities*
Setting

This study was conducted at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), a mid-sized, public university in Northwest Ohio. The university is located in the small city of Bowling Green, Ohio, which has a population of about 30,000. Bowling Green can be considered a college town, with a median age of 22 and about 47% of the population between the ages of 18 and 24. According to the 2010 census, the racial makeup of the city is 92% White, 3% Black or African American, 0.2% Native American, 2% Asian, 0.02% Pacific Islander, 2% from other races and 1% from two or more races while Hispanic or Latino or any race were 3% of the population. Bowling Green is 25 miles south of Toledo, Ohio, which is the fourth most populous city in Ohio with a population of about 287,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The median age in Toledo is 33 with only 11% of the population between the ages of 18 and 24 and the population is 70% White, 24% Black or African American, 0.3% Native American, 1% Asian, 0.02% Pacific Islander, 2% from other races, 3% from two or more races and Hispanic or Latino of any race are 5% of the population according to the 2010 census. The state of Ohio has a population of about 11,537,000 and a racial makeup of 87.7% White, 12.2% Black or African American, 0.2% Native American, 1.7% Asian, 0.05% Pacific Islander, 2.1% from two or more races and 3.1% Hispanic or Latino of any race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These data suggest that while the racial makeup of Ohio is comparable to that of the entire U.S., the setting for this study, Bowling Green, Ohio, is comparatively less ethnically diverse than the state and country.

BGSU enrolls approximately 20,000 students, of who about 3,000 are graduate students. The university offers more than 200 undergraduate majors and programs, 47 master’s programs and 17 doctoral programs under the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Human Development, Health and Human Services, Musical Arts and Technology
CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION

(BGSU, 2012). In the 2012 edition of Best Colleges, BGSU was ranked within the second-tier of National Universities at 177 (U.S. World & News Report, 2012). The vast majority of students at BGSU are from Ohio, with almost 90% of student population comprised of in-state students. Only about 3% of the student population is comprised of international students. In the fall of 2011, BGSU enrolled 845 international students from 88 different countries. Students from China, including Taiwan and Hong Kong make up the largest number of international students (n=220), followed by Saudi Arabia (n=124), India (n=56), Canada (n=46), and Russia (n=32). 205 international students were pursuing master’s degrees and 155 were pursuing doctoral degrees in the fall of 2011. The ethno-racial composition of the BGSU student population in the Fall of 2010, the most recent semester for which data is available, was 77% White, 10% Black or African American, 0.6% Native American, 0.8% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 3% Hispanic or Latino and 8% other or unknown (BGSU Institutional Research Office, 2012). This data demonstrates that the university is slightly more diverse than the surrounding community.

The racial makeup of the student population of BGSU and the surrounding community is relevant to this study because diverse, multicultural societies tend to have a higher tolerance for cultural diversity, including the cultural diversity of international students, while in a more homogeneous society there is more pressure on individuals to conform to the dominant cultural values and practices (Deal, 2002). The population of BGSU and the surrounding community does include small percentages of diverse racial and ethnic groups; however, a large majority of the population is White and therefore the cultural values and practices of this group can be expected to dominate. This will impact the experience of Chinese graduate students studying at BGSU as they interact with individuals and institutions in the new environment.
Procedure

Participant Selection. The subjects for this case study were BGSU graduate students who are international students from the People’s Republic of China and who had been studying at BGSU for one year or more. Graduate students were chosen for this study because they represent the majority of Chinese students at BGSU. Undergraduate and non-degree-seeking students were excluded from this study because their motivations for studying abroad in the U.S. may differ from graduate students and they also may have different patterns of cross-cultural interaction with Americans (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007). Only students from mainland China were selected because they comprise the largest number of international students at BGSU and in the U.S. and the fastest growing group. In contrast, the number of students coming to the U.S. to study from Taiwan and Hong Kong has been decreasing (IIE, 2010). Additionally, many previous studies have recruited subjects only from Taiwan or defined “Chinese students” more broadly as students from the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong and even ethnically-Chinese Malaysian students (Ying & Liese, 1994; Holmes, 2005; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). However, there are many political, cultural, economic and academic differences among these different locations. Especially pertinent is that each of these locations has a different education system, which impacts how the participants relate and adapt to the U.S. education system. To better understand how students who have matriculated through the education system of the People’s Republic of China, this study has only recruited students from mainland China. Finally, only students who had been at BGSU for one year or more were included in the study because problems with sociocultural adaptation have been found to be most pronounced in the months after international students arrive in the host country (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The researcher concluded that participants who had been studying in the U.S. for at least one year
would have been able to address their initial acculturative stress and have a better sense of whether they feel they are meeting their goals for their study abroad experience.

This study aimed to enroll 10 to 15 students for this qualitative study through purposeful convenience and snowball recruitment techniques. Nonrandom sampling techniques were used to obtain a sample, “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Convenience sampling involves recruiting participants who are most easily accessible to the researcher, and snowball sampling involves asking each participant to refer the researcher to additional potential participants (Merriam, 1998). First, students with whom the researcher was acquainted with and who met the conditions for participation were contacted by phone or email to determine if they were willing to participate in my study. The researcher also asked those participants to introduce me to any of their classmates and friends who may be interested in being a part of this study. As part of the snowball technique, the researcher distributed flyers to the participant after each completed interview, which detailed the study and asked if they could introduce me to any other Chinese graduate students. If they provided the email address of a student, then that student was contacted and was sent information about the study with a request that they participate as well. This process was continued until 11 students had been recruited to participate in the study.

**Data Collection.** Over email or phone, the researcher set up one-hour appointments with each student at a time and place convenient for them in order to conduct an interview. Prior to the first interview, a pilot interview was conducted with a Chinese graduate student who was not participating in the study. This served a test and practice for the interview protocol and the student gave feedback on the interview questions and the consent form to ensure they were
phrased with vocabulary that Chinese graduate students should be able to understand with their level of English language ability. When the researcher met with study participants, they began by reviewing the procedures of the study in line with accepted research methods, how the researcher would protect their confidentiality, and that their participation was voluntary and they may withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell, 2003). The researcher confirmed with the students that they were over 18 years or age and provided them a consent form with the information about the study and contact information for the researcher, the faculty thesis advisor and the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) committee. Participants were given time to read over the form and ask any questions they had. Students signed one copy of the form and kept one copy for themselves.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded. Interview questions were open-ended and focused on their experiences studying abroad at BGSU. The interviews were semi-structured with a set of questions asked of each student and a number of follow-up questions to their responses. Interview questions were devised after a review of relevant literature. The first nine questions sought to obtain demographic information such as where in China the student is from, their program of study, how long they had been at BGSU, their age, marital status and whether they had been abroad prior to studying at BGSU. Demographic questions were followed by ten questions regarding their reasons and goals for their study abroad experience, what their daily life is like at BGSU, who they interact with most often, situations in which they find it easy or difficult to communicate with Americans and whether or not they feel they are accomplishing their goals for their study abroad experience (See Appendix A). Interview questions were developed in line with relevant literature about the acculturation process for Chinese international students studying abroad in the U.S. and
addressing the research questions of the study about students’ interaction and support networks in the U.S. (Merriam, 1998).

Although all participants were native speakers of Putonghua or Mandarin Chinese, interviews were conducted in English, but with a purposeful attempt by the researcher to use language understandable for all participants. English was chosen as the language to conduct the interviews in because the Putonghua language ability of the researcher was not sufficient to conduct an interview and a translator would have been necessary. On the other hand, Chinese students studying in a masters or doctoral program in the U.S. have achieved a passing score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to be admitted to the U.S. university and therefore can be expected to have a higher level of English language. Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder. The recorder was visible and participants could elect to stop the audio recording or stop the interview at any time (Creswell, 2003). All participants agreed to be audio-recorded.

Each audio recording from the interviews was transcribed verbatim onto a Word document. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and were not corrected for grammatical mistakes. Rather than including corrections, the researcher felt it was important to accurately reflect what the students said, and to ignore small grammatical mistakes when they did not interfere with what the participant was communicating. For that reason, the researcher also did not include the Latin adverb sic after grammatical errors, which it was felt would interrupt the flow of the quotations from the participants, and highlight their small grammatical errors. Thus, any perceived mistakes in the transcriptions should be interpreted as accurately reflecting the words of the research participants. In addition to interview recordings, the researcher took detailed notes during each interview and reflective notes after each interview (Creswell, 2003).
Participants were informed that their identities are masked in the interview transcripts because an interview number instead of the participant's name was attached to the interview data.

**Data Analysis.** Following guidelines by Miles and Huberman (1994), interview data were reviewed systematically, while remaining open to new themes that may inductively emerge. As the interviews were transcribed, they were coded line-by-line to find common themes. A list of descriptive codes was developed deductively after reviewing relevant literature and reviewing the interview transcripts, but new codes were added and some abandoned as necessary throughout the coding process. The strength of different themes and ideas was assessed by the frequency of different codes and comparisons were made between major and minor themes to understand the connections between them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Themes and findings were triangulated with the descriptive and reflective notes of the researcher and related back to the literature and discussed with my thesis committee chair and a thesis committee member to check and verify the results (Creswell, 2003). In addition, the interview transcripts were sent to the participants via email for member checking (Creswell, 2003). Participants could review the transcripts and provide additional feedback and clarification on their interview responses.

**Limitations and Generalizability**

Limitations of this study that can affect the validity and generalizability of the study include the small sample size and non-random sampling methods used for recruiting participants, the subjective nature of interview data and the background and perspective of the researcher. Because convenience sampling was used to recruit a small number of students, the results of this study cannot be representative of the population of Chinese graduate students studying in the U.S. or even the complete sample of Chinese graduate students studying at BGSU. However, the findings can give deeper insight into the experiences of some Chinese graduate students, which
can be kept in mind and compared to the experiences of other students at BGSU or at other universities in the U.S.

The second limitation is that students can choose what information they will share and what they will not. Their responses may vary due to the time during the semester that the interview was conducted and even based on the time of day or location of the interview. Some students may exaggerate their responses and some may try to give the answer they feel the researcher would like to hear. I attempted to limit this threat by creating a casual atmosphere, allowing students ample time to think about their answers and by asking follow up questions, but overall, this limitation is unavoidable.

A third consideration is the perspective and characteristics of the researcher. Some characteristics of the researcher will contribute to the study, but there is also an opportunity for bias if the researcher puts more emphasis on findings that conform to his or her perceptions and overlook those which do not. To limit the negative effects of researcher bias, the selection below describes the most significant researcher characteristics that could affect the study; the raw data and findings were also discussed with members of the thesis committee throughout the data collection and analysis phases (Creswell, 2003).

**Researcher Perspective.** The first personal characteristic of myself as a researcher that will impact this study is my race and nationality as a White American. Having been born and raised in the United States, I have internalized values, beliefs and behavioral practices that are specific to the dominant cultural of the U.S. When I interact with Chinese students, it is as an American and outsider to their culture. This affects the structure of the study, the types of questions asked and how I interact with the participants. This in turn can affect how the Chinese students react to me and how they answer the interview questions.
The second characteristic that impacts the study relates to my own experience studying abroad as a student and later working abroad in China as an English teacher. As I began this study, I already had knowledge of my own experiences living and studying in another country. I know how I interacted with local people in a foreign environment and the effect that this had on me as a student, professional and an American national. Specifically, I have an understanding of Chinese culture and know what it meant for me to be a foreigner in China. Although the students view me as an American, it is not as a complete outsider due to my experience in China and my knowledge of China and Chinese cultural patterns. I can speak Putonghua at a conversational level and my husband is a Chinese national who I met when I was living in China. At the time of this study, he is completing his Master of Science in Electrical Engineering as a Chinese international student studying at a U.S. university. It is personally interesting to compare the experience of Chinese students in the U.S. with my own experiences in China.

The third characteristic that impacts the study relates to role as a researcher and instrument of data analysis. When I began this study and starting to review the relevant literature, I already had some initial hypotheses. I predicted that the students I interviewed would have limited interaction in American students, faculty and community members and I predicted that the students would feel somewhat regretful about their limited level of integration into the society of the local campus and community. However, I also predicted that the students would be more interested in their academic and professional pursuits than in gaining experience in cross-cultural communication and learning about the culture of the U.S. Some of the findings of this study have aligned with my previous hypothesis, but others have not.

**Generalizability.** Qualitative studies are not designed to be generalizable as they employ small, often non-random samples as this case study does and, while steps are taken to
limit the threats to validity, a qualitative case study can still contribute body of knowledge with in-depth descriptions and explanations as well as “a more personal understanding of the phenomenon” (Myers, 2000).
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews with 11 graduate students from the People’s Republic of China studying abroad at BGSU, amid-sized university in the Midwestern U.S. In order to understand the students’ goals and motivations for their study abroad experience, the patterns of interaction and support networks, as well as the barriers the students may perceive to cross-cultural interaction, the interview questions explored the cross-cultural interactions of the students in their daily life in the U.S. as well as their goal orientation. Four major themes emerged from the interviews. The first was the academic goal orientation of the students. Almost all of the students stated that academic achievements were the primary goals for their study abroad experience. This theme explored how the strong academic goal orientation affected the students’ daily lives and interactions in the U.S. The second theme that emerged was the tendency of students to seek environments and interactions that were familiar to them. Participants stated that they chose to study abroad in the U.S., a country more familiar to them than other places, and while in the U.S., they sought interaction with other Chinese students and faculty members and tended to avoid interaction with Americans. The third major theme that developed was that the participants felt some American students, faculty and community members were able to employ intercultural communication techniques that allowed them to meet the participants “in the middle”. As a result, the Chinese students felt they could communicate with these Americans easily and successfully. The fourth and final theme that emerged from the study centers on the efforts of students to be independent and make it on their own. While the students interacted with many people on a daily basis, their academic and social support networks were not extensive and the students overcame many challenges individually.
Theme One: Academic Goal Orientation

The first major theme arising from the interviews was the strong academic goal orientation of the students and the impact that it had on their study abroad experience. This theme encompasses the three subthemes of the value of a U.S. degree, time and struggles related to school and the effect of academic orientation on student support networks. Students who decide to study abroad have made an academic decision to continue their studies and ultimately, almost all of the students listed academic reasons for choosing to study abroad in the U.S. and named the successful completion of their degree as the primary goal for their study abroad experience. This academic goal orientation coincides with the high value placed on educational achievement within Chinese culture and the current level of competition in the job market in China. Employers and parents in China value a degree from a foreign university, particularly a U.S. university, and students and families are willing to invest the considerable time, effort and money necessary to study abroad with potential for future professional, social and economic rewards.

The students’ academic goal orientation also impacts their interactions and experience in the U.S. Graduate coursework is rigorous and requires considerable of time and effort, especially when the language of instruction is not the students’ first language. Many of the students also financed their studies through graduate teaching or research assistantships, which placed more demands on their time. Many of the students reported spending vast amounts of their time studying and completing work for their assistantships with limited leisure time. Additionally, of the five people each student interacts with most, almost all of them were related to the student through their academic or assistantship work, either as classmates, officemates or faculty advisors. It may seem that the students are isolated in their academic programs and their
opportunities to explore the new environment and culture in the U.S. are limited, but in the end, the students were satisfied with their experience and felt that they were meeting their goals and purposes for studying abroad.

“**I think in America you can learn something, compared to other countries.**” For the first subtheme, students described the value of a U.S. degree, citing primarily academic and professional reasons why they choose to study abroad at a university in the U.S. There is a general confidence in the quality of academic programs and facilities at U.S. universities compared to those in other countries. Qi, a female student studying media and communication, said

I think England and European countries are hard. They are expensive and what I thought is that they are not such a good place as America for you to learn something solidly. Of course I think in America there are more chances to get scholarship, money and a good place to learn and nice education background.

Yun, a female student studying photochemical science, came to the U.S. “to receive a well-developed education.” Other students choose the U.S. because of their majors. Lei, a male student, felt that “computer science is famous in the U.S.” and Yun “felt or heard from many other informations that the U.S. has more technology and knowledge in biological science, so I applied to universities here.” Other reasons for choosing to study in a U.S. university were to work with professors that are famous in their fields and to have better research opportunities.

**“The library, the student union, study, study, study, a lot of homework.”** The second subtheme that emerged regarded the extensive time students devoted to their studies and assistantships once at the university in order to reach their academic goals. A few of the students were able to complete the majority of the coursework and assistantship work during the day from
Monday to Friday, but a greater number found themselves also devoting their weekday evenings and a considerable amount of time on the weekends to keep up with their work. Qi said “I may stay at school for the whole day, maybe until midnight, but sometimes I have a light workload and I will come back for dinner and relaxing.” Ying, a female student studying biological sciences, explained “there was once a time when I was doing an experiment and I went back home at 3:30am and also those days after 12am sometimes.” For Bo, a female student studying accounting, “If there is an examination next week, the weekend is not a weekend.” When asked to describe how much time they spent studying, some of the students found it easier to determine how much time they spent on tasks other than studying, like Lei who determined that he spent 13 hours a day on schoolwork by calculating “maybe 8 hours for sleeping, maybe two or three hours for lunch or dinner. This is 11. 24 minus 11, maybe 13.” Yu, a male student studying photochemical science, also explained “I have class in the morning and then, whenever I don’t have class or teaching, I have to work in the lab.”

With the extensive amount of time that the students report devoting to their academic pursuits, it follows that their leisure time is extremely limited. On weekdays, most time not spent in the classroom, studying or the lab was spent at home either cooking or relaxing with music, TV or books, with the exception of a few students who would get together with friends for meals or to go to the student recreation center. On weekends, students had more free time. Catching up on sleep after a busy week was a first priority for many students. Lei responded to a question about whether he had time for fun activities saying “no, maybe sometimes I sleep all morning, sleeping until the noon.” Yu said “almost every weekend I just sleep in and woke up at 4 or 5 o’clock in the afternoon. I will sleep a lot. On the week days I can’t sleep too much.” Many students found time on the weekend to go to the movie theater, go shopping or have dinner
with friends, but their leisure time was still limited because of their schoolwork. The students expressed that they did not get together with their friends as often as they like, like Lei said “sometimes have my friends come to my home and maybe I will also talk with friends, but I almost don’t see them.”

For the most part, graduate studies are demanding and an enormous time commitment for any student, but the students in this study had an extra challenge of studying in a language that is not their first language. A few of them reported needing to spend extra time on their studies in order to meet their goals for academic success. Lei felt that he needed more time to finish his homework because his English language ability was lacking. He said that after each class he had to review his textbooks since he struggled to understand his professors during class due to language difficulties. Bo struggled to communicate with her group members to complete a group project because “first I should translate their English into Chinese to understand it. When I to express I should translate with time.” In order to overcome the challenges of completing group projects with American students and giving presentations in English, Chao, a male student studying computer science, found that he needed to spend more time rehearsing compared to American students.

“Sometimes see outside, for example like group study, maybe in my home and maybe in the lab.” In addition to occupying the majority of their time and effort, the students’ academic endeavors influenced whom they interacted with on a daily basis and the nature of those relationships. This is the third subtheme. Since the students spend the majority of their time at school, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of the connections they had made were with other students or faculty members in their classes or offices. This is often the case for many domestic and international graduate students, but the students from China especially tended to
interact the most with other Chinese students and faculty in their academic department. Fang demonstrated the convenience of these relationships describing the people she spends time saying “most of the time it’s Chinese friends and most of them are from our department or Chemistry department because we have quite similar schedules.”

Classmates, officemates and professors are people that the students have to interact with as they carry out their academic and work tasks, but in addition, the students often form good relationships with these people. These relationships form an academic and social support network for the student that helps them adapt to a new academic environment achieve their individual educational goals. Ling, a female student studying photochemical science, described her relationship with her classmate from China saying

he came here together with me because we are in the same major program so we the same flights came here and so we studied together until now so he’s one of my good friends and when I was in trouble, he always help me.

Students often got together with classmates to study and when they had questions about their coursework or research, they often would turn to their Chinese classmates first for help. Peng, a male student studying photochemical science, explained that he often interacted with “those in my lab and my roommate because we are all specializing in the same field and doing research on this, we help each other learn a lot.” Some students turned to their Chinese classmates for assistance when they struggled to understand vocabulary used class lectures or a professor’s accent. Other students relied more on communicating with their professors outside of class to clarify concepts that they could not understand clearly in class, and to improve their comprehension of their coursework.
Classmates and officemates also became the students’ closest friends with whom they spent their leisure time and who they relied on for social support in their daily life in the U.S. Chao described his relationship with his classmates saying “we went here together and we live near, door by door. So we just, we sometimes we go out, we eat together, have dinner together and when we have questions, simple questions, we choose to ask my Chinese classmates.” Students would often go together with classmates to take care of errands related to their daily lives, like grocery shopping or paying their bills and some of the students even chose to live together with one of their classmates. During their leisure time, students would get together with their classmates to have dinner, go the student recreation center, go shopping and other activities. Some would eat lunch with their classmates or officemates at school on weekdays and almost all got together with co-national classmates to have fun and relax on the weekends.

The primacy of academic and professional goals for Chinese students studying in the U.S. affected their strategies for acculturating and adapting to their new environment. Learning about and integrating into the U.S. mainstream culture are potential outcomes of acculturation (Berry, 1970) if the Chinese students sought higher levels of contact and participation with American students, faculty and community members, but if the students valued these goals at all, they were secondary or tertiary to other objectives. The students devoted the majority of their time to study and research and built relationships with professors and classmates who could assist and support them to achieve their academic goals. Most students only pursued cross-cultural interaction to the extent that it helped them to be successful in their program of study. When they had problems including cultural or language barriers with Americans or U.S. institutions or needed support as they dealt with the challenges of living far from home, they sought out other students in their program from China to help them. However, in spite of the challenges and time
commitments of their academic programs in the U.S. and low levels of contact and participation with Americans, the students expressed satisfaction with their experience in the U.S. All participants felt that they were meeting their academic goals and were on track to complete their respective degrees.

**Theme Two: America the Familiar**

The second major theme arising from the interviews was that although pursuing their studies abroad was a new and unfamiliar experience for the students, as only one of them had left China before, they tended to seek out environments and interactions that were more familiar to them. The three subthemes are (1) the students’ familiarity with the U.S. before they arrived; (2) their tendency to seek interaction with Chinese people and cultural products while in the U.S.; and (3) the students’ efforts to seek the unfamiliar. Seeking the familiar includes the students’ decision to choose the U.S. as the destination for their study abroad experience over other countries.

Before arriving in the U.S., students already had impressions of the U.S. derived from connection to other individuals who had direct experiences in the U.S. and also indirect experiences watching movies and TV shows from the U.S. These impressions gave the students information about what to expect when they came to the U.S. to study and potentially reduced some of the uncertainty that students face when they first arrive in a foreign country. It also includes the tendency of the students to seek out interactions and activities with other Chinese students and faculty members because these interactions are more familiar to the student and usually involve less stress and exertion.

“I just like the U.S., I feel I’ve watched too many American movies.” The first subtheme is that while still in China, the students could choose from thousands of universities in
a variety of different countries, but the majority of students applied only to universities in the
U.S. or only to universities in the U.S. and Canada. The students’ interest in the U.S. coincides
with their prior familiarity with the U.S. through personal relationships and academic
connections to people who are living or have lived in the U.S. and also with exposure to
American cultural products like movies and music that are easily accessible in China.

Many of the students had either classmates who planned to study in the U.S. or professors
or academic advisors with research connections with a professor at a U.S. university. Chao said
“we had 22 classmates in our undergraduate class and 10 of them choose the U.S. as their first
priority”. The advisor of Fang, a female student studying biological sciences, knew her advisor
in the U.S. because “they worked in the same lab together several years ago because my advisor
here is a Chinese and before I came here I already knew the project I have to do so I think it’s
interesting”. In the case of Wei, a male student studying statistics, a professor from a U.S.
university came to his university in China to give a lecture. Other students had friends or family
members with experience in the U.S. When Chao applied to U.S. universities, he had a friend
who “was in the second year of the master’s degree and he offered [him] all the information so
[he] kind of got it easy”. The father of Wei is a professor who had come to the U.S. as a visiting
scholar and Fang had older cousins who have studied in the U.S.

American TV shows, movies and music all contributed to students becoming more
familiar with U.S. culture and the English language. Young people in China have access to a
multitude of American cultural products at movie theaters and media stores, and in addition, they
can access an extensive range of movies, TV shows, news broadcasts and music online for free.
Students mentioned watching shows like Friends, Prison Break and Desperate Housewives
before coming to the U.S. Movies and TV shows were the most commonly cited source for
impressions that students had of the U.S. before arriving. Peng said that he “was not surprised at all [by the environment in the U.S.] because [he] watched American movies as a child”. In addition to providing entertainment, students also watch American TV shows or listen to Voice of America (VOA) news broadcasts to improve their English language abilities. English language is heavily emphasized in China and Peng said that one reason he chose to study in the U.S. over other countries was “because for other nations I have to learn another language and we already learned English for 10 years when I graduated college.”

Whether they got their impressions from friends, TV shows or the news, students were already familiar with the U.S. before they arrived. Many thought that living and studying in the U.S. would be very different from China, but others thought there would be little to no difference. Before arriving in the U.S., Yun felt that Americans were “arrogant, so self-serving…and American people are kind of lazy”, but overall students mentioned many more positive impressions of the U.S. than negative. Americans were often described as friendly, independent and creative, and U.S. universities were believed to have better technological, research and professional opportunities.

**Interacting with other Chinese students: “It’s so much easier. I didn’t find out until I came here.”** In contrast to choosing to study in the U.S. because it was more familiar to them, the second subtheme is that after arriving in the U.S., the students tended to seek out environments and interactions that were more familiar to them as Chinese students. This included interaction with classmates and professors from China, the formation of social groups comprised entirely or almost entirely of other students from China, and the avoidance of interaction with Americans. The students expressed that it was much easier to interact with other students and faculty members from China than with Americans. Some of the students were even
surprised by how much they had in common with other students from all over China. The comfort and ease with which they could interact with others from China was attributed to the shared native language and culture and a desire for Chinese cultural products like food, festivals, books and TV shows.

Participants were asked to identify the five people they interact with most on a daily basis. The vast majority of people identified were other Chinese students, in spite of the fact that Chinese students make up such a small percentage of the campus population. The students sought interactions with other Chinese students because of the ease of interpersonal interaction. Ying described the absence of barriers to communication with other Chinese students by saying “you speak Chinese without thinking anything” and Chao said “there is an emotional issue because we share the same background.” On the other hand, students avoided interactions with Americans because they feared they would not be able to understand them if they speak too quickly or use vocabulary that is unfamiliar to them. Most students reported that they had struggled to interact with an American in the more formal academic and work settings, and also in the informal interactions of daily life in the U.S. Although all of the students had to achieve high levels of English ability before arriving in the U.S., Ling expressed frustration with being unable to express herself accurately in English. Qi explained that when interacting with Americans “there may be many misunderstandings. Usually you feel not comfortable asking again then you may just assume they ask you to do something, but there must be something wrong or misunderstanding there. I think language is still a problem.” Lei went so far as to say that he didn’t find interaction with Americans difficult because he simply “didn’t meet with American people.”
While the students devoted a majority of their time to academic and assistantship work, when they did partake in social leisure activities, their groups of friends tended to be comprised almost exclusively of other Chinese students. Some of the students expressed that they felt their social activities were different from the social activities of American students to explain their preference for spending their leisure time with other Chinese students. They described getting together with their Chinese friends to have dinner, go to the movie theater or go shopping. Ying said that

we Chinese people, we don’t have big parties. We don’t play music or drink, but this post doc, he is very good at cooking and a very nice person, so when we head to his apartment we will cook and eat and also wash dishes for him.

Bo explained her reluctance to include Americans in her social activities saying, “We invited American students to come here and we are worried that they are not used to our food. Yeah, we don’t know how to invite them and how to treat them.” Even Wei who lives with an American roommate said that his roommate rarely joins him when he spends time with his friends unless they go to his home to have dinner or if they are playing video games.

Usually the students described spending their leisure time with informal social groups, but the students also described more organized groups comprised primarily of Chinese students, like the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) and some sports groups organized by Chinese students. The CSSA is a student organization that, as Chao describes, “serves as a channel to help Chinese students” by connecting the Chinese students on campus through online chat groups and social events. Through online chat groups, Chinese students can find Chinese roommates before arriving in the U.S., and just generally be connected to a group of fellow students to help them address practical matters relating to living and studying in the U.S. The
CSSA also organizes three main events each year to help Chinese students build social connections and celebrate their festivals from home. The events are a welcome picnic for new students, a Mid-Autumn Festival celebration and a celebration for the Spring Festival or Chinese New Year. Ying said that at the picnic they “invited the new students to come and they come and the old students exchange their experience and also they meet some people. That’s what they need when they first came here and there is nobody else they know.” The sports groups that a couple of the students participated in were casual groups where Chinese students got together once a week or more to play basketball or badminton together.

Students also expressed a desire for Chinese food, festivals, books and TV shows while studying in the U.S. Many of the students either participated in or attended the Chinese festivals put on by the CSSA as a way to interact with other Chinese students, but also to celebrate an important holiday and be reminded of home. “Authentic” Chinese food was something the students strongly craved, but struggled to find. Many would drive to places 30 minutes to an hour away in order to find Chinese restaurants serving food more similar to what they are used to at home and markets offering imported Asian food products. Chinese movies and TV shows are readily available on the Internet and one student noted that before coming to the U.S. she preferred to watch American movies, but now that she is in the U.S., she prefers to watch Chinese movies. Bo noted that

several days before there’s something wrong with my computer and I have to finish all my homework in the library, but the systems are English and I cannot see Chinese movies. Those days I was so overwhelmed. I was too lonely. And the television is English, everything is English!
Novels and other books in Chinese are more difficult for the students to access, so a few of the students brought books with them from China to read during their leisure time. Some students were reading books or novels in English, but others found it too tiring to read in English after a day of studying. In response to whether she usually watched TV shows and read books in English or Chinese, Qi said “Chinese, I don’t think my brain will be happy if they see English again after it was tortured all day.”

“I just want to get out from China and open my mind.” The third subtheme is that in spite of seeking familiar interactions, food and TV shows, the students specifically chose to continue their studies in a country that is geographically and culturally distant from China. Yu explained his decision to study in the U.S. by saying “I wanted to experiment some different life. I hate to stay in the same place all the time” and Yun applied to universities in the U.S. and Singapore, but ultimately choose to come to the U.S. because she felt Singapore was too culturally similar and geographically close to her home. A few of the students listed a desire to broaden their horizons and learn about life in another country in very general terms among their reasons for studying abroad; however, these goals were generally only listed after academic and professional goals.

The students had the most contact with other students and faculty members from China, but some of them did list Americans among the five people that they interact with most. These people were classmates, officemates and faculty advisors or individuals that the students had met through organizations or programs on campus that pair international students with American students or community members for social purposes. However, with a few exceptions they spent less time and had more superficial relationships with these American friends.
The inclination of individuals to seek more familiar interactions and environments is a natural tendency as they try to reduce the daily anxiety and stress that is associated with living and studying in a foreign country. The connections and relationships that students build with other students and faculty from China can mediate homesickness and acculturative stress by helping them to adapt and thrive in their new environment. However, in addition to building relationships to conationalists, students can also benefit from relationships they build with American students and international students from other countries. By avoiding interactions with Americans and building a social and academic support network almost entirely comprised of other Chinese students and faculty, students reduce their access to the cultural, academic and professional resources that reside primarily in the hands of American students, faculty and community members.

**Theme Three: Meeting in the Middle**

Even though the majority of the students’ close relationships were with other students from China, through their academic program and daily life in the U.S., each student did find him or herself often interacting with Americans. At times the students struggled to communicate cross-culturally with Americans and other times they felt they could communicate easily. The third theme that emerged was the way that the Chinese graduate students reported communicating with Americans. Within the third theme of “meeting in the middle”, four subthemes emerged. The first subtheme is that the students described patient and empathic American students, faculty and community members who often had prior experience communicating with non-native speakers of English. The second subtheme is that these individuals would often meet students in middle by using intercultural communication techniques, such as speaking at a slower-than-normal rate of speed and using simpler vocabulary.
In the third subtheme, some students came into contact with these individuals through their academic programs, but a good number of them were introduced through university- or community-based programs that specifically matched international students with American students or community members for the purpose of cross-cultural learning and interaction. The forth and final subtheme is that the students encountered a few instances of overt discrimination, but overall they felt they were treated well by individuals and institutions in the U.S. Americans who can interact successfully with the Chinese students are an important factor in the process of acculturation that occurs when the students come to the U.S. to complete their program of study because they provide a channel for the international student and American to each learn about and connect to a foreign culture.

“I think most of the people here are very kind and very nice and I like this kind of feeling.” Interacting in a language other than your native language and with people from another culture can be challenging, especially for someone who has not had much experience in intercultural communication before. The students struggled to communicate with Americans when they first arrived in the U.S., but many of them were able to overcome language and cultural barriers to interact and build relationships with American students, faculty or community members. The students described the Americans who they interacted with on a continuous basis or had build good relationships with as patient, understanding and kind in the first subtheme. Yu said “Except for the language problem, I think I get along well with Americans. Because I think most of the people here are very kind and very nice and I like this kind of feeling.” For Ying, she felt that she could easily overcome barriers to interact with Americans because “if people talk to me and I didn’t get the idea, they will repeat again and help me more. That’s good.
Mostly people are very friendly.” Bo had an American friend whom she could relate to very well and felt there were “no barriers for us to communicate with her.”

These Americans who the students built relationships with serve as cultural mediators for the student. With their knowledge of the English language and U.S. educational and general culture, they can help the students when they encounter questions or problems in their daily life in the U.S. Wei relied on his American roommate saying “sometimes I still have something I don’t know how to express very accurately, so I will ask Joe” and Ying described her relationship with an American community member saying “she was very patient and tried to help me if I tried to say something and I couldn’t find the word. She would give me some words to think like is it right. She’s very helpful.” When Bo struggled to complete a group project, she got help from her American classmate because “after the discussion they were sending an email and someone concluded the points for me to further understand.” Some students also explained that good relationships with American professors and academic advisors facilitated their adaptation to the U.S. educational culture. For example, Qi said that her advisor “helped me to find my interests and my confidence and something like that so we interact. I think she has a nice experience and understanding of international students.” Bo said “we have a lot of presentations and I was very nervous so I went to talk to [my advisor].”

“Explain it in a more easier to understand way.” In addition to kindness and understanding, the second subtheme that emerged was the use of intercultural communication techniques by the Americans with whom the students were able to easily communicate. This included speaking clearly at a slower-than-normal rate of speed and using simpler vocabulary similar to communication tools used by the Voice of America (VOA) for their Special English broadcasts, but also included other techniques like body language and helping students to correct
their language mistakes. Lei said “usually the American people are very nice and also they know that international students have difficulties to communicate and they speak slowly and clearly and use some body language.” When Ling struggled to understand her American friend she would “explain it in a more easier to understand way” and the friend of Qi “will try to use a very easy word and try to use a very easy, kind manner to communicate.” Fang explained that she was able to improve her English and learn American communication patterns quickly with the help of her American friends. She said “I think I learned them quickly because every time [my American friends] are friendly, they tell me it’s not correct or something like that.” Through the intercultural communication skills of some of American students, professors and community members, the students from China are able to successfully and easily communicate cross-culturally and improve their ability to communicate with other Americans in the future.

“They gave us lots of the things about the homestyle of an American family.” The third subtheme that arose was that the positive relationships that the Chinese students developed with Americans during their study abroad experience in the U.S. originated from a variety of academic and social connections; however, a majority of the students who listed an American among the people that they interact with most had been introduced through a campus or community program designed to pair International students with Americans. One program that students cited was the Cross-Cultural Conversation Connection or 4C program. This is a campus-based program that pairs an international student with a domestic student for the purpose of “develop[ing] cultural understanding in today’s global community by connecting people from different cultures through conversation” (ESOL, 2012). The international and domestic student will meet once a week to talk and enjoy different social activities. It is an opportunity for each student to learn about the other’s culture and for the international student to improve his or her
English language ability. A few students were also intentionally paired with Americans in the classroom to complete group projects. Bo said that “the teacher requires us to don’t just communicate with the Chinese and she divided us into four groups. We should communicate with American students to finish a project.”

The other cross-cultural programs that students described were all organized by a community-based organization, Global Connections (GC). GC was developed by three local churches and with the mission to “connect with the international community by serving you and providing cultural events for you, make friends by inviting you into our homes, learn about your culture while sharing aspects of ours and create opportunities for you to observe and participate in our spiritual communities, if you choose to” (Global Connections, 2012). They organize a number of programs and services for international students and their families including dinners and other social events, shopping trips to the international food markets, picking student up from the airport and pairing students with American host families. Qi appreciated the organization’s “nice volunteers, they also try to communicate with you, use the language, the words they think you know.” Ling enjoyed spending time with her boyfriend’s host family because they “can communicate with each other very well for the fun things and even discuss some traditional American festivals”. Yun was a member of a “girl group” that was organized by a GC volunteer and would meet once a month to get together and have dinner. She would volunteer with GC and “sometimes do the portfolio and also cleaning, serve the people food, pick up students and take them to go to some place.” The 4C program and Global Connections facilitate informal, social relationships between international students and American students that are interested in making cross-cultural connections and help international students to adapt to the environment in the U.S.
“I can see from their faces.” Beyond their relationships with a small number of Americans, international students’ perceptions about discrimination and treatment they face from American people and institutions in general as Chinese, international students in the U.S. can have a significant impact on the acculturation process. The forth subtheme focuses on the experience of discrimination. Many of the students in this study listed only one or two instances when they felt they were discriminated against, but overall they felt they were treated well and did not encounter discrimination in their daily lives in the U.S. Qi said “generally I think people here are really nice and kind so didn’t feel there is any discrimination and since my language is not so good, even if there is, I did not hear.” Many students felt they were only treated differently in the sense that people were understanding and helpful. Ying noted “I’m an international student. If people talk to me and I didn’t get the idea, they will repeat again and help me more. That’s good. Mostly people are very friendly.” Chao felt that in his first semester in the U.S. professors had “lower standards for grading because the teacher just knows you have difficulty in the language.”

The isolated experiences of discrimination happened at school and around town. Fang described a student that she taught as a teaching assistant. “I had a student last year and every time he will ask me questions like ‘why did you come here’ and said something like ‘if you stay here you will take the chance for a job from us,’” however she did emphasize that “only one student said that.” Chao explained a time when he was called a derogatory racial term. “One time I was driving a bike near downtown, but there is a sign ‘No Biking’ so one guy just rolled down the window and say something unpleasant.” This only occurred once, but reaffirmed to Chao that “in public conditions we have to behave here very carefully because if we act strange
they just put the image on all Chinese.” In spite of occasional negative experiences, they found their experience in the environment of the U.S. to be positive.

The process of acculturation involves contact between two or more different cultures, their reciprocal influence on each other and the changes that result from that contact (Sam & Berry, 2006). The students from China are not the only ones who must respond and adapt to the new environment in the U.S. American students, faculty and community members must also respond and adapt to the Chinese students. From their interactions with Americans, the Chinese students learned about the U.S. educational and general culture. This can help them to achieve the goals for their study abroad experience and get along better in their daily life in the U.S. Americans also learned intercultural communication skills from their interactions with the students from China. The Biology 101 students taught by Fang could communicate with her better as the semester progressed. She said “I would let them repeat it or change to another way to explain it. Most of the time, it works or maybe some other students can help him to explain the question again.” When Americans and the students from China both adapt to each other and culturally “meet in the middle”, cross-cultural interactions can be successful and relationships can be built.

Theme Four: Making it on Your Own

In addition to their academic and professional goals, the fourth major theme that came out of the interview data was that a number of the students listed gaining life experience and becoming more independent as goals for their study abroad experience. Within this theme, two subthemes illuminate the increased independence reported by the students. The first subtheme is that the students tended to spend substantial amounts of time on their own and the second is desire and efforts of the students towards independence resulting from their study abroad
experience. In making the decision to study abroad, the students got advice from professors, classmates and family members, but each of them ultimately decided to move away from their friends and family to continue their studies and live on their own in a foreign country. For most of the students this is not only the first time for them to live in a foreign country, but also the first time for them to live outside of either a college dormitory or their parents’ home. The students found themselves faced with many new situations and challenges that they had to tackle without their network of support from home. The students began to build a new network of support as soon as they arrived in the U.S. and sometimes earlier than that through email and online chat groups, but the new network was not as developed as at home in China. The students spent a lot of time meeting their academic responsibilities, enjoying their leisure time on their own and felt they become more independent as a result of their study abroad experience.

“First, I have a good sleep.” In the first subtheme, the students’ schedules revolved around their academic responsibilities that for most students consisted on studying or doing research individually. Peng described his daily schedule as

get up, have something to eat and then go to the lab and start my work. If there is a teaching, I go teach. If there is not, I will work in the lab all day all day all day until well typically starting from 9 to 5 or something like that.

Qi said “the first year I stayed in the library.” Even after completing their academic work, many of the students spent a considerable amount of their leisure time on their own. Peng said he finished his schoolwork by five in the afternoon and “after five, I will go home, cook, go online, maybe talk to my friends or my parents and tell them I’m ok and take a shower and go to bed. Even on the weekends.” Almost all the students mentioned that the first thing they do on the weekends when they have more free time is to sleep in. Yu said that on the weekends, “I just
sleep in and woke up at four or five o’clock in the afternoon. I will sleep a lot. On the week
days I can’t sleep too much.” The students would also use their limited leisure time to catch up
or prepare for tasks related to daily life like cooking, cleaning their apartments and grocery
shopping. Ling said “first I have a good sleep. I sleep for a long time and then, because on the
weekdays maybe I don’t have enough time to cook some really delicious food, you can cook
something on the weekend.”

In their leisure time, the students would get together with their friends and classmates, but for most the students they were not able to get together often because of their busy schedules. Instead, they spent their windows of leisure time and study breaks to relax on their own watching TV or movies, listening to music, reading or going to the student recreation center. In the evenings, Ying said she would “cook something for myself and also do some homework and read some papers, or else relax, watch a movie.” Ling explained that she spent her free time “watching some movies, watching some TV shows, go to the recreation center for some exercise, taking exercise and listening to the music, reading books, something, just relaxing stuff.” Some of the students read books and watched movies in English, but others preferred books and movies in Chinese because they found it more relaxing. Qi is one of them who said “I don’t think my brain will be happy if they see English again, after it was tortured…I still cannot use English reading for fun so that’s why I brought a lot of Chinese books.” The students found these individual activities relaxing after a long day of research and studying.

“I think I want to be independent, so I choose.” The second subtheme is that some of the students felt that they would become more independent as a result of their study abroad experience in the U.S. as they took care of everything related to their studies and daily life on their own. One reason Qi choose to study abroad was “to accumulate life experience.” Ying
said that “in China, when we were undergraduate students we still use our parents’ money and live close to parents or even with parents…I feel that people here can just talk freely and they live more independently, especially the undergraduate students. Most of them support themselves by working part-time, which was not the same in China.” Through graduate assistantships, many of the students were able to gain more financial independence from their parents than before like Qi who said “one good thing is that I think that after I came to America, thanks to the scholarship, I can be independent.” Chao said “actually I need the sponsorship. I need funding. My parents can’t afford the education here for me so I have to stand on my own.”

Buying and owning a car is also a new experience for most of the students that they feel greatly increases their independence in the U.S. as few young students own cars in China. Peng listed his goal to buy a car before obtaining his degree and although he had not yet purchased a car, he talked a lot about his plans for learning to drive and buying a car. He said

I somehow made a promise that the first time I left, the first time I left [BG], I’m going to drive my own car. Yeah, I’m waiting for that…I’m waiting for maybe next year and maybe this winter it’s too cold for me to learn how to drive, maybe May.

Several other students already owned cars and they used them to run errands and go to dinner and the movie theater in town and also to go to other cities for shopping and tourism.

When the students faced obstacles, like language difficulties that affected their academic success and their assistantship responsibilities, they could turn to their classmates, professors or friends for assistance, but they often worked to overcome them on their own. The students used Chinese-English dictionaries and spent more time reading their textbooks. Lei struggled to complete his coursework because of his limited language ability, but he said to overcome the challenge “almost now I just look at the textbook” and he also spent extra time to complete his
work satisfactorily. Students also spent more time rehearsing individually to prepare for class presentations and teaching. In order to give good presentations in class, Bo said “we have to read and prepare for two or three days and almost we can recite them.” Chao also said he had “to practice compared to other native students” because “most Chinese don’t get trained for presentation so we just in pain prepare for a couple of hours before the presentation in front of a mirror.” After rehearsing, the students went well and their presentation skills improved over time. When Wei struggled with his teaching assignment, he said he “watch[ed] some other instructors’ courses and maybe spend more time to prepare the course” in order to overcome the difficulty. Ying also felt her teaching ability improved through practice “because for the second class, I just repeated what I had already taught them.”

All of the students built up academic and social support networks to help them achieve their goals for their study abroad experience and to enjoy their lives while living in the U.S., but these networks were still limited because the students came to the U.S. for a short period of time and to complete specific goals. The majority of the students’ time was devoted to individually working towards their academic endeavors and building social connections with other Chinese students and cross-culturally with Americans was only a secondary concern. This allowed the students to develop personal solutions to the challenges they faced and to become much more self-sufficient in their daily lives. The experience of studying abroad in a foreign country can have a large impact on students as they experience situations and challenges that they wouldn’t encounter in their home country and as they adapt to a new environment, the students gain academic, communication and daily life skills that help them to develop as an independent individual.
Research Questions

Research questions that this study addressed are 1) What are the goals/expectations of Chinese international students for interpersonal and intercultural learning and adaptation?, 2) What kinds of groups and networks do Chinese international students interact with at graduate school, and outside of required coursework, what activities do they participate in?, and 3) What barriers to interaction and participation do the students perceive in these environments?

To address the first research question, this study found that the students’ primary goals were academic and professional. If a student mentioned any goals for interpersonal or intercultural learning, they were secondary or tertiary to other goals. Some students listed improving their English language ability and broadening their horizons as goals for their study abroad experience, but others did not list any goals relating to interpersonal and intercultural learning.

In response to the second research question, the students in this study interacted mostly with networks comprised of other students and faculty members from their academic departments and primarily with other students and faculty members from China. Outside of required coursework, some of the students participated in social groups and activities that were organized and attended entirely by Chinese students or in cross-cultural programs organized by the university or local community to connect international students and domestic students, faculty and community members.

In response to the third research question, participants perceived language and cultural barriers to interaction with Americans. Limited English language ability was a common deterrent to interaction except when Americans were patient, understanding and able to employ cross-cultural communication techniques to facilitate communication. Limited experience and
knowledge of U.S. social norms and cultural patterns was another deterrent to cross-cultural interaction except with Americans who had international experience either relating to other international students in the U.S. or going abroad themselves.

Summary

This chapter reported the results of this study through four major themes relating to the students’ goal orientation, interaction with Chinese and American students, faculty and community members and their experience in general studying abroad in the U.S. It was found that the academic goal orientation of the students significantly impacts their interaction and experience in the U.S. The students were much more likely to form relationships with individuals that could help them to achieve their academic and professional goals than to form relationships with individuals not related to their area of study. The students were also more likely for interact and form relationships with other Chinese students or faculty members as these relationships were seen as more familiar and easier for them because of a shared language, cultural background and experience. However, the students did also form relationships with American students, faculty and community members who were understanding of their experience as international students and could employ intercultural communication techniques to facilitate interaction. The students also spent a lot of time on their own in order to fulfill their academic and professional responsibilities and to relax during their leisure time. The next chapter will discuss interpretations of these findings in relation to the academic literature reviewed in Chapter 2, as well as recommendations for professional practice and future research.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The international graduate students from China in this study interacted and built relationships with many individuals throughout the course of their experience living and studying in the U.S. and those individuals became the networks of support for the student as they coped with the stress and challenges of the acculturation process. They interacted with other Chinese students and faculty members and also interacted cross-culturally with students, faculty and community members from the U.S. or countries other than China. Four themes developed around the many factors affecting the students’ interactions with others and the networks of interpersonal support that they developed in the U.S. First, the students’ emphasis on academic and professional goals affected their patterns of interaction and led them to connect with students and faculty members in their same area of study. Second, the students strived to decrease their acculturative stress by seeking interactions and environments that were more familiar to them with other Chinese students. The third theme found that the students were able to relate cross-culturally with Americans more easily when the individual American was able to understand and accommodate their situation as an international student. Finally, the students demonstrated that even in face of acculturative stress and with a limited network of support, they were able to become more independent and accomplish their goals for their study abroad experience.

Theme One: Academic Goal Orientation

The process of acculturation for international students from China studying in the U.S. is impacted by the choices and strategies that students make for cultural practices and interaction (Berry, 2001) and the students in this study demonstrated that those choices are influenced by the motivations and goals that the students have for their study abroad experience. The students in this study all stated that obtaining their degree was their primary goal for their study abroad experience and many of their secondary goals were also related to academic and professional
endeavors like publishing research papers and gaining research and work experience in their field. Because of these goals, they portrayed an interest in learning and adopting the dominant cultural patterns of the U.S. environment when those cultural patterns were related to their academic success. The students also pursued interaction and participation with American individuals and institutions that could contribute to their academic success. However, when possible, the students turned to faculty members and classmates from China for assistance and support.

**Sociocultural Adaptation.** While the students in this study found differences in the educational culture between the U.S. and China, they adapted socioculturally to the culture of the U.S. university. Previous studies also described the numerous cultural barriers that international students from China overcame in order to fulfill their academic and professional goals (Wan, 2001; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2009). The students devoted the large amounts of time and energy necessary to complete their coursework. They overcame language barriers and adapted to American classroom styles, which tended to involve more interactive discussions, group work and presentations than they had been accustomed to in China. Sociocultural adaptation tends to increase for international students over time (Ward & Kennedy, 1993) and for a few students, giving presentations was a daunting task when they first arrived in the U.S., but overtime they learned and practiced until they were able to give successful presentations. They similarly improved many other academic skills in order to meet the academic and professional goals for their study abroad experience.

**A Secondary Support Network.** The students also sought interaction and participation with Americans who would contribute to their academic success, namely American faculty members, advisors and classmates. This relates to the secondary, bicultural network described
by Bochner et al. (1977) that international students develop to be successful in the host country environment. This network is comprised of individuals from the student’s home country and the host country, in this case, China and the U.S. The purpose of this secondary network is to “facilitate the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner” (Bochner et al, 1977, pp. 291-292). This network functionally aligns with the primary goals of the students. Some students described attending American professors’ office hours or approaching them after class when they had questions about the content or structure of their courses. The professors and advisors helped them to not only further their understanding of course content, but also to overcome language and cultural barriers to their academic success.

These cross-cultural relationships were necessary since only a few of the students had professors or advisors from China, but the students would interact and seek assistance from conational students and faculty when possible. The vast majority of the individuals that the students interacted with were their classmates from China. Among other functions, relationships with conational students served to assist and support the students in their program of study and help them meet their academic and professional goals.

International students choose their acculturation strategies for cultural learning and interaction based on their own personal goals. Studies by Berry (1970; 2006), Berry et al (1999), Sam & Berry (2010), and Segall et al (1999) have explored the process of acculturation for international students and found it to be impacted by the fact that international students willingly choose to live in a foreign country for a limited period of time and the host country’s attitude towards foreign nationals, but this study shows that the students’ goal orientation also had a significant impact on their acculturation strategies. In addition, the students choose different strategies for acculturation in different areas of their lives. In the area of academics, the students
strived to adapt socioculturally to the cultural patterns of the U.S. university and formed a bicultural support network similar to the secondary support network described by Bochner et al. (1977). On the other hand, when it comes to areas of the students’ social and daily lives, the students showed less interest in adapting socioculturally to U.S. cultural practices and interacting with Americans and more interest in reducing their acculturative stress.

**Theme Two: America the Familiar**

Chinese students studying in the U.S. face high levels of uncertainty and anxiety as they interact with foreign people in a foreign environment (Berry, 1970) and the students in this study took steps to reduce their acculturative stress. In order to successfully meet their goals and maneuver in the new environment in the U.S., students adapt socioculturally to U.S. cultural patterns and practices (Ward & Kennedy, 1993), but they also need to maintain their psychological adaptation or wellbeing. The students’ familiarity with the U.S. before they arrived and their tendency to seek out other Chinese people as well as Chinese cultural products and practices serve to reduce acculturative stress and help the student to maintain his or her psychological wellbeing. The relationships the students built with other students from China served as an important network of social support for the students that helps them to cope with acculturative stress and to explore and adapt to the new environment.

**General Cultural Knowledge.** The students had a fair amount of general knowledge about the U.S. before they arrived and this prior knowledge took away some of the uncertainty that the students felt when they first arrived in the U.S. and reduced their acculturative stress (Deal, 2002). Although none of the students had been to the U.S. before beginning their current program of study they had gained second-hand knowledge about the U.S. from family and friends, movies and TV shows and other sources. These resources provided valuable
information about the culture and environment of the U.S., which helped the students to better predict the behaviors and attitudes of individuals in the new environment when they first arrive. Even if late, the students discover later that U.S. society is not as simple or uniform as they had been lead to believe, they still benefit from that foundation knowledge of the host culture (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988).

**A Primary Support Network.** After arriving in the U.S., the students sought out relationships with other Chinese students and continued to follow Chinese cultural patterns in their daily lives in the U.S. in order to reduce the uncertainty and stress that comes from moving to a foreign environment (Deal, 2002). This corresponds to Bochner et al.’s description of a primary support network that is mono-cultural and comprised almost entirely individuals from the student’s host country (1977). The close bonds that the students formed with other students from China form a support network of individuals that can understand the acculturative stress that they face on a daily basis and provide a comfortable environment where the students’ interaction is not restricted by language and cultural barriers (Bochner et al, 1977). The students can speak freely in Chinese, eat Chinese food and express other familiar cultural practices with their friends from China. By reducing stress and increasing the comfort of the students in their new environment, this primary support network helps the students from China to meet their interpersonal and daily life needs with more ease and also contributes to the psychological adaptation of the students.

**Psychological and Sociocultural Adaptation.** Although the students formed close friendships mostly with other Chinese students and kept many of their cultural patterns from China, they also adapted to U.S. cultural patterns and interacted with Americans throughout their study abroad experience. While multiple studies found that Chinese students studying abroad
were relatively isolated in their networks of Chinese students and had limited interaction with Americans (Bochner et al, 1977; Deal, 2002; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Trice, 2004; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Williams & Johnson, 2010), but the students did overcome language and cultural barriers interact with some Americans and adapt to life in the U.S. Living and studying in a foreign environment is not a simple undertaking and if the students were not able to get some of their most basic needs for interaction and daily life met by their Chinese classmates, it is possible that the acculturation process would be too daunting.

Theories of acculturation describe integration with the host society as the best outcome (Sam & Berry, 2010), but it is most important that students are able to adapt on their own terms and do not face more acculturative stress than they can manage. Physical and psychological wellbeing and survival are the biggest priorities for Chinese students studying in the U.S. and only the individual student knows how much uncertainty and anxiety he or she can manage. Learning about the U.S. before they arrive and more importantly, building a primary support network of close Chinese friends help students to maintain their physical and psychological wellbeing so they are able to adapt and interact in the new environment at their own pace. However, even though international students cannot be expected to immediately integrate into U.S. society, the Chinese students and American students, faculty and community members can all continue to move gradually out of their comfort zones and adapt to each other in order to move closer to integration.

**Theme Three: Meeting in the Middle**

The international students from China only make up one of the two groups undergoing acculturation and American individuals and institutions also have to respond and adapt to the international students living in their community for successful cross-cultural interaction to occur.
The students did mention a limited number of American students, faculty and community members among the people they interact with most and these relationships are important because they can help students to learn about the cultural norms and practices of the U.S. (Ward & Kennedy, 1993) and to better adapt and feel satisfied with their study abroad experience (Trice, 2004). However, even if international students are interested in connecting with Americans, building cross-cultural relationships takes effort and certain skills from both parties to overcome the language and cultural barriers that can exist between individuals from different cultures. The Americans that the students tended to interact with were those who had interest in cross-cultural interaction and ability in cross-cultural communication. Campus and community programs also facilitated interaction with a limited group of interested persons.

**A Tertiary Support Network.** Aside from relationships with American faculty members and advisors, the students had also built relationships with American students and community members that they interacted with in their daily lives or for social activities. This aligns with the tertiary support network described by Bochner et al (1970). This network is a multicultural network to provide companionship for social and recreational activities (Bochner et al, 1970). While the students’ ties with individuals in this group may not be as close as those with their primary and even secondary support networks, these relationships should provide a more informal environment with less pressure where cross-cultural communication and learning can occur. In spite of the benefits of a multicultural support network, most of the students in this study had a limited number of friends from the U.S. or any other country besides China and instead choose to spend their recreational time with their friends from China. Relationships with conational students were easier to initiate and maintain and many students avoided interacting with Americans.
Cross-Cultural Interaction and Communication. Even though international students may want to make friends with Americans, they may be faced with too much acculturative stress and not have the cultural knowledge to know how (Deal, 2002). Americans can take measures to facilitate cross-cultural interactions on campus and in the local community. The Americans with whom the Chinese students were able to successfully interact and build relationships tended to be kind, patient and understanding which helped to overcome cultural barriers. They also employed cross-cultural communication techniques similar to Special English (VOA, 2012) that helped to overcome language barriers. Most of the Americans they interacted with also tended to have prior experience either going abroad themselves or continued interaction with international students from a variety of countries. They gained their cross-cultural interaction skills from interest and experience.

Cross-Cultural Programming. Programs developed on campus or in the community proved to be the greatest source for the relationships that the Chinese students had developed with Americans. These programs tend to be limited in focus and are specifically geared towards international students and American students and community members interested in building cross-cultural friendships. They can provide social activities and assistance to international students with daily life tasks. These programs serve a vital function for the campus and local community by providing a venue for international students and Americans with similar cross-cultural interests to meet and learn from each other (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). The downside is that they are limited in participation, especially on the part of American students, because of a lack of interest and they are general in focus since they commonly serve the entire community encompassing individuals with a variety of interests, pursuits, ages and backgrounds.
Environmental Factors. Even though the students reported few instances of overt discrimination and were more likely to report positive interactions with Americans, they did face pressure to conform to U.S. dominant cultural practices and norms and varying degrees of receptivity by Americans. Overt discrimination could also be underreported by the students based on their individual definitions and perceptions of discrimination. The students may fail to perceive discrimination at times due to limited English language ability or be unsure about what can be defined as discrimination due to limited knowledge of societal norms and practices in the U.S. (Deal, 2003). Direct confrontations and verbal discrimination are overt and obvious, but feelings of discomfort or differential treatment can be more subtle and difficult to define (Rice & Lee, 2007). As found in studies by Lee & Rice (2007) and Wan (2001), the students perceived that, as a whole, American students had little to no interest in their home countries or cultures and similar to other studies (Bochner et al, 1984; Williams & Johnson, 2010), only small numbers of host national students befriended international students.

Studies on the acculturation of international students agree that interaction with American students, faculty and community members benefits international students as a source of learning and support, but this interaction cannot occur with only the effort of the international students. The students from China found it was much easier to relate to Americans who were understanding of their circumstances as newcomers in a foreign environment and could change their style of speech to communicate with them effectively, but not all Americans are willing or able to do this. The limited nature of cross-cultural relationships is a lost opportunity for international and domestic students to learn about other countries, cultures and languages.
Theme Four: Making it on your Own

The students in this study built up networks of classmates, professors, advisors and friends after arriving in the U.S. to provide emotional support, to assist them in meeting their academic and professional goals and responsibilities and to provide companionship for recreational and leisure activities as in the study by Bochner et al (1977); however, these support networks are often limited in comparison to the networks they had developed in their home country. This can be attributed to the fact that the students have only been in the U.S. for a short time (Berry et al, 1987) and plan to eventually return to their home country and also to the nature of graduate study in the U.S., which often requires extensive amounts of individual work on specific research projects and papers. The result is that the students found themselves becoming more self-sufficient as they spent a lot of time and faced many tasks and issues on their own.

Self-sufficiency. The students became more self-sufficient as an outcome of their study abroad experience. They faced acculturative stress in addition to stress related to their academic and daily lives and the students had to develop their own strategies for adaptation and coping with this stress. Relationships and support networks they developed in the U.S. helped to mediate stress, but the students also independently overcame many challenges. This could mean relying on a Chinese-English dictionary or spending extra time rehearsing for presentations. The students also spent much of their leisure time relaxing on their own by exercising, watching TV or movies, reading books or listening to music. The students were proud of their ability to live and pursue their goals in a foreign environment away from their friends and family in China. All the students felt they were meeting their primary goals for their study abroad experience and most also felt they were meeting all their secondary goals as well.
Current Economic and Communication Technology Factors. Economic factors in China and current communication technology contribute to the ability of the students to independently meet their goals with limited networks of support in the U.S. Market reforms and economic growth over the past three decades have increased the professional and economic opportunities for college graduates within China and today, the majority of students coming from China to study in the U.S. plan to return to China after a period of time (McMurtrie, 2011). This encourages the students to maintain their relationships and networks of support in China even as they develop new relationships in the U.S. Through the internet, the students are not only able to stay in contact with their friends and family in China, but can also keep up with news and entertainment, like music and TV shows from China. With a network of support in China and the knowledge that their stay in the U.S. will likely be temporary, the students can be self-sufficient and achieve their goals.

Acculturative stress can negatively affect the physical and psychological health of international students (Zheng & Berry, 1991) and there are many cultural barriers they have to overcome in their academic and daily life in the U.S., but as long as acculturative stress remains at a manageable level, it can contribute to the students’ personal development and self-esteem. Having limited social support can also push the students to become more independent and self-sufficient as long as they do not feel too isolated. The students felt they were able to accomplish their goals and had grown and changed in many positive ways in spite of the challenges of living and studying abroad in the U.S.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the patterns of interaction and support networks of Chinese graduate students studying abroad in the U.S.
through a qualitative case study at a midsized, Midwestern university in the U.S. With the large and expanding numbers of international students from China studying in the U.S. each year, it is important to explore the process of acculturation that results from the contact and interaction of the students from China with the individuals and institutions of the U.S. In order to meet their goals and daily needs while living and studying in the U.S., the students from China change and adapt to the larger U.S. society, but acculturation is an uneven, two-way process. To a much smaller degree, U.S. society and individuals Americans are also affected by their contact and interaction with students from China and they change and adapt as a result. This study explored the factors that affect the students’ patterns of interaction and support networks and additionally, how these patterns affect their ability to meet their goals for their study abroad experience.

**Chinese Graduate Students.** The students from China interacted with students, faculty and community members from the U.S., China and other countries throughout their lives in the U.S. These interactions and the networks of social support that the students built up were affected by the motivations and goals of the students and the acculturative stress of living in an environment whose language and cultural patterns differ from their own. The students were motivated primarily by academic and professional goals to complete their degree program and gain skills and achievements that will contribute to their future professional success. The students also faced acculturative stress as they adapted psychologically and socioculturally to academic, interpersonal, daily life and other cultural patterns that differ from those in China in the new environment in the U.S.

The vast majority of the individuals that the students interacted with most were conational students and faculty members from China in their same academic area of study. Interacting and building relationships with these individuals is convenient, functional and
comfortable for the students. It is convenient because the students spent the largest amounts of their time within their academic departments either in class, studying, conducting personal research projects and completing the teaching or research responsibilities of their assistantship and they simply have more chances to interact with other students and faculty members in their area of study. It is functional because their classmates and professors have similar responsibilities, pursuits, and areas of expertise and can offer assistance or support for issues related to a student’s coursework or research. It is comfortable because other students and professors from China come from a similar cultural background and they avoid the acculturative stress associated with the language and cultural barriers to cross-cultural interaction. The students formed close ties with conational students who could best understand the experience of acculturation that the students were undergoing and provide emotional, cultural, academic and interpersonal support.

Although most of the individuals that the students interacted with most were conational students and faculty members from China, the students also interacted with American students, faculty and community members. Some of these relationships are convenient and functional if they develop with American students or faculty members in their area of study. The students come into contact with these individuals often and they can be sources of support and assistance as the student pursues his or her academic goals. These relationships can be more difficult to develop because of language and cultural barriers, but they provide the student with opportunities for cultural and cross-cultural learning. As they interact with Americans, the students from China can learn about the cultural patterns and practices of the U.S. society. This cultural learning facilitates their interaction with Americans, but can also contribute to their psychological and sociocultural adaptation to the U.S. in their academic endeavors and daily
lives. Interactions and relationships with Americans is also a source of cross-cultural learning and the skills that students develop interacting with an American who has a different native language and cultural background from them can also help them to interact with individuals with other native languages and cultural backgrounds.

**American Students, Faculty and Community Members.** For the American students, faculty and community members who are also undergoing a process of acculturation as they come into contact and interact with the students from China, there is often less direct motivation and less interest in cross-cultural interaction and building relationships with the Chinese students. Students from China and also international students in general make up only a small percentage of the campus and local community and most Americans could find other American students and faculty members to turn to for assistance and support in their academic endeavors and daily life. However, interacting and developing relationships with students from China still provides opportunities for cultural and cross-cultural learning. They can learn about the language and culture of China and about the Chinese students’ experience as a foreigner in the U.S. In addition, the Americans can gain skills and experience in communicating and relating to individuals with a different native language and cultural background from them. These skills help to integrate people with diverse backgrounds into a multicultural society and are invaluable in an increasingly globalized world.

**Implications for Students and Universities**

The results of this study can justify existing programs and services and also provide some suggestions for Chinese and American students and universities in the U.S. in order to increase the amount of cross-cultural interaction taking place between Chinese students studying abroad
in the U.S. and American students, faculty and community members and to create a more integrated, multicultural campus community.

**Resources for Chinese Students.** Chinese students can benefit from orientation and support after arriving in the U.S. and into their first semester and beyond. The students need practical and cultural information about how to operate within a U.S. university and local community, academic information about their program of study and information about the process of acculturation. Students who like to solve their problems on their own would also benefit from having online access to the information they need. The Chinese students should also have clubs and programs that help them to connect with other Chinese international students who can provide a strong network of support for the students and provide an environment where they can act out their familiar cultural patterns and practices from China.

**Cultural Competence for American Students.** American students need to learn how they benefit from learning more about other countries and cultures and also learning how to interact and relate to people with different backgrounds including intercultural communication skills. Often U.S. university campuses offer some globally minded programming and intercultural training and some students display interest and proficiency in these areas, but the numbers are limited. With some cultural and intercultural experience, American students are more likely to reach out and build relationships with international students from China and other countries.

**Internationalization.** Universities recruit international students from China and benefit from their presence so they have a responsibility to support students in meeting their goals and integrating into the campus community. The students need support with immigration, language, academic success and physical and psychological wellbeing. An office of international student
services can provide some institutional support, but other support can be better provided by other students, faculty and academic departments. Cultural student groups and programs should exist and be promoted so that international student groups can find conational support and also provide opportunities to teach and share elements of their own country and culture with Americans. U.S. universities should also recognize the students’ reliance on conational support networks for information and assistance in their daily lives in the U.S. and even before they arrive. By better connecting with the students’ conational student groups and informal support networks, university faculty and staff could provide better assistance and services to the Chinese international students on campus and help recruit more students from China to their university. Intercultural student groups and programs should also exist to bring domestic and international students together for friendship and learning. However, these clubs and programs often face limited interest on the part of the campus community. Better aligning the efforts of these groups with the academic and professional goals of international and domestic students may help increase participation.

In a world that is increasingly globalized, many universities discuss internationalization, but the subject has yet to make significant changes to the campus cultures of many U.S. universities. A global mindset and international programming should not be a responsibility limited to a defined group of people or offices, but should instead be a mindset that pervades the work of all offices and departments on campus. The institution should promote a multicultural and pluralistic campus community where all visitors and members of society interact and work together with their diverse cultural identities. If these strategies are pursued, they will hopefully contribute to a positive and successful academic experience for international students and better intercultural competency for Americans and international students.
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The design and methodology of this study were chosen to explore the patterns of interaction of Chinese graduate students studying abroad in a U.S. university qualitatively from the perspective of the students, but they also limit the scope of the results. The results of this study may provide insights or inform practices for students and institutions with similar characteristics and in a similar university setting, but future research should explore the experiences of students with different characteristics and in different settings. Further studies could focus on other subpopulations of international students from China whose experiences may be significantly different from those in this study; for example, undergraduate students, married students or students who had been abroad before. The results could also be compared to the further studies with international students from other countries since the patterns of interactions (Trice, 2004) and perceptions of treatment by host nationals (Lee & Rice, 2007) has been shown to vary for international students from different countries of origin. Finally, environmental factors would be expected change in different settings and further studies could explore the experiences of students in U.S. universities in different regions of the U.S., in urban vs. suburban vs. rural communities and with a different racial or ethnic makeup of the student population.
REFERENCES


Appendix A
HSRB Approval

September 22, 2011

TO: Alison Dempsey
Cross Cultural & International Education

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H12T025GE7

TITLE: Intercultural Interactions among Chinese Graduate Students

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of September 21, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on September 3, 2012. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 10-15 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications: Stamped original consent form is coming to you via campus mail.

c: Dr. Christopher Frey

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Where are you from?

2. How long have you been at BGSU?

3. What are you studying?

4. Do you work as a graduate assistant, teaching assistant, etc. on campus?

5. Are you currently taking any English courses at BGSU?

6. What was your educational experience before coming to BGSU?

7. Was this your first time in the U.S.? In a foreign country?

8. How old are you?

9. Are you married?

10. What led you to study in the U.S., and BGSU?
    a. What goals did you hope to achieve during your study abroad experience at BGSU?

11. What were your impressions about the U.S. before you arrived here? Ohio? BG? What kind of place did you imagine it to be?

12. Who are the five people you interact with most in BG?
    a. What is your relationship with them? (How did you meet them?)
    b. What is their nationality?

13. Who do you live with in BG?
14. What is a typical school day like for you? Tell me a story about a typical school day.

15. What is a typical weekend like for you? Tell me a story about a typical weekend.

16. What activities or clubs have you gotten involved with while studying at BGSU?

17. Can you think of a time where you struggled to interact/communicate with an American?
   
   What did you do?
   
   a. Can you think of a time when you easily interacted/communicated with an American?
   
   b. With other Chinese students here in the U.S.?

18. Can you think of a time when you felt that you were treated differently because you are a Chinese student or international student?

19. Do you feel that you have accomplished your goals or are working towards accomplishing all of your goals for your educational experience in the U.S.?