MOVING BETWEEN ACADEMIC SYSTEMS: CHINESE STUDENTS AND THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES WITHIN WESTERN UNIVERSITIES

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

May 2015

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ABSTRACT

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This study addresses the academic challenges graduate Chinese students face when they move from Eastern to Western university environments and English becomes the language of instruction. To address these issues, this study aims to understand the Chinese students’ academic background in China, the methods through which they learned English, and their beliefs, expectations, and misconceptions in relation to academic success, courses, professors, assessments, and grades when they come to study in a medium-sized U.S. university. Data were collected through interviews with four Chinese graduate students who have been in the U.S. for nine months or longer. Each participant was interviewed during three individual sessions. Then, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The results indicated that the Chinese educational system favors conservative attitudes toward knowledge based on reproductive models of thinking, which align with the purpose of Chinese education. However, these attitudes may not transfer to Western academic environments and may clash with the purpose of Western education, which favors experimentation and innovation. In addition, the participants’ preparedness for English immersion can be misleading for both Chinese students and U.S. faculty. Lastly, the participants believed that in order to succeed at the university, they had to improve their communicative strategies and change their attitudes to learning. These findings may be useful for identifying and understanding Chinese students’ attitudes and specific academic needs within the different cultures and subcultures at the university. They may also assist U.S. instructors in developing curricula, assessments, and classroom practices that take Chinese students’ needs into account.
This study is dedicated to Luis, Joao, and Caio for their love, partnership, and adventurous spirit.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I cannot express enough thanks to my committee for their continuous support and encouragement: Dr. Burke, my committee chair and advisor, for your deep commitment, dedication, responsiveness, and valuable feedback; Dr. Clark for your assistance with issues involving paperwork, positive thinking, and optimism; Kimberly Spallinger for your generosity, engagement with recruiting participants, and for being the one who got this thesis started.

My completion of this project could not have been accomplished without the support of these important people: my mother, who led the way onto academic studies abroad where my sister and I first learned about the challenges of studying in another language; my sister, Cica, who thoughtfully suggested that I should read River Town, by Peter Hessler; Rosana Martins and Mary Burchfield for their faith and prayers; Marcia Salazar-Valentine for her attention and commitment to the international students at the university, and to Dr. Wells-Jensen for her ukulele lessons and enthusiastic inspiration. My special thanks to my participants, who patiently taught me about their education in China, and shared their experiences in the U.S. with an open heart. My interest and appreciation for the Chinese culture and people grew beyond expectation.

Finally, to my caring and supportive husband and children: my deepest gratitude. Your encouragement when the times got rough are much appreciated and duly noted. It was a great comfort to know that you were willing to provide assistance to our household activities while I completed my work. My heartfelt thanks.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to Brown (2001), English has become a “tool for international communication in transportation, commerce, banking, tourism, technology, diplomacy, and scientific research” (p. 118). With the globalized world and supremacy of English languages around the world, U.S. colleges and universities have attracted batches of international students in the pursuit of a college degree and better job opportunities. More and more educators find themselves in an increasingly diverse classroom environment where they have to cope not only with different levels of proficiency in English, but also with a variety of cultural beliefs and philosophies of learning and teaching. A current concern for these educators is to decide which methods and classroom instruction will constitute best practice to respond to and meet their students’ needs.

The inspiration for the present research goes back to classroom observations I did a few years ago at a Midwestern-private school that offered an English as a Second Language (ESL) program for high school international students. My focus was on secondary-level Chinese students in both ESL and content classrooms. Many of the difficulties Chinese students were facing were attributed to their lack of proficiency in English and poor socialization skills. After reading some of their written assignments and observing their classroom behavior, it appeared to me that the core of their problems was underneath what seemed apparent at the time. When I was a graduate student in the Curriculum and Teaching Program at Whitefield University¹, some of my classmates were Chinese students and soon I realized it was hard for me to understand their spoken English during oral presentations and classroom discussions. Being an international student myself, this experience triggered many questions about cultural and academic issues within classrooms in which English was the language of instruction. My previous teaching background as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructor compelled me to look at this

¹ For privacy purposes, the original institution name was altered.
situation from a teacher’s perspective. At the same time, I could not ignore my current status as an international student. I was interested in understanding the gaps that emerge when English is no longer the language to be learned, rather the means of instruction to learn content and develop expertise in a particular area to earn our master’s degrees (Ballard, 1996). My research begins by providing a historical perspective of the status of English in the world and the methods used to teach English for speakers of other languages.

A Brief Perspective of the Status of English in the World

Back in the 1970s and early 1980s both the U.S. and Europe were faced with issues of massive immigration with the establishment of the European Common Market and their need for labor. Educators were pressured to look for new teaching methods that would increase the ability of parents and their children who immigrated to communicate successfully in a shorter period of time (Mitchell, 1994; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Learning a new language through the traditional grammar-translation method required years of study and dedication before students were actually able to use language in real life (Mitchell, 1994). As a matter of fact, grammar-translation methods did not meet the needs of adult learners who were busy at work nor schoolchildren who were less academically able (Mitchell, 1994). In addition, progressive ideas about learning and teaching had already spread in academic institutions and claimed that active learning was more effective than passive learning (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004; Mitchell, 1994). This idea represented a shift towards the adoption of techniques that involved, for example, active participation and group work. Teaching world languages was no exception to this tendency and teachers were challenged to look for new methods that could better accommodate this shift in thinking (Mitchell, 1994).
Meanwhile, a handful of developing nations around the world realized the urge to participate in first world economies and pressed for reforms towards modernization. According to Langlois (2001) modernization can be seen as a gradual movement from a society that is oriented to past traditions and engages in reforms in order to look more like industrialized societies. Many developing countries like China have held the belief that the process of modernization should be based on the experiences of other countries (Chengdan, 2009).

Acquiring the English language has become an important target in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) initiative to modernization (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Hayhoe, 1992; Hu, 2002). Even though traditional methods, such as grammar-translation and audio-lingualism, were in agreement with the Chinese culture of learning, they were not preparing students to meet the new pedagogical objectives and the professional needs of a world that was becoming increasingly global. To address this gap, in the late 1980s Chinese authorities imposed a reform movement to import and implement communicative language teaching (CLT) in order to increase the nation’s participation in the global economies. Massive effort and resources were invested in improving curricula, updating English syllabi, creating communication-oriented textbooks, developing skill-driven examinations, and promoting instructors’ knowledge of new language-learning philosophies and pedagogies (Hu, 2002).

**Rationale for the Study and Statement of the Problem**

Based on my personal experience as a world language learner, teacher and researcher, and an observer of world language classrooms, I tend to support research that states the importance of communicative competence and meaningful learning (Burke, 2007; Canale & Swain, 1980; Habermas, 1970; Savignon, 1997). However, Burnaby and Sun (1989), Cortazzi and Jin (1996a, 1996b), Hu (2002), Nunan (1987), Rao (2002), and Richards and Rodgers (2014)
have shown that there are many obstacles to the effective implementation and development of communicative competence in English language classrooms in China. Chinese instructors of English may fail to understand what a communicative, student-centered classroom is (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b; Hu, 2002; Paine, 1992; Richards, and Rodgers, 2014). They also may be constrained by external circumstances, such as classroom sizes, time limitations, examination pressure, and cultural barriers that prevent them from fully embracing the communicative approach (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Hu, 2002; Paine, 1992). In addition, Chinese ESL/EFL instructors may feel vulnerable about their own communicative and cultural proficiency and might not understand the worth in learning through that approach (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Hu, 2002).

Ballard (1996) and Paine (1992) suggested that the difficulty in adjusting to Western methodologies is more deeply rooted in the nature of the Chinese culture of learning than on CLT or any method of language teaching itself. In the twentieth century China adopted Mandarin as their standard language in their search for modernization (Ramsey, 1989). In the twenty-first century, China invests heavily in teaching English as a foreign language to become an active participant in the global economy (Hayhoe, 1992; Hu, 2002). English, along with Chinese and mathematics, is one of the core subjects in primary and secondary school curricula (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Hayhoe, 1992). Hu (2002), Nunan (1987), Paine (1992), Rao (2002), and Ross (1992) pose that Chinese philosophy of learning clashes with Western philosophy. The often-quoted saying “Chinese learning for fundamental principles; Western learning for practical application” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Hu, 2002; Ross, 1992) illustrates the dilemma. The communicative approach was conceived upon the philosophies of learning and teaching to meet the principles of Western economy (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The language issues that
emerged from immigration movements in the U.S. and Europe in the late 1970s demanded more effective approaches to language learning and teaching in Western societies (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These approaches prioritized the development of skills that enabled conditions for life and work in diverse environments rather than cultivation of the intellect (Brown, 2001; Byram, 2008). The different assumptions about the purpose of education in Eastern countries made attempts to implement the communicative approach in China questionable (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). If Eastern and Western have different views on education, assumptions about what it entails to be successful students in these contexts also may differ.

English language dictionaries provide several definitions of the word “success.” The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines success as 1) the fact of getting or achieving wealth, respect, or fame; 2) the correct or desired result of an attempt. This study more often associates success with the second definition. However, that definition may not comprise all the meanings and perspectives addressed in this study when referring to success. Success can be analyzed from different perspectives, and the researcher chose to focus on academic success. In this study, academic success entails: 1) meeting academic standards; 2) showing ability to participate and function in class; 3) socializing with faculty and classmates; 4) understanding, accepting, and adopting attitudes that are in agreement with the academic culture. Academic success is one of the themes of this research and the term is used throughout this study.

According to the Whitefield University Student Handbook\(^2\), students are responsible for progress toward their academic success. Day-to-day decisions have an impact on this success. The university makes the following recommendations:

- Attend classes and take good notes.
- Study every day; don’t wait until the last minute.

\(^2\) All names of participants and the university have been changed to protect those who participated in this study.
• Manage your time wisely; a day planner/organizer will help you plan ahead.
• Set realistic, positive, measurable goals.
• Understand how you learn best.
• Find a study environment that works for you.
• Read your textbook in small manageable amounts.
• Get involved in a group or organization that matches your values and interests.
• Talk to people in your classes; find study partners or become part of a study group; get to know your professors.
• Be an active participant in your education.
• Seek the help of advisors and faculty, before a small problem becomes a crisis.

According to the handbook, the university’s student body should be treated as a uniform group with the same needs and outcomes and does not differentiate between international and non-international students.

Research Questions

When Chinese students enroll in Western universities, not only do they move to a different country, but also to a distinctive academic milieu that can be overwhelmingly different from the one in which they have been raised and educated (Ballard, 1996; Biggs and Watkins, 1996). This study examined the expectations four Chinese students had when they arrived to a medium-sized mid-western university to earn their master’s degrees. The research questions I posed to address these issues were as follows:

1. What do Chinese students believe is necessary for their academic success at the university?
2. What were Chinese students’ expectations about how they would perform in courses
while earning their master’s degree?

3. What changes do Chinese students believe they need to make in order to succeed at the university?

The present study aims at providing some insight into these participants’ beliefs about teaching and learning in China and in the U.S., and how students are prepared in China to study and live in English speaking countries. My intent is to identify common ground so that the existing gaps in diverse classrooms can be bridged to meet the needs of Chinese students.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms and their definitions that are used throughout this study.

**Confucianism** – Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE) (Fenggang & Tamney, 2011, pp. 128-129)

**EFL** – English as a Foreign Language; English learning contexts in which English is not spoken widely outside the classroom; e.g., Japan (Folse, 2009, p. 343)

**ESL** – English as a Second Language; English learning contexts in which English is widely spoken outside the classroom; e.g., the U.S., Canada, the U.K, Australia (Folse, 2009, p. 343)

**ESOL** - English for Speakers of Other Languages; an alternative term for ESL. For many, ESOL is the preferred term as it does not assume that learners are necessarily taking on a second language (for many language learners, English is a third, fourth or even fifth language); it also shifts a sometimes invisible emphasis of the importance of English over that of other languages towards an explicit acknowledgement of the primacy of language and culture in all our lives (Retrieved from http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Swearer_Center/Literacy_Resources/esol.html)
**Gaokao** – The *gaokao*, also known as the National Higher Entrance Examination, is an exam taken by students in China at the end of grade 12. The exam consists of three mandatory subjects (Chinese, math, and English) and three out of six elective subjects (three from pure science subjects and three from social science subjects). Only top-performing students in high-stake tests may enroll in prestigious universities and get recruited for satisfactory jobs. They thereby enjoy opportunities that are off-limits to lower scoring students. China adopts a highly selective educational system, with fewer students at the higher end of the educational ladder (Confucius Institute in Toledo, 2015).

**Language proficiency** – a person’s ability to read, write, listen, and speak in their world language (Elder & Kim, 2015)

**Summary**

The author believes that by understanding the learning contexts in which Chinese graduate students were raised and educated and by describing the challenges these students undergo when they enroll in Western academic environments, faculty in Western educational systems may be better able to identify best classroom practices to assist Chinese graduate students in the transition process between Eastern and Western educational contexts. A brief history of the status of English in the world and current assumptions about the best methodologies and practices for increasingly diverse classrooms were explained. Next, the rationale for this study and the research questions were presented. Lastly, a definition of terms was provided.

Chapter 2 presents Eastern and Western perspectives of education: 1) the Chinese philosophy of teaching and learning; 2) English language methods and the aspects of teaching and learning they address; 3) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Western hemisphere;
4) communicative competence; 5) English language teaching in China and the existing obstacles to its implementation; and 6) acquisition of knowledge and academic success within Eastern and Western educational systems. Chapter 3 explains and describes the methods and procedures used to conduct this study. The results of this study are presented in Chapter 4. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I discuss my findings by answering my three research questions, drawing conclusions and providing future recommendations and suggestions for Western instructors.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter discusses different elements interfering with the academic success of Chinese students in U.S. universities. In order to better understand the Chinese participants’ educational background, the Chinese philosophy of learning and teaching is described. Then an overview of world language teaching in the U.S. and in Europe from the 1950s to the present is provided and the emergence of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the Western hemisphere is explained. Next, English Language Teaching (ELT) practices from the 1950s to the present date in China is examined. Finally, issues about attitudes to learning and what it entails to be a successful student in Eastern and Western academic systems are presented.

Chinese Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

Five hundred years before the purported birth of Christ, Confucius devised a system of national exams that would grant social mobility to the common Chinese person (Lee, 1996). It was a time when China was ruled by feudal lords, and the common man had no access to government or leadership (Lee, 1996). Confucius believed that the human being, not divine entities, was the propelling force of society. Human beings could be taught, improved, and perfected. For Confucius, education was the means by which human beings could be empowered; the ordinary person could become superior and the weak nation could become strong (Hu, 2002). The Chinese saying “everything is low, but education is high” (wanban jie xiapin weiyou dushu gao) illustrates the purpose of education as a means of attaining superiority and high spirituality. In the Confucian tradition, even a person coming from a precarious upbringing could have a chance to achieve social recognition and material rewards (Hu, 2002; Lee, 1996; Zhu, 1992). Everyone is educable and capable of attaining perfection (Lee, 1996). Differences in intelligence and ability are not viewed as determiners of educational achievement.
Instead human dispositions such as effort, determination, perseverance, and patience play a more significant role (Biggs, 1996a, 1996b; Lee, 1996). The utilitarian function of education, therefore, has motivated generations of students in China to aspire to success in education (Lee, 1996). According to Lee (1996), the possibility of social mobility became a significant driving force for Chinese children to study hard for a better future. In addition to making social mobility possible, academic achievement could be a way to be useful to society, to dignify ancestors (guanzong yaozu) and to “bring pride to family” (Hu, 2002, p. 100). By passing college exams, Chinese students not only accomplish an academic goal, but they also fulfill a moral obligation to their families, community, and nation.

In the Confucian tradition, education also means the cultivation of moral qualities (Scollon, 1999). Confucius designed curriculum for young men that was oriented towards literature, behavior, loyalty and tact, and combined moral and intellectual education (Zhu, 1992). Traditionally, moral education included teaching how to relate to other people in society and cultivating moral virtues such as loyalty, fidelity, altruism, modesty, and conformity—that is, how to be a good person (Scollon, 1999). According to Hu (2002), Confucianism “encourages imitation of socially approved models and collective orientations, but discourages fulfillment of personal needs, and self-expression-issues that are given priority in the CLT classroom” (p. 97).

Hu (2002) notes how Confucian philosophy regards education as a “process of accumulating knowledge rather than a practical process of constructing and using knowledge for immediate purposes” (p. 97). Yu (1984) illustrates this view by comparing it to the practice of saving money in a bank. According to this perception, knowledge is saved for future use, just like money is saved for any future emergency. He poses that the ultimate purpose of knowledge is accumulation for a need that exists only in the future and not for immediate consumption. In
addition to perceiving learning as a process of accumulating knowledge, Hu (2002) points out to the idea of “source of knowledge” (p.97). By tradition, true knowledge comes from written texts such as classic and official literature (Paine, 1992; Scollon, 1999). The Chinese proverbs “it is always useful to open a book” (kaijuan youyi) and “when the time comes for you to use your knowledge, you will hate yourself for having read too little” (shu dao yongshi fang hen shao) both demonstrate the centrality of textbooks and reading as a source of knowledge as opposed to the Western view that places students as “negotiators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information” (Hu, 2002, p. 98).

The role of the teacher in the process of transmitting textbook knowledge is crucial in the Confucian philosophy (Paine, 1992). She explains, first the teacher reads, interprets, analyses, and elaborates points selected in the textbook. Then, the teacher helps students make connections between what has been learned previously to the new points. Finally, students repeat, memorize, and understand. Memorization is a Chinese strategy of internalizing content (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Lee, 1996; Paine, 1992). According to Lee (1996) Chinese teachers share the belief that the repetition of small components leads to an understanding of the bigger picture. Students memorize to understand (Biggs & Watkins, 1996).

Because teachers are the ones in charge of transmitting knowledge, students must respect and pay reverence to the teachers (Paine, 1992). Hu (2002) claims “students are expected to respect and not challenge their teachers” (p. 98). In a survey conducted at Nankai University, Tiajin, in 1993, the most frequent expectation that Chinese students had of a good teacher was that the teacher should know his or her subject in depth (67%). Other characteristics, such as, having pedagogic skills that aroused students’ interest (17%), using effective teaching methods (16%), or ability to explain clearly (less than 7%) received far lower percentages (Cortazzi & Jin,
1996a). Hu (2002) pointed out two other perceived expectations regarding a teacher’s roles. The first is to cultivate good citizenship. The second is to play the role or a mentor or parent. Teachers should be available to give advice on a wide range of situations from “correct way of studying to most personal problems” (p. 99). The third is to make sure that all students progress in a satisfactory way. Hu (2002) notes that, “It is against Chinese expectations to adopt a pedagogy that may put teachers at risk of losing face” (p. 99).

**English Language Teaching**

Since the late 1980s, English language teaching and learning has gained importance and popularity at an accelerated rate in the People’s Republic of China (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b). There has been clear recognition of English being an important resource that the nation can harness in its drive to modernization (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b). English proficiency can help the Chinese promote international exchange, acquire scientific knowledge and technological expertise, foster economic progress, and increase participation in international competition (Brown, 2001, 2007; Ross, 1992). Savignon (1997) points out, “teaching methodologies respond to a variety of economic, political, social and intellectual influences” (p. 15). Therefore an overview of the methods of English language teaching from the 1950s to the present is provided in order to offer a better understanding of the emerging needs that influenced the development of different methods and approaches to language learning and teaching.

**Until 1950s.** Before the supremacy of English as a world language, foreign language learning in Western schools was first concerned with teaching Latin and Greek and later with modern languages, such as French and German (Brown, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The tradition of teaching classic languages aimed to develop the intellect with scholarly purposes and in some cases to develop reading proficiency on classic texts. Therefore, classroom teaching
focused on learning grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary and declensions and conjugations, translations of texts, and doing written exercise (Brown, 2001). Little or no attention was given to the spoken language because the purpose of language learning was to exercise the mind rather than enhance communication (Brown, 2001). Until two centuries ago this was called the Classic Method, but in the nineteenth century it came to be known as the Grammar-Translation Method. Foreign language learning was, therefore, associated to this method. The Grammar-Translation method is by far the most traditional and “requires few specialized language skills on the part of teachers, tests of grammar rules and translations are easy to construct and can be objectively scored” (Brown, 2001, p. 19). However, Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that there is no literature that supports the Grammar-Translation Method on the basis of linguistics, psychology, or educational theory.

1950s-1960s. During the previous decade, World War II had awakened Americans from their linguistic isolation and triggered “the need for them to become orally proficient in the languages of both their allies and enemies” (Brown, 2001, p. 22). The U.S. military invested massively on language programs that focused essentially on pronunciation and repetition drills, and conversation practice and practically eliminated the traditional grammar-translation curriculum. The “Army Method” came to be known in the 1950s as the Audio-lingual Method (Brown, 2001).

Meanwhile, in the People’s Republic of China, students learned Russian as a foreign language and Russian textbooks emphasized grammar-translation methods (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Hayhoe, 1996). However, with the decline of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the late 1950s, Russian lost its popularity and there was a swing to study modern languages such as French, German, and English in Chinese schools (Hayhoe, 1996). Chinese textbook writers looked for
new methods and materials that suited Chinese learners and Chinese circumstances (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a). After the mid 1960s, however, during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), foreign languages were banned from Chinese curriculum for being considered too bourgeois and a threat to communism (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Hayhoe, 1996; Hessler, 2001). The initiatives launched to contain the advance of democracy and capitalism in China not only paralyzed the country politically but also affected it economically and socially in drastic ways (Hayhoe, 1996; Qiu, 1999). The impact on education culminated with the complete closing of higher education institutions and faculty being sent to rural areas for retraining (Hayhoe, 1996).

According to Howatt and Widdowson (2004), there were seven predominating principles of teaching ELT between 1950 and 1970 in U.S. and Europe.

1. All skills should be taught (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with priority to spoken skills.
2. Acquisition of appropriate speech habits through spoken language.
4. Careful selection of vocabulary, which was presented with new grammatical patterns through written texts.
5. Inductive grammar teaching through presentation and practice of new patterns.
6. Meaning should be thought through ostensive procedures and/or linguistic context.
7. Avoidance of error through practice and rehearsal (pp. 299-300).

For Howatt and Widdowson (2004), this era was mainly characterized by grammar patterns and vocabulary that were carefully selected and graded, stress on pronunciation, and relevance of text. Howatt and Widdowson (2004) claim that the language being taught in the classroom closely obeyed literate norms: well-formed, standard English sentences, which were “translated
into speech by the teacher” (p. 300). Language patterns and grammatical accuracy were stressed.

**1970s and onwards.** It was with no surprise that in the West many minds and language learners welcomed the spirited 1970s and all the innovations to language learning theories that followed (Brown, 2001). Growing interest in language acquisition led to research on second language learning and teaching (Brown, 2001). Alternative methods based on acquisition of language and language learning theories and purposes attempted at fulfilling the gaps and responding to the boredom that grammar-translation and the rigidity of drills had become (Brown, 2001). Some of these new methods acknowledged the existence of affective domains interfering with learning and placed emphasis on activities that aimed at reducing anxiety. The Community Language Learning (CLL) method, for instance, consisted of a series of group exchanges in the learners’ native language and a teacher performing as a “language counselor” who would translate the utterances into English. The learner then repeated the English sentence as accurately as possible (Brown, 2001).

Another method of the seventies, Suggestopedia, advocated for “relaxed states of mind for maximum retention of material” (Brown, 2001, p. 27). While music and comfortable seats were introduced to the classroom to promote relaxation, students adopted names and attitudes of native speakers (Brown, 2001). The Silent Way consisted of another trendy method of the 1970s. Grounded on more cognitive rather than affective assumptions, this method was based on problem-solving approaches to learning (Brown, 2001). Richards and Rodgers (2014) suggested that learning was facilitated when the learner discovered or created rather than remembered, realia was used for mediation, and the content to be learned involved problem solving. Discovery learning procedures were highly encouraged as a means to foster learners’ independence, autonomy, and responsibility. The teacher was viewed as a stimulator who would be silent most
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of the time (Brown, 2001).

In the late 1970s, two approaches were developed based on observations of first language acquisition: Total Physical Response (TPR) and the Natural Approach. The former, TPR, was based on observations of language development of young children. In interactions involving young children and their parents (or other adults) both verbal and physical elements are present. The child, with still little verbal command of the language, responds physically to a verbal stimulus from the adult, and the adult reinforces the child’s responses through further verbal stimulus. This creates a positive feedback loop between the parent’s speech and the child’s actions (Byram, 2000). Moreover, it was also noticed that young children typically spend a long time listening to language, called the silent period, before ever attempting to speak, and that they can understand and react to utterances that are much more complex than those they can produce themselves (Brown, 2001). The teacher is the source of the learners’ input and the creator of interesting and stimulation variety of classroom activities such as sketches, games, and small-group work, but it is the learner’s decision making ability that comes into play.

Also based on theories of language acquisition was the Natural Approach. Originally proposed in 1977, it is concerned with personal communication skills and, therefore, focuses on everyday language situations such as “shopping, conversations, listening to the radio” (Brown, 2001, p. 31). The natural approach was very different from the audio-lingual method, the mainstream approach in the U.S. until the early 1980s (Markee, 1997). While the audio-lingual method emphasized drills and error correction, these practices disappeared almost entirely with the introduction of the Natural Approach (Markee, 1997). The Natural Approach placed more emphasis on exposure to language input and on reducing learners' anxiety than on language practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).
The methods of the seventies emerged as reactions to the grammar-translation method and audio-lingualism (Brown, 2001). Their focus was to address the setbacks and limitations posed by traditional methods, and these attempts revealed a growing interest in the learner (Brown, 2001). More and more scholars became concerned with understanding the purpose of language use, and many were in agreement with the idea that we use language to communicate (Habermas, 1970; Hymes, 1967; Savignon, 1997).

**Communicative Language Teaching in Western Hemisphere (U.S. and Europe)**

Brown (2001, 2007), Canale and Swain (1980), and Hu (2002) contend that it is difficult to offer a definition of Communicative Language Teaching – CLT. As opposed to being seen as a method, it is conceived more often as an approach that takes into consideration principles about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching (Brown, 2001, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In that sense, CLT differs from traditional methods of language teaching in its emphasis on communication rather than on the teaching of grammar (Brown 2001, 2007). It emphasizes meaningful learning, as opposed to rote memorization (Brown 2001, 2007). In other words, it presupposes that, for real communication to take place, subjects must have some message to convey, some understanding of the context, and must be granted some freedom to express their own thoughts and feelings (Habermas, 1970). Real-life learning requires that learners develop linguistic fluency and not just accuracy, and CLT provides students with tools and opportunities to generate unrehearsed language within different contexts so that learners reach their fullest potential (Brown, 2007). Brown (2007) summarizes seven characteristics of a CLT approach for language learning.

2. Meaningful purpose. The learning of grammar structures must engage the learner in the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of the language in real life situations.

3. Balance of fluency and accuracy. The flow of language is as important as the accuracy in which structures are used. Teachers must know when to prioritize each one of these aspects throughout their lessons.

4. Real world contexts. The ultimate goal of learning is the use of language in real life situations. Therefore classroom activities must provide students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts.

5. Autonomy and strategic involvement. Students become aware of their learning processes through assessing their own styles of learning. Students are provided with strategies for production and comprehension and with opportunities to assess their weaknesses, strengths, and preferences.

6. Teacher roles. Teacher is a facilitator and guide rather than the main source of knowledge. The teacher is a coach who values their students’ linguistic development.

7. Student roles. Students in a CLT class are active participants in their own learning process. Students are expected to share interests, ideas, and thoughts. They interact and work collaboratively with their teachers and peers (pp. 46-47)

**Communicative Competence**

Communicative competence is a term in linguistics that refers to the user’s knowledge not only of the rules of syntax, morphology, phonology but also social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately (Savignon, 1997). The notion of communicative competence set the foundations for the communicative approach to foreign language teaching (Leung, 2005). Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence in terms of three
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components: 1) grammatical competence: words and rules; 2) sociolinguistic competence: appropriateness; 3) strategic competence: adequate use of communication strategies. While traditional methods rely on the analysis of sentences and structures in terms of how the grammatical elements interact within a sentence, Hymes (1968) was interested in looking at speech events, that is, at the communicative “activities that are governed directly by the rules of language use” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 17). Even though research acknowledges that little is known about how social context and grammatical forms interact, Hymes (1968) poses that it is through the observation of communicative activities that one can devise the rules of language use and the social meaning of utterances.

For Hymes (1968) communicative competence is an interaction of four systems of competence: grammatical (what is formally possible), psycholinguistic (what is feasible based on the means of implementation available), sociocultural (what the context says is socially appropriate), and probabilistic (what actually occurs). With second language teaching, much attention has been given to grammatical and sociocultural competences. As for psycholinguistic competence, Canale and Swain (1980) argue that it is not dealt with directly because “perception and memory constraint are likely to impose themselves in a natural and universal manner rather than require conscious learning on the part of a student” (p. 16). The probabilistic rules of occurrence in Hymes’ model, however, seem to be an important aspect of language use. In other words, knowledge of what a native speaker is likely to say in a given context is a crucial component of second language learners’ competence to understand second language communication and to self-expression in a native-like way.
English Language Teaching in China

The development of English Language Teaching (ELT) in China can be gauged by the status of English within the context of the People’s Republic modernization process (Ross, 1992). English has been acknowledged as a resourceful instrument in technology, science, and commerce (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a).

Chinese approaches to language teaching are traditionally concerned with mastery of knowledge, which stands upon four pillars: the teacher, the textbook, grammar, and vocabulary (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b). The teacher is an authority and source of knowledge as well as an intellectual and moral example (Hu, 2002; Scollon, 1999). Teachers are the models to be copied and the textbook is the key element in Chinese learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b; Rao, 2002; Scollon, 1999). Instructors are expected to go over the text and study grammar points which are transmitted through meticulous explanations (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b). Texts are presented in detail and frequently memorized. Grammar and vocabulary are explained and taught to students who are supposed to learn hundreds or even thousands of words by heart each year (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b). Thorne and Thorne (1992) suggest that the central activity of English learning in China is vocabulary memorization. Grammar, in turn, is introduced out of context with no communicative purpose or as a means to convey meaning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a). A study reporting classroom observations of nine instructors teaching grammar noted that even though English was the most frequent medium of instruction, more than 85 percent of class time was spent on teacher explanations. Students worked individually and student talk only occurred when answering questions (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b). Reading, grammar and vocabulary are the main focus of language instruction. Writing, listening and speaking are given low priority in Chinese language instruction (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b).
At the lower levels, writing activities in Chinese EFL classrooms concern written production at sentence level (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b). At the higher levels, teachers realize their students’ difficulties with more elaborated writing techniques but the intense focus on testing prevents them from further developing their students’ writing skills (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b). In addition, Chinese EFL teachers are unaware of process-oriented approaches that develop strategies such as planning, pre-writing, or drafting “to improve students’ writing” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b, p. 69). It is not uncommon for Western teachers to find that Chinese students’ written texts lack clarity and logic (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Houston, 1994). Arndt (1987) has suggested that little awareness is given to writing as a process in Chinese schools. Scollon and Scollon (1995) have also indicated that Chinese students tend to prefer inductive modes of writing with a delayed introduction to the main point. They noted that this practice could cause confusion in Western readers since their expectation lies on a deductive approach to writing (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Biggs & Watkins, 1996). In a similar way, Chinese students tend to avoid expressing their views openly and choose quoting or paraphrasing as a sign of respect for authorities and literary traditions. In the West, this would be interpreted as lack of individuality and creativity, and imply plagiarism (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a).

The introduction of CLT in China has shown, among other things, the existing disparity in philosophies of learning (Ballard, 1996). In the late nineties, Cortazzi & Jin (1996a, 1996b) have carefully examined English teaching and learning in China and provided evidences of the differences in learning and teaching between the Western and the Chinese educational contexts and the challenges to integrate CLT to the Chinese context. In spite of the perceived differences at several levels, Chinese teachers and students are willing to adjust, to learn, and to succeed (Biggs, 1996a, 1996b; Rao, 2002). Cortazzi & Jin (1996a) and Rao (2002) also note different
expectations in relation to CLT, teachers’ and students’ roles, teacher training, and actual Chinese student’s performance in U.S. colleges and universities. Chinese teachers are expected to be a model, they are the dominant figure in the classroom whereas students take more passive roles as learners (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Paine, 1992). Even the concepts ‘active’ or ‘passive’ suggest different interpretations. Cortazzi and Jin (1996b) claim that Chinese teachers and students relate the notion of “activity” to mental processes, for instance, it implies “cognitive involvement, lesson preparation, reflection, review, thinking, memorization, and self-study” (p.71). In contrast, for the majority of international teachers in China, “activity” means oral participation (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b, p. 71). The language instruction Chinese students are getting in their home country is focused on preparing them for college entrance overseas; however, it does not seem to fulfill their academic expectations and needs once they get into English speaking overseas colleges (Ballard, 1996).

**Obstacles to ELT in China.** Even though CLT has been gradually incorporated into EFL classrooms since the beginning of 1980s, Rao (2002) claims that CLT has not yet become a prevailing method in most EFL classrooms in Chinese institutions. His study involved 30 English-major university students and was based on earlier research findings of existing mismatches between learners’ and teachers’ perception about how students learn. Burnaby and Sun (1989) and Rao (2002) argue that Chinese teachers favor teacher-centered methods and prioritize knowledge of English structures, content, and exam results. Rao (2002) explains that most English teachers in Chinese institutions are native Chinese speakers. They do not have enough training in using CLT and they also have low English proficiency to improve Chinese students’ communicative competence. Among the most frequently reported reasons for the lack of success of CLT in China, the study conducted by Rao (2002) indicates:
• By the time Chinese undergraduate students enter university in China, they have become used to the teacher-centered and book-centered classrooms, and to using reproductive strategies to learn.

• Chinese students tend to prefer non-communicative to communicative activities. They enjoy working in groups, but do not like moving around the class.

• A large majority of students report having difficulties related to communicative activities. These difficulties may render them unwilling or unable to participate in dynamic activities in the classroom.

• Chinese students acknowledge the increasing importance of communicative competence, but they still prefer grammar than communicative competence activities because all language tests are grammar-based (pp.91-97).

According to Burnaby and Sun (1989), Chinese ELT teachers have noted that not every Chinese student learns English to study, live, and/or work in English speaking countries. Some might need English just to read technical articles or translate documents. These teachers argue that for these students current Chinese methods are suitable to meet their learning purposes. Rao (2002) claims that CLT was first created for countries in which English is the second language, such as Britain, the U.S., and Canada. In China, the method meets many obstacles when is adapted to EFL situations. Burnaby and Sun (1989) identify some obstacles interfering in the implementation of CLT in Chinese higher education:

• Strong expectation from students and university administrators that the curriculum is built upon exam content;

• The inclusion of songs, games, and communicative activities to the lessons is not considered serious learning;
• Chinese use of English texts for teaching purposes focus on analyzes of language structure, not content;

• Communicative classrooms require high oral competence from teachers and oral participation from students;

• Non-English major class sizes tend to have more than 60 students at undergraduate level, fewer classroom hours than English-major classes, and tight teaching schedules;

• Lack of resources such as authentic teaching materials and equipment (photocopiers, overhead projectors, and computers);

• Difficulty to identify appropriate cultural contexts to develop lessons;

• Chinese teachers of English struggle to answer spontaneous questions on language or sociocultural contexts;

• Chinese teachers of English cannot count on their intuitive skills in the construction of language activities (pp. 227-230).

More recently, Liu (2007) suggested that developing more realistic expectations and contextualized understanding of language learning in Chinese classrooms is necessary “to promote communicatively competent learners and users” (p. 1).

Acquiring Knowledge and Achieving Academic Success within Eastern and Western Educational Systems

Paine (1992) suggested that the infrastructure of the Chinese educational system is conservative in that knowledge is developed through the transmission of facts and procedures. She explains that the transmission of knowledge happens within a hierarchical process: from master teachers, to novice teachers, to students. During her observations of ten Chinese student
teachers, Paine (1992) noted that their professional training consisted of, firstly, listening to experts (teachers), secondly, observing master teachers, and finally analyzing the lesson content (text) and rehearsing their lesson presentation. Paine (1992) explained that all ten students received the same text for lesson preparation and a teacher’s guide. Their preparation focused on learning the text in detail, preparing a script they would show to classmates, university supervisors, and master teachers for criticism. Paine (1992) found that the authority of the textbook was not questioned. Full compliance was achieved through “precision in interpretation and explanation” (p. 191).

As a graduate professor in an Australian university, Ballard (1996) observed different attitudes about development of knowledge and styles of teaching and learning within educational contexts. She suggested that approaches to knowledge happen in a continuum. At one end of the continuum there are attitudes that emphasize the conservation of knowledge and at the other end there are attitudes that emphasize the extension. Ballard (1996) claims that different attitudes to knowledge occur in all cultures and societies. However, she emphasizes that different cultures may favor certain attitudes to knowledge at different levels. Ballard (1996) distinguishes three attitudes to knowledge: reproductive, analytical, and speculative approaches. Teachers and students have specific roles for each approach.

Within the Western educational system, Ballard (1996) associates the “reproductive approach” with primary and secondary education (p. 152). In the reproductive approach, the teacher is the source of knowledge; s/he selects and transmits information in a clear and organized way. The teacher may relate students’ personal experiences to what is being taught. The role of the students is to follow the lesson, do their homework, and demonstrate on tests how well they have learned. On the continuum, Ballard (1996) places the “analytical approach”
between the reproductive and the speculative approach to knowledge (p. 152). The analytical approach is most frequently associated with undergraduate education. It involves a progressive shift to a more critical style of learning, in which students develop analytical thinking and the capacity to handle theory and abstraction. Ballard (1996) poses that when the analytical approach is used knowledge is no longer static. Teaching and learning allow for inquiry and criticism to be shared by students and teachers. The key role of the instructor is to expose uncertainties, inconsistencies, and complexities common to every subject being studied. The teacher’s role is no longer to transmit knowledge, but rather, to guide and challenge students to develop their own ideas and evaluations. The students’ role is to adopt new perspectives, learn to question, and evaluate all they hear and read. They are expected to choose a perspective and reorganize their ideas to support their argument. On the other end of the continuum is the “speculative approach,” which dominates postgraduate courses, especially in the sciences (p. 153). Ballard (1996) no longer refers to teachers and students, but to supervisors and researchers. She claims that the criterion for a successful thesis is to make a relevant contribution to knowledge and learning takes place through discussion, investigation, and reflection.

Ballard (1996) argues the problems Chinese students may have when moving between academic systems rely on the intellectual strategies used to deal with the challenges posed in the new system. She claims that non-Western societies emphasize a conservative attitude to learning where strategies of reproductive learning are prioritized. When Chinese students transfer into Western academic environments, the problems of adjustment occur because their past educational experiences may not have prepared them to recognize or accept the need for change in their study behavior. She ponders that the English instruction Chinese students receive prior to coming to study in English speaking does not properly cater to their needs in the new academic
context. Soon enough Chinese students realize the difference between “learning English and studying in English” (p. 148).

Similar to Ballard (1996), Biggs and Watkins (1996) claim that if Chinese students in English speaking academic environments use reproductive strategies to function in an analytical context, they might not achieve academic success. Chinese students’ difficulties take place in the disconnection of expectations about styles of learning that are required and students’ language competence also interferes with academic success (Ballard, 1996). They believe that the study skills Chinese students have acquired in their own environments, such as memorization and deep receptive learning strategies, are not effective in helping them achieve academic success in their new context. Biggs and Watkins (1996) identify problems deriving from misconceptions that Chinese students have already developed automaticity in the lower-level language skills. The lack of automaticity in writing, speaking, and listening skills may limit their ability to achieve academic success in the new environment in which English is the language of instruction.

**Summary**

In Chapter 2, the Chinese philosophy of teaching and learning, which is grounded on Confucian thinking, was described. An overall perspective of the different methods of English language teaching was provided and the questions about learning and teaching these methods addressed were explained. Then, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the U.S. and Europe and the foundations of communicative competence were presented. Next, English Language Teaching in China and the obstacles for its implementation were discussed. Finally, theories about knowledge acquisition and their implications on success achievement within Eastern and Western educational systems were addressed.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter addresses the methods and procedures used to conduct this research study such as the research method, the participants of the study, the instrumentation and procedures utilized, and data analysis. In addition, how the researcher achieved validity and reliability is explained, and limitations are identified. This research aimed at investigating beliefs about academic success and expectations of Chinese graduate students when they come to pursue masters’ degrees in a U.S. academic milieu. This study also addressed the changes graduate Chinese students believe are necessary to succeed in a Western academic environment. The research questions were:

1. What do Chinese students believe is necessary for their academic success at the university?
2. What were Chinese students’ expectations about how they would perform in courses while earning their master’s degree?
3. What changes do Chinese students believe they need to make in order to succeed at the university?

Methods

This research used qualitative methods. According to Glesne (2006), the aim of qualitative research is to provide some understanding of “social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu” (p. 4). I interviewed four Chinese graduate students in order to understand their educational background in China, their expectations when moving from the Chinese educational system to a Western academic system, and the changes they had to make to succeed in the new system. Lichtman (2013) explains qualitative research uses “the voices of those studied” and the
focus is not on testing hypothesis; rather, on “looking at the whole of things” (p. 70). Erickson (1985) and Lichtman (2013) also claim that the goal of the qualitative researcher is to understand how participants make meaning of a situation.

From a philosophical perspective, this study is grounded in a social-constructivist approach. That is, the aim of the study is “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). According to a social-constructivist perspective, the participants’ views or meanings are formed through interaction with others or through situations participants confront. Creswell (2014) poses that due to the variety of meanings, the researcher has to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing into a few categories or ideas. The researcher’s role is to make sense of the meanings others have about the world. I have chosen this approach because it seemed the most accurate way to understand Chinese students’ perspective. I am neither a Chinese native nor have I ever been to China. It seemed to me that accuracy would be better achieved if Chinese participants’ background experience and their current academic experience in the U.S. were reconstructed through their interviews with minimum interference from the researcher. Erickson (1985) suggests that the researcher’s point of view materializes through “interpretative commentaries that help the reader make connections between the details that are being reported and the more abstract argument being made” (p. 102) when presenting results.

In order to have a varied sample, four participants from different areas in China and from different programs at Whitefield University were chosen. Three were females and one was a male. I used open-ended questions in three semi-constructed interview sessions with each participant. Through several analyses of these interviews, commonalities and discrepancies about their experiences were identified and reported and then contrasted with the literature. Instead of
looking for ultimate results, I aimed at understanding the transition process between the Chinese and the U.S. academic environment so as to identify vulnerable aspects and devise initiatives that might help instructors and Chinese graduate students transition effectively.

**Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of four Chinese graduate students who attended a medium-sized Midwestern U.S. university, Whitefield University, for nine months or longer. The participants came from different cities in China and were enrolled in different graduate programs at Whitefield University. Out of the four participants, two of them were English majors in undergraduate courses in China. Among the non-English undergraduate majors, one was an education major and the other was a film production major. In addition to her film production major, this last participant also has a master’s degree in film research from the University of Paris VIII, in France. All of them were admitted to their undergraduate programs in China through the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, the *Gaokao*, which has English as one of the core admission subjects (see Appendix A – the Confucius Institute in Toledo granted me permission to include part of the English *Gaokao* practice test for further understanding of the English requirements to Chinese students). Depending on their undergraduate programs in China, the amount of English instruction they were exposed to in their courses varied. All of the participants took at least one semester ESOL course in speaking and/or writing at Whitefield University. A brief description of each Chinese graduate student who participated in this study is included in order to comprehend the background knowledge and education history of each participant.

Wang is 30 years old and she is originally from Dan Dong, in Liaoning Province. She holds an undergraduate degree in film production from the Beijing Film Academy, in Beijing.
She also has a master’s degree in film research from the University of Paris VIII in France. She came to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D. degree in film research but, due to the lack of a specific program and advisor in her area of interest, she decided to enroll in a second master’s program in the media and communication department at Whitefield University. She estimates she has had eight years of English instruction in China. Even though she studied English from primary school to college, French was her foreign language of preference. At the time of the interviews, she had been in the U.S. for 14 months. She took one ESOL writing class in addition to her content classes at the university.

Ting is 26 years old and comes from Jilin, in Jilin Province. She had her first contact with English words in grade 1, but systematic learning only occurred when she was in grade 3. Starting from grade 3 she had a total of 13 years of English instruction in China. Her undergraduate major was English and she earned a bachelor's degree in English. At the time of the interviews, she had been in the U.S. for 14 months. In addition to being a student in a master’s degree program in education, she also took ESOL classes for two semesters. Before coming to the U.S., she worked for two years at an educational agency in charge of placing Chinese students in schools overseas. She also worked for a year in a university foundation program at a Chinese university. The program provides English as a Second Language (ESL) and pre-college courses for Chinese high school graduates who want to study in English speaking countries. These two jobs triggered her interest in international students studying abroad which influenced her decision to pursue a graduate degree in the U.S.

Xueli is 25 years old. She is originally from a rural village in central China called Zhumadian, in Henan Province. By the time she started middle school (junior high), she had to move to a larger city for secondary education. There she attended a boarding public school. She
studied English for eight years, from junior-high to college. In China, she pursued a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She had been in the U.S. since August 2014, fifteen months at the time of the interviews. At Whitefield University, she took two ESOL classes. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in the curriculum and teaching program and a Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certificate in the English department. She came to the U.S. to learn about different cultures and experience a different life.

Li is 30 years old and has been in the U.S. for more than five years. He is originally from Kaifeng, in Henan Province. He holds an undergraduate bachelor's degree in English from Xi'an International Studies University (XISU), in China. He came to the U.S. to pursue a master’s degree in English but as soon as he realized his difficulties with the language, he decided to pursue a second undergraduate degree in math, which was more related to his area of interest. After that, he pursued a master’s degree in statistics at the same university, Whitefield University. He started studying English in junior high, when he was in grade 7, and has not stopped ever since. He took three ESOL classes in addition to his content classes at the university while enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

**Procedures**

The four Chinese graduate students were selected based on the time they had been in the U.S. and on the program they were enrolled in Whitefield University. They were contacted through either a research recruitment letter that was distributed by instructors in the ESOL department or through an e-mail message sent to my contacts at the university. Chinese graduate students who showed interest in participating were then invited to an individual meeting with the researcher. At this meeting the study was further explained as well as the participant’s role. The
participants signed an informed letter of consent (Appendix B) and had the opportunity to ask me any questions about the study. In addition, dates and times for each interview were scheduled.

**Instrumentation**

In order to better understand the four participants’ perspectives of their background education in China and their current experience at Whitefield University, semi-constructed interviews were chosen (Appendix C). Interview questions were developed based on the following sources: a) Chapter 4, “Making Words Fly: Developing Understanding Through Interviewing” (Glesne, 2006), b) the list of tips to achieve academic success as in the 2014-2015 Whitefield University Student Handbook, c) the articles I read for my literature review, and d) Peter Hessler’s accounts of his experience as a Peace Corps English instructor in China (Hessler, 2006). Glesne (2006) guided me through constructing my interview questions and Hessler’s (2006) experience in China was similar to my participants’ but in the opposite direction.

**Data collection.** First, the interview protocol was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). Each participant participated in three face-to-face interview sessions that lasted between 60 to 120 minutes each. Interviews were scheduled two weeks apart from each other and were audio recorded. Participants read the interview questions before the beginning of each interview. After the interview session, the interviews were transcribed and sent to each participant so that they could read it before the following interview session. At the beginning of the second and third interviews, I dedicated time to clarify parts of the transcription that were unclear. After the third interview, transcripts were sent by e-mail and participants clarified the transcripts through e-mail or through an electronic file. Corrections made by the participants were included in the transcripts. The interviews were designed to get a broad and accurate perspective of Chinese student’s educational background in China, their perceptions about
coming to an English speaking academic milieu, their expectations about instructors, assignments, grades, and performance, and finally the changes they had to make in order to succeed at the university. Participants responded to the same questions but follow-up questions were allowed if pertinent to the research context. As suggested by Glesne (2006), interviews should be a means to “capture the unseen” (p. 105). I was able to gain insight about explicit and implicit contexts in which learning takes place in Western and Eastern academic environments, from the Chinese students’ perspectives. For clarification purposes, I maintained an open channel of communication with my participants throughout the data collection and data analysis phases so that participants had the opportunity to make corrections and ask questions at any time.

Interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken. At the end of each interview, mental notes were taken on the most interesting or unexpected accounts of each session, as a pre-selection of which data would be relevant to the data analysis process. When interviews were transcribed I paid attention to how the participant introduced the points I had previously made a mental note. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, with English language grammar not being corrected. After each transcription was completed, the transcription script was rechecked using the audio file to make sure every word and sentence accurately represented what the participant said. Whenever something remained unclear, a yellow highlight on the unclear word or passage would indicate the information that needed to be checked for accuracy through member checks. The transcription file was sent to the participant and a copy was printed for verification in the following interview session (Creswell, 2014). Changes were made at the beginning of each interview session.

**Data analysis.** Inductive and deductive strategies were used for data analysis (Creswell, 2014; Johnson, 2012). Johnson (2012) defines inductive analysis as the “process of looking at a
field or group of data and inducing or creating order by organizing what is observed into groups” (p. 276). After the preparation of the transcripts was completed, I used inductive strategies when I read all the transcripts again, this time organizing them by participant. I read the three interview transcripts of each participant in the sequence the interviews were done, starting from the first one and the third being the last one. I looked for the general ideas that could become themes and subthemes (Creswell, 2014). Key words written on the margins of the printed copies helped me to identify themes and subthemes from the participants’ accounts. After most of the themes were identified, I analyzed my data again, this time looking for pattern recognition (Erickson, 1985). Deductive strategies were used when a new chart was created and the themes and subthemes were placed in the leftmost column of a table. Then the participants’ answers for each theme/subtheme were organized in columns placed side by side so as to provide the views of all the participants’ answers. This visual arrangement was helpful to analyze how each participant responded to a specific theme/subtheme and how the key elements in their responses interacted (Erickson, 1985; Glesne, 2006). More similar responses indicated a stronger connection with that specific theme/subtheme. I then underlined the parts of the participants’ answers that seemed central to each of the themes and that could be quoted in the research. I aimed at looking at my data from different perspectives—the Chinese educational system, the U.S. academic system and how the participants responded and felt in relation to each of the themes so as to establish connections between their previous educational background and their current academic environment. I also was interested in observing how the participants’ system of beliefs changed as they interacted in the new environment. Some of the themes identified were: English instruction in China, Chinese students’ perceptions of life in the U.S., Chinese students’ preparedness to English immersion, Chinese students’ expectations about coming to an English
speaking academic milieu, Chinese students’ changes to succeed at the new English-speaking academic environment. Some of the subthemes included how English was taught in elementary, middle and high schools and then at the university and Chinese students’ expectations in relation to professors, assignments, grades, and performance. Lastly, the results were submitted to participants to check the accuracy of my analysis. Whenever there was a recommendation for change, the change was included.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

According to Creswell (2014), in qualitative research trustworthiness can be established through validity and reliability. Qualitative validity occurs when the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings. Creswell (2014) identified eight validity strategies that can be used to check for accuracy. Out of the eight, I have chosen triangulation and member checking. Triangulation means “using different kinds of data to look at something from more than one perspective” (Johnson, 2012, p. 278). In order to understand the transition between the Chinese to the American academic system I have selected participants from different cities in China and also from different programs at Whitefield University. The different perspectives of the same experience provided me with responses that reflected the participant’s perspective, not mine. I used direct quotes instead of paraphrasing what participants said so that the readers could connect with the participants and create their own interpretations from the participants’ point of view (Erickson, 1985). The second validity strategy I used was member checking. Creswell (2014) suggests that researchers take the final version or specific themes back to the participants so that they can check for accuracy of the reported findings. Participants did two revisions of the Results chapter. In the first revision, they suggested changes/correction if they found a passage inaccurate. Then, the corrections or modifications suggested by the participants were
implemented. After that, an updated version of the chapter containing all the changes was once again submitted to the participants for accuracy check. In addition to keeping a channel of communication with my participants where I could clarify specific points throughout the study, participants were given the complete thesis manuscript prior to final submission.

The second aspect to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research is qualitative reliability. Qualitative reliability takes place when researchers determine if their approaches are consistent (Creswell, 2014). A detailed protocol of the research objectives, my role as a researcher, the participants’ role, as well as the context from which the data was gathered were submitted to and approved by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). The procedures described in the protocol were followed and participants and my thesis advisor were contacted whenever there was a question.

Monitoring subjectivity also is an important aspect in qualitative research. Subjectivity is not to be avoided; however, the researcher must be aware of distortions caused when the researcher’s autobiography gets intertwined with the research being carried out (Glesne, 2006; Peshkin, 1988). Like my participants, I am a graduate student at Whitefield University. I am originally from Brazil, and I experienced being an international student in France and twice in the U.S. prior to my current experience at Whitefield. When I lived in France I was 14 years old, not knowledgeable enough to pay attention to the implications of diverse classrooms. However, after teaching English as a foreign language for more than eighteen years in Brazil, I was faced with many questions when I attended diverse classrooms at my current U.S. academic environment. My research was born out of these questions (Erickson, 1985). I met two of my research participants soon after they arrived at Whitefield. I had the opportunity to see them in the classroom setting, one as a classmate and the other as a student, which allowed me to observe
their behavior, struggles, and anxieties. And by observing them as a world language teacher who wants to improve students’ learning conditions, I caught myself thinking of them, and of their peers, and several questions emerged even before I knew this research would materialize. These questions guided me through my research and in many aspects I shared my participants’ struggles and anxieties. I started doing meditation a little before my thesis proposal and have adopted meditation as a daily practice ever since. Meditation is a means to improve my connection to my inner self and feelings and to learn how to set things apart. My advisor has been very helpful in calling my attention about my subjectivity when I fail to monitor it. Being in contact with my subjectivity has been one of the major drives to this research.

**Limitations**

As with any research study conducted there were limitations to this research. One of the limitations was sample diversity. I did not have any participants from Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, or Taiwan, which are known to be leading centers in education. In addition, graduate Chinese participants from other U.S. colleges and universities might have improved reliability and validity. Another limitation was that, time and again, participants would refer to what happened at their school environment as to what happened in the whole China. Therefore, I had to make constant checks that my data analysis was accurate.

One last limitation was that time constraints prevented me from doing classroom observations of participants in the different departments. Gaining a perspective of what happens in the classrooms makes the research richer and would have given me a deeper perspective of what participants reported (Erickson, 1985). Some of that perspective I got when I was attending classes in my graduate program; however, observing classrooms in the different departments would have provided me with an even broader perspective and more resources onto which to
ground participants’ reports. On-site observations of Chinese classrooms might have also improved reliability and validity (Erickson, 1985).

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the methods used to conduct this research study. The research design, the participants, and the instrumentation utilized throughout this study were described. Then, the processes of data collection and data analysis used during the research were explained. The interviews used for data collection and the several steps in which data analysis was conducted aimed at gaining multiple perspectives of the participants in order to better understand expectations, practices, and feelings of graduate Chinese students when they come to pursue master’s degrees in an English academic milieu within the different cultures and sub-cultures of each department.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The data collected from interviews with the four Chinese graduate students were analyzed in order to determine Chinese students’ beliefs about academic success, their expectations about how they would perform in courses while earning their master’s degree at an English academic environment and the changes they underwent in order succeed in this new environment. The results are presented according to the participants’ perspectives of 1) the purpose of Chinese education and the framework upon which Chinese education is built for students to achieve success; 2) their account of learning English; 3) their expectations in relation to their courses, instructors, assessments, grades, and performance at Whitefield University and 4) their self-identified areas of vulnerability, as international students, and the changes they experienced to succeed in this new academic environment.

Beliefs About Academic Success

The participants held different beliefs about what it meant to be a successful student in China and a successful student in the U.S. Academic success in China was directly related to exam scores. Academic success in the U.S. was also related to high GPAs, but the participants added some new meanings such as leading a balanced life, developing skills, enjoying the learning experience, finding a connection between theory and practice. In order to understand how academic success was promoted in China, the framework of Chinese education is explained next.

Academic success in China. In order to pursue their goals, the Chinese educational system has developed a framework, which can be characterized by the themes of academic consistency, competitiveness, intensity, and administrative control (Paine, 1992). Each of these themes is described below.
Consistency. The participants came from different cities in China, some even from different provinces, and attended different schools. They also had different upbringings. However, several commonalities were observed in their narratives about school routines, teaching methods, learning strategies, learning material, classroom arrangement, and use of technology. For instance, according to what they reported, classes usually had more than 60 students and lasted 45 minutes. Because Chinese, math and English were the most important subjects in order to pass college entrance exams, these subjects were taught everyday in middle school and in high school, sometimes as a double-block class. Students were assessed through tests. The main purpose of those tests was not to test their knowledge about subject content, but to indicate the students’ preparedness for the two major exams during their school life: one for high school admission and the other, the most important exam in Chinese students’ life, the Gaokao, for college admission. From their accounts it seemed Chinese teachers promoted learning through memorization and grammar-translation drills, and they relied on the textbook as the main source of knowledge.

Learning strategy: Memorization. All four participants explained that memorization was a strategy promoted by their teachers to learn content. Everyday before breakfast, Chinese students have a reading class in their first period. It is a class in which students read the textbook aloud in order to learn the content through memorization. Xueli reported on how several subjects were learned through memorization.

You need to memorize all the things. So in the morning they think we have the best memory of the day so we need recite that kind of subject Chinese, English, politics, and history. It’s like you read a lot and they think that you will can memorize better. So if you read just silently and the teacher will knock on you and (ask,) “Please, read aloud.” It’s
noisy. And, sometimes, especially when you just wake up, and you still feel asleep and
the teacher will ask you to read aloud so they said, “You won’t fall asleep again when
you read aloud.”

Ting explained that copying vocabulary words several times was a practice used for
memorization of English vocabulary.

In China English is very text based, so you need to memorize a lot of things, the first the
most important thing is vocabulary…. We will learn these words in class. So she (the
teacher) will explain like the meaning, how to use the words, and we have like a
vocabulary list for each unit on the textbook. So after you go back home sometimes the
teacher will require you to write down the words like five times per word as an
assignment and show to the teacher. And sometimes you just like memorize by yourself
and so the strategy we usually use is just to write down how many times until you
remember. (When we go back to school the following day) we will have a test.

Wang emphasized the focus on vocabulary lists to be memorized and the centrality of the
textbook as a source of knowledge.

According to the class requirement, before class you have to check the vocabulary, you
have to memorize all the vocabulary (for that) unit. Normally is only 30 words…-
combination of the words: nouns, verbs, prepositions. At the end of the textbook there
will be a vocabulary list. So you have to check the list first to memorize them to
remember the meaning and then you can go back to the textbook of each class and to read
the very brief dialogue to see how they use the words in the textbook.
From Xueli’s, Ting’s, and Wang’s reports, memorization was enforced in school routine and was the most frequently used strategy of learning. The practice of memorization happened daily and was closely supervised by teachers to ensure that students were learning content.

*Method: Grammar-translation and drill.* Chinese students’ accounts illustrated how teachers enforced the use of grammar-translation and drills in their English classes. Xueli described her experience as follows:

> And the teacher will explain the grammar in the text and then they will give us practice drill and we’ll practice until we get the grammar and….that’s mostly the English class is like: vocabulary, text, grammar, practice, test.

At Li’s school, English was taught in a very similar way to Xueli’s. He explained:

> Then the teacher just read the sentences sentence by sentence and we just follow teacher. Then the teacher explain the sentence, maybe because the difference may include some grammar. Then the teacher explain grammar for us. Then after we learn the grammar the teacher require us to memory this.

The Chinese educational system adopts a reproductive approach to learning. When reproductive methods are used, the teacher is in charge of the analytical processes. Grammar-translation and drills are used to ensure the automaticity of structures and vocabulary but do not allow for students to develop their own analytical strategies about how the language works nor does it encourage a more creative use of the language.

*Textbook.* All participants also noted the centrality of textbook to practice and learn. Li stated: “Textbook. Just for textbook. The teacher require us to speak, to read textbook loudly. Because she want us to open our mouth. Yeah. And do more practice.” Ting explained how the textbook design promoted the learning of grammar.
It’s all designed by the textbook, so they’ll probably like focus on grammar item every other unit. So like, unit one will focus on past tense, and so in the textbook there is a lot of sentences written in past tense and after we learn the passage, the teacher will have one class focused on grammar, so is past tense. We will do a lot of practice on that.

*Competitiveness.* In all the students’ interviews, when referring to scores, schools, teachers, and classmates in China, competiveness was a recurring theme.

*Schools and college admission.* Wang explained she did not get high enough scores to get into the college program she wanted, so she decided to take both the arts exams and the National Higher Education Entrance Exam Chinese (*Gaokao*) again the following year.

But (*Gaokao*) is very important for every student who want to go to the better university because the competition is so hard. If you fail you have to wait until the next year. That’s why I take (*the art exam and the Gaokao*) two times. I needed to go to another high school. You can (stay in the same high school) but normally they won’t accept you. Because every year they will publish their admission situation. If you fail, you might fail again, which might affect their reputation.

In addition, Chinese students are ranked based on their test scores. Ting described how the ranking system is imposed on student’s performance.

The college admission system is very competitive, like how they select students to get into college just based on the exam is really hard, the content of the exam, so I think is like the ranking push you to get in there, like they will have statistics data like each year how many students in high school their score can pass the tier one universities admission score…so you know where you are… so if your goal is to go to tier one you know I need to study harder or maintain my current status.
From the participants’ accounts, it seemed that the pursuit for high scores involved institutions, teachers, and students. Students were at the bottom end of this competitive system, receiving all the pressure to make sure that through their scores, teachers and institutions made it to the higher ranks as well.

*Teachers.* Participants reported that in secondary school the teachers’ salary was based on students’ test scores. Xueli explained a phenomenon that illustrates how students’ scores affect teachers’ performance evaluation. In order to make sure that students focused on their subject, some instructors would come to their reading class period, the first period in the day, and ask students to interrupt whatever they were memorizing and switch to their subject. She recalls that:

Sometimes the teacher will, to make more time for themselves, and they will interrupt, and they came to the classroom and they will (tell us), “OK, we need to focus on my subject and not others”. Sometimes it happens and also there maybe fight among teachers about this…And others will come and (say), “No, study mine.” And then they fight because their salaries is based on our performance.

*Relationship with supervisors and instructors.* Li and Ting commented on a practice of obtaining benefits by developing a closer relationship with college supervisors. Li said that:

For some competition… for some very good opportunity, for example, we have some internship program….The supervisor just in charge in students’ life and students’ …If you have very good relationship with that guy, you know, and maybe you can get some chance to get a very good company, good internship company, may you get some chance. Is always happen in China.

Ting added:
Sometimes Chinese professors you can tell they have their own preference so you can tell who they like, they’ll show very obviously with the student and so they got higher scores, they may like hang out with the professors after class and the professors may introduce them like internship opportunities or job opportunities.

Rather than an indication of how much a student knew about what he/she learned in class, test scores were a means by which students, teachers, and institutions were ranked; teachers’ salaries were defined, and which students were entitled the best universities and job opportunities. Test scores were therefore the measure of success for students, teachers and institutions: the higher the scores, the greater the success. The pursuit for high scores promoted and perpetuated competition at all levels.

**Intensity.** In addition to spending more than nine hours at school every day, Ting and Xueli discussed how their school day became more and more intense when they reached high school. Ting noted that:

In primary school we don’t have any pressure, so I guess the teacher could teach you in a fun, in a useful way… In middle school we are not as busy as in high school so we can still do some fun practice. In high school is very intense. So the curriculum was designed for three years of study but we have to finish everything by the end of the second year. So we need to learn things faster.

Ting explained that she only had 20 minutes to rest within the entire school day. At her boarding school, Xueli observed that classes started at 6:00am and their last class was at 9:00pm. Even though students were scheduled to have a two-hour naptime period after lunch, teachers would not allow them to nap. They would say, “No you need to do your homework.” And students
were not permitted to go back to their dormitory. Instead they were required to stay in the classroom, sitting by their desks. And she concluded:

   We are teenagers and we spend six days at the school and we go back home on Saturday and we have only one day at… you know we need to return to school on Sunday night. So it’s like less than one day. At home you just don’t know what to do with the less than one-day break. And also you still have homework.

   **Administrative control.** Ting reported on two forms of control. One referred to reporting scores at the secondary level and the other to how school rules were enforced by administration. When addressing how scores were reported to parents, she explained that after each mid-term and final exam, parents would come to a parents’ meeting where the class ranking would be displayed in the classrooms, so that everyone could see their child’s (and everyone’s child) ranking. Parents would also keep a photocopy of the class ranking during those meetings. In the ranking list, parents could see their child’s score in each subject, their child’s total score and, finally, where in the class ranking their child was placed in relation to their classmates. In addition, the ranking of the whole grade would be printed on a large poster at the entrance of the building. Ting estimated that the poster would display the names of the top 10, 20, or 50 students in each grade. If there were 600 or 700 students in a grade, then likely the top 50 students would show. The poster would mention the name of the student, the class number, and the score. According to her there was no privacy.

   Ting also mentioned the Personal Archives (PAR). This was a file the schools kept for every student in China since the elementary levels. This file contained personal information such as the student’s grades and attitudes, and was passed on from school, to college, to work place. She explained:
So if you ever do anything bad or seriously they will make a document put in your envelope so like your future institution or your company will know. If you get involved in a fight and you injured someone is not only you like the police station will keep your record and also if you… in your envelope. So I think this is how they keep like Chinese to obey like the school rules. If you are caught cheating in class and they will put in this envelope… We have a rule only in college…in middle school and high school is never a serious thing is either like the teacher will physically punish you or call your parents. But they won’t put in…this in your envelope. But if you cheated in college and you are caught you had to leave the school in 24 hours and you don’t get the chance to get back anymore. So they are very strict about cheating in college. But is only in the final exam. And any big exams.

China possesses an educational system that is consistent, competitive, intense, and administratively controlled, with schools, instructors and students keeping their focus on grade point average and rank. From top to bottom, this system imposes itself upon institutions, teachers, and students. Students are at the very low end receiving all the pressure for the best scores. Results from tests are not meant to indicate how much they have learned, but how well (or badly) ranked they are and, consequently, their teachers and institutions. All four participants shared the same beliefs about academic success. Wang described success in terms of ranking: “Well a successful student in China that means you have the outstanding gradings- maybe top one, top ten, top five—and you know everything your professor told you. Is only based on the score.” Ting said: “In middle school and high school is a high GPA, like a high ranking in class. It means you are a successful student.” For Xueli, being a successful student meant: “Before college it means you have very good GPA and you can get admitted to top universities you are a
successful student. But in college undergraduate it means you can find a good job, a high paid job.” Li pointed out that a successful student has a high GPA, and a successful person earns a lot of money.

**Academic success in the U.S.** Nevertheless, when they were asked to explain what it meant to be a successful student in the U.S., new meanings emerged from all participants. For Xueli success meant, “balance your life and study and work…And…keep your GPA and at the same time have a lot of fun.” Li believed academic success entailed developing certain skills:

> What makes successful here definitely…you GPA very high...But for me now I think I want to develop my skill: organizational skill, leadership, communication, writing, and critical thinking. I want to develop my ability to… erase difficulties.

Ting, in turn, reflected about learning experiences in addition to GPA:

> Uhm…I don’t really know…cause like to me I think for graduate students since we are adults and we shouldn’t care about the GPA that much…unless you really want to get into a Ph.D. program…so I feel like here students they feel probably like in a similar way as the students in China and they will be upset if their GPA is low. They don’t really think about like how much they’ve learned in this class, like their experiences….They are more focused on scores than on the learning experience.

Wang was in agreement with the focus on high scores, and reflected on the possibility of alternatives for international students:

> I think is the same (only the scores.) That’s why I need to find a program that didn’t judge the student based on the score, which can offer the student some practice, you know activities, not just the reading, writing paper. I know most of the Ph.D. (program)
need to write a paper to involve the theoretical research but I really want to find a program combine the practical with the theoretical, not just the theoretical parts.

When asked if they considered themselves successful students in the U.S., participants’ views were uncertain and reflected how success was intertwined with their personal experiences. Here I think I did well in school and I didn’t do any other things out of school. So I don’t know if I’m successful here cause I couldn’t define what’s successful in the States to a foreigner. I think when people talk about like of success to foreigners, they’ll think finding a job here means success, but I don’t have plan to work here and I spend most of my time in schooling, like in school. (Ting)

I don’t think so. I don’t think I am successful here. But I think I am on the way. I am on the way. Here I pay more attention about my ability. I want to develop my skills. But in China I just focus on result. (Li)

Participants’ views on academic success in the U.S. differed from their views of academic success in China. GPA was an important measure of success, but not the only one. It seemed easier to define what academic success entailed to U.S. than to international students. When they defined academic success in the U.S. students new meanings emerged such as finding balance between academic and personal life; developing skills; or appreciation for their learning experiences. One of the participants was not sure what academic success meant for an international student who does not want to work and live in the U.S. None of them considered themselves academically successful students in the U.S.

Participants’ Expectations

Based on participants’ accounts, they did not have a clear expectation of what their life in the U.S. would be like. Even though English learning was an important target for Chinese
education, the same cannot be said about the culture of English speaking countries. English language and culture existed separately, and until college cultural aspects would not be addressed at all by the school curricula.

**Perception of U.S. culture.** All participants agreed that their contact with the U.S. culture was limited in China. The lack of access to media resources was one of the reasons. Participants agreed that Chinese youth enjoyed watching U.S. TV shows but until recently they were not broadcast, the only access was through illegal downloading. Most recently, however, the government had granted permission to websites exhibit some U.S. shows, but the content might have been edited. Participants noted that Chinese youth preferred to watch original versions of American TV shows rather than edited versions by the government. The strict government control over media resources and television broadcast, in addition to the increasing demands for test results in school life, may have prevented Chinese students from having an accurate perception of what life in other countries is like. Li confided:

> America is a very strange country for me. I don’t know America. Even in China, you know, in China, I just, I do not travel to many cities. I never leave China. I know Chinese people very well, but I don’t know American people. I don’t know the people outside China. I don’t know how to hang out with them. I don’t know how to make friends with them. I don’t know how to live here.

Wang made an allusion to the myth of the American Dream:

> I know America…in Chinese’s people mind, we call it a dream country. But I never think about coming here. Because in my mind, I always have the Chinese face, and I have to learn English, I used to speak French.
Xueli commented on the vague perception Chinese students had of foreign countries coming from textbooks.

In the book there are a lot of pictures about other countries and English speaking countries specially. And I think that the pictures are a lot of fun and interesting. I just wanted to go to that places...It’s like the teacher mainly ask you to focus on test and memorize the stuff they give you, so I don’t think students have a lot time to think things too far away, like to have a dream or something.

Participants had little knowledge what a life in the U.S involved or what cultural and social attitudes would be expected from them. Their accounts referred to the U.S. as “a strange country”, “a dream country”, or “a country that existed in textbook pictures”. With such limited views, participants’ strategies to cope with the new environment also were limited. Limitations occurred in relation to their language skills automaticity as well.

**Perception of preparedness for English immersion.** Automaticity of language skills is one of the aspects that might foster the engagement in academic and social life in English speaking countries. However, the development of skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, and as well as interactive strategies were scantly addressed by English instructors in China, who kept their teaching focus on test requirements. According to Ting, “there’s really no time to do extra practice in speaking. Speaking is not required in the college exam.” Xueli explained that their textbook had listening activities, but “because on the test we don’t have listening, the teacher will skip that to save more time for (grammar) practice.” The core of reading activities in middle and high school were dialogues or short page passages. Ting recalled that they read “a one page passage... So the teacher mainly focused on grammar or phrasal verbs.” As for the development of writing skills, Li noted that “In the test we do writing. Yeah.
But is very simple writing…one paragraph or something. Is very simple writing.” Until before college admission, Li summarized learning English as follows: “We learn English because we have to take exam. Why do we focus on grammar? Because we can get a very good grade in exam. Exam just check your grammar, reading, writing.”

**English teaching in college.** When the participants went to college in China, their exposure to English differed based on their majors. Two of the four Chinese participants in this study were English-majors in their undergraduate programs. As for the other two non-English majors, one participant was in the public affairs program with a minor in film production and the other was in an elementary education program. The participants’ English program at the university varied in length and focus. English-major students were expected to take four years of mandatory English classes throughout the program and the courses varied according to what they chose to study. One of the programs concentrated on English news editing while the other on English literature.

Non-English major programs, however, required only one or two years of compulsory English classes, which were taken during their freshman and sophomore years. Their English courses were more comprehensive because no matter the program, all non-English majors would follow the same English curriculum. Therefore, English-major students had more and more varied exposure to English courses that would, at least in theory, result in more opportunities to use the English language in writing, reading, listening, and speaking.

**Non-English major participants.** Xueli, one of the non-English major students, recalled that they had a large classroom with 100 to 150 students from different departments and that the professor did not know the students’ names. According to her, most of the time the instructor would lecture but every once in a while he would show a video clip of a classic movie, or an
excerpt from a classic book, and even some music. The instructor used these activities to refresh them from the textbook. In addition, he introduced them to websites for home practice. Extra class activities included reading online articles from BBC or Voice of America (VOA), writing short papers or translating texts from Chinese to English or vice-versa. Xueli also explained that because English was no longer one of the main subjects, most of the students did not take it seriously. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that one particular professor was very popular because “he introduced movies, songs, and other learning stuff.”

Wang, the other non-English major, described her college English classes at the Beijing Film Academy and noted the lack of skill-oriented instructors.

It is never about academic writing. I think the teacher just teach you more words. Like they will randomly pick up some articles and ask you to read it and to recognize the words. I think they (the undergraduate English instructors) want to do that (teach academic writing) but is very hard to achieve it. For my university, Beijing Film Academy, they don’t have the professional English professors.

English major participants. As for the two English-major participants, their stories differ to the extent of the context in which they entered the English program. For Ting, the communication department was her first college choice, but her scores were not high enough. When exam scores are very close but not enough, Chinese universities usually accept candidates to their second option. In her case, that was English. Li, in turn, did not get the chance to enroll in a program of his interest. His parents chose the English major for him. He explained:

My parents had very strong responsibility on me, so sometimes they are in charge of everything, including the major I choose. But when I was student in China, you know, I don’t think my English was very good. I don’t think so. I just tried to survive the exams.
Li described his courses and exposure to U.S. culture as follows, “My course just like English reading course, listening course, American culture, some…American culture…and American literature and literature and English.” And he admitted, “I study, my English major is English, but I still don’t know about American culture. I don’t know. No knowledge of American culture. We read some novel. I don’t think I can learn some culture. I don’t think so.”

For Ting, her academic experience as an English major partially helped her in developing Western academic skills.

Cause I was an English major and it was required to write a graduation paper. It was about 35 pages in English and no one tell me how to write an academic paper so I just figure out by myself and I think I did it wrong, but no one cares. After I came here I realized my graduation paper was so bad and I use it as my application essay to write some points to apply here.

However, Ting agreed that practices in presentation either in Chinese or English helped her to adapt to academic life in the U.S. Wang felt the English she learned in school did not always connect her to real life in the U.S.

Because when I come here I realize the some of the knowledge we learn from the English class maybe cannot be practiced in the real life here, like some of the way we speak English might not be the way the people here speak English, which makes you looks weird sometimes. And also as foreigner we know less English background, so sometimes we may use the wrong words as a result we might offend the people we talk about. I always concerned how about my words about “Does it offend you?”, “Does it good for you?”, “Make you uncomfortable?”
It seemed that, even though China increasingly invests on sending students to an academic life overseas, the type of life it entails was rarely discussed in courses or elsewhere. Because these differences were barely addressed, participants may have come to the U.S. thinking that the strategies they used to achieve success in China would be the same to succeed here. When pondering about her preparedness for an academic life in the U.S., Xueli questioned the goal of Chinese education and how it connected her to her future life.

I don’t know the final goal of Chinese education. It’s confusing. It’s like the score is their goal. But what after the score I don’t know what they expect me to do. They don’t have a clear, like a life long goal for me, for individual’s development. It feels disappointing to me because I feel I’m not respected and you only set these goals for me because you need this goal and you don’t care what I’ll do after this. And I don’t think they do a very good job of prepare me for either later education or the later life.

**Expectations about U.S. college life.** From the data analyzed, it appears that the Chinese participants came to the U.S. with a goal in mind, but with no clear expectations or a definite purpose. However, as they engaged in university life, they started to realize differences in relation to the academic environment, expectations, and behaviors. For Xueli, expectations took the form of wishful thinking.

I don’t think it’s expectation. It’s more like wishes. I wish the classes would be…I wish I could understand my class and before I came here I cannot imagine I will listen to total English class and also I wish like know how to communicate with the professors here. You know, there must be difference. And also expect the professors will like more flexible, will be flexible like the only difference, give you something more appropriate for your level.
As for Li, one of the English-major participants, as soon as he tried to engage in conversation on his way to America (his first time on a plane), he realized his lack of proficiency in English. Native speakers of English could not understand him. At first, he had no idea what he would do in the U.S. without being able to communicate in English. Li then gave up his master’s in English and decided to start from scratch. He studied English for four months, and applied to a math undergraduate program instead. He reported:

I want to learn some knowledge, you know, is a very useful…it’s mean I can get a connection, a very strong connection with real life, with daily life…Is not just academic, no, I dislike it. I dislike it because I know is dead, I can’t use it. And for some language, English I hope my teacher can help me find, find out where’s my problem. How can I solve it. What kind of method I can practice, I can use it to improve my English, same thing for writing class. But for math class I do not worry that much because is not hard for me.

Wang already had earned a master’s degree in history, aesthetics, and theory in France and applied for a Ph.D. program both in China and overseas. She experienced rejection from every school she applied to, except from Whitefield University. However, the university did not offer the program she needed to develop her research, so she decided to start a different master’s program than she had planned on, in the media and communication department. Of all the Chinese participants, she was the only one with previous academic experience overseas. Her expectations were different from the other participants. She contacted professors at the university but did not find one who would accept to advise her. She explained:

My research is new stuff. Is new, really new. But my mom encourage me to go come here, because here we call it the film country. It must have more chance, and more
scholars to conduct new research, which my mom is right now I think. And my mom told me, “Just go. Go to see how America is and to see what kind of scholar they have, what kind of research they have to do. They can do.” That’s why I have decided to come here.

(Media and communication studies)

After participants had been in the U.S. for a while they realized they were in a different academic and social context and gained heightened awareness of the barriers they would have to overcome. Their expectations became related to the fulfillment of their most immediate needs. Some participants wished they could understand the classes and lectures, and wished more flexible attitudes from their professors. Others hoped that professors would help them solve their problems and that their courses would connect them to real life experiences, and some that they would find someone interested in their research. They also realized that they would have to change their attitudes to learning in order to achieve.

**Expectations about instructors.** After taking different classes at the university, the participants’ opinions of instructors differed based on the kinds of experiences they have had. In general, they agreed that instructors here were different from professors in China. Differences they described included showing more flexibility, being friendly and willing to help.

Xueli, who studied in the education department explained:

I have no idea what they would be like, but when I came here, yeah, they are different. When I experienced that myself I know they are different. They are more approachable like they are always there and will tell me to come to…see me whenever you need help… I mean, most of the professors I have here are very nice and very accessible and always telling me “Oh, don’t worry!” and “Take your time.” They are always being flexible with me.
However, the student in the math department had mixed experiences and feelings.

Firstly, my professor is friendly. Friendly. And if you ask any questions they love to answer you. They never judge you. I like professor like this. And they can learn me, they give me suggestion, and they real care about me. I like this professor. But some professor I dislike it. Because they’re too academic. I think, you know, something I don’t have any interest. Why? Because I don’t think is very useful. I don’t think I’ll use in the future. So that’s why I don’t want to study it too much.

**Expectations about assessment.** Depending on the college attended in their undergraduate programs in China, participants’ expectations about assessment differed. For instance, Wang attended the Beijing Film Academy and some of her classes required the production of short films. But for courses like English or math, she would only have a final exam and a participation grade. Generally, the main form of assessment in English programs in China is a final exam. In the other courses, if participants were in the humanities area they might have projects or presentations, but the core of their assessment is the final exam and the class participation grade. If they were in the scientific area, they would have midterm and final exams, and the participation grade. Therefore, the varied types of assignments throughout the semester and the shorter deadlines participants faced in the U.S. were somewhat unexpected. They responded to the assignments in different ways. Xueli felt overwhelmed: “Hum…in college (in China) I don’t have homework, I only have a final….And now I have all kinds of homework, like research project, presentation, reading, class observation…yeah and teaching demonstration….” Li acknowledged he had more assignments in the U.S., but realized the benefits from having meaningful activities.
(In China) we don’t have too many homework. In here maybe I have homework every week. I like doing homework, it means I learn something...if you do your homework you can make sense for homework it’s mean. No problem for exam...because the homework is problems and review for the materials we have learned in class.

*Expectations about grades and performance.* It might have been expected that Chinese students would come to the U.S. with the sole purpose of getting high GPAs in their programs. Nevertheless this assertion has not been true for all of them. Ting, for example, said she was very satisfied with her grades because she didn’t expect to have a high GPA. She had no idea how the professors would grade her paper in her U.S. program. She explained that in China not every class had a syllabus that informed about course content and assessment. She believed there were recommendations not to grade students only based on exam scores, but it was not clear how professors graded students. It seemed that grading in her program at the university was more objective. In addition, she thought the syllabus and the rubrics were very helpful tools in making the course objectives clearer and providing guidance through their assignments.

I like the grading system here cause it’s clear and even if you think you didn’t receive a fair score you can argue with the professor based on the syllabus or you can complain with the graduate schools and you have evidence to show “This is not fair.”

Wang, on the other hand, chose a program that was not a one hundred percent fit to her previous film research background in France. Therefore, she lacked some of the background information other students in the same program had been previously exposed to. Her grades might have reflected that lack of background knowledge. Even though she had put a lot of effort into her assignments and attended the classes, she did not see the results in her scores. She felt
her professor did not take her effort into account. She explained her frustration with her grades in the following manner:

Even they can tell that you worked really hard and this is really difficult to me, they still give you that score because they think that’s the fair stuff. They didn’t care about your background, they don’t want to compare your weakness background with the native speaker…most of my classmates they have the communication background in their undergraduate studies. But for me my undergraduate is more about film, is nothing related to the communication.

In relation to participants’ expectations about instructors, assessments, grades, and performance, participants’ expectations varied based on their individual academic experiences. They agreed that a detailed rubric and syllabus helped them to understand what was expected from their assignments and also that they could argue about their grades based on the rubric. However, the results also showed that when the participants’ academic background in China did not connect with the courses they enrolled in the U.S., there was misunderstanding about their expected performance and grading system. Participants would have expected the professors to assess them based on their effort and lack of previous background knowledge, but it did not happen.

Changes to Succeed in the U.S. Academic Environment

Based on the Students’ Handbook at Whitefield University, participants were prompted to discuss practices that Whitefield University considered relevant for graduate students’ success. The areas in which participants expressed vulnerability and/or controversy include goal-setting, raised awareness of diverse learning styles, time management and reading comprehension, note
taking, writing, extra-curricular involvement, socialization with faculty and peers, and class participation.

**Realistic personal goals.** When asked if the participants set realistic, positive, measurable goals, they were uncertain about the meaning of the word “goals” and “realistic”. The following items show how they expressed their lack of understanding. Xueli said, “No. I think I have a very blurred goal. It’s graduate successfully. So far it is to finish my project by December and afterwards apply for my teaching license…OK. So I don’t have a very realistic goal.” Ting asked, “Not really. No. What do you mean by goals?” and Wang replied:

> It’s very hard to define all. For some successful people or other person like Bill Gates. I think at his first stage of setting his career his goal is not realistic based on other’s person definition but when he gets successful then people said oh that’s realistic goals. So is very hard to define “realistic.”

After he obtained a second bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in the U.S., Li was the only participant who seemed certain about his personal goals, “Yes, definitely.”

**Raised awareness of diverse learning styles.** This is a new concept to Chinese students. As seen in an earlier section, the most frequent learning strategy Chinese students seem to use in China is memorization. Therefore, it may take students some time to realize and understand that there are other types of learning strategies and processes. When asked if they understood how they learned best participants responded in different ways. Ting asked: “What does that mean?” Wang replied based on her learning experiences in China, France, and the United States:

> China, France, and American we have the different education system. The professors have totally different teaching styles so you need to fit yourself to professors’ styles and you need to change all time based on your study behavior, study habits.
Li explained what he learned in the U.S.:

You cannot just learn teacher teach you, just use this method in your assignment is not enough. For example, just like, when you finish the course, you have to know what’s the main purpose for this course…Is mean you can write down information tree (concept map) yourself. You can summarize what kind of method taught you learn in the class and how to use it. What kind of situation you will use it. This is my job. I think this is more important than just learn in this.

Xueli concluded: “By doing, I think.” However, she expressed uncertainty about the outcomes of her learning experiences:

It feels like I did a lot …when I look back…, I went to elementary school, to Montessori school, to class observation that kind of thing. So I did a lot of things but what did I learn? It will hard to say what did I learn…I cannot tell…So it’s all I know I did something.

Participants’ accounts express uncertainty about what type of learning outcomes is expected from them. They might not understand the new methods and what they are expected to achieve through these methods. The reproductive strategies they learned in China do not help them in the U.S. They also appear unaware or uncertain of the learning strategies they have to use to succeed in the U.S and their goal when they use those strategies.

**Difficulty with time management and reading comprehension.** All the participants admitted to not completing the reading assignments assigned. Two issues were pointed out: lack of time to complete the assignment and/or lack of understanding of both content and English. All of them adopted different strategies to cope with these issues. Xueli explained that she glimpsed over the chapter and looked for some part she could understand.
I’ll start from that part, the easiest part, and expand a little bit and …like know some basic things about what they’re talking about and then do some Google… and so it will give me some background information to either understand the professor or talk discussion with my classmates. Usually it will give me enough support to participate in the class.

Ting claimed it was impossible for her to complete all her reading assignments, but she felt better prepared to participate in class and understand lectures if she did.

So if it’s a reading for class I think I browse the articles first and then I read carefully and take notes and get the main points. Cause I find it’s very helpful if I prepare well before class. It’s very helpful to join the class discussion and understand the professor’s lecture better then I…. cause sometimes I’m too busy to read all the articles and I find hard to understand the professor.

Wang spent long hours reading, but confessed she did not understand the texts thoroughly: “At the beginning is really hard to understand so I have to spend all day. I only slept maybe only four hours a day in order to finish the reading, which I cannot totally understand.” She would then use different strategies to cope with her lack of comprehension.

First I would ask my classmates: what meaning for the sentence, what that talk about.

And the second, if the book had a Chinese version, I’d check the Chinese version. Then if both of my classmates and the Chinese version cannot help me I will ask the professor.

But they are also very busy, so most of time I won’t bother them. I try to do it on my own.

Because Li was in the math department, the load of reading assignments might not have impacted him as much. Li was not so concerned with his reading. He explained, “While I read a
textbook, you know, I will highlight something (if) I think this something is important. First if something is very hard understand and is not important then I’ll totally ignore it.” When he took English as a second language classes at the university, he explained that reading was not a matter of so much concern for him: “English language class, no. Reading is not more difficult, just reading is not difficult. Writing for me is the difficult. And to understand some culture is difficult.”

**Difficulty with taking notes in class.** All participants expressed concern about taking good notes. Most of them considered taking notes to be difficult, and sometimes not useful. Ting reported:

I take notes. But I…Also I think taking notes is a problem. I don’t think my notes is helpful for me to review what I’ve learned in class. I either just like just copy what the professor pointed in their PowerPoint or if I make points like write the points by myself it doesn’t make sense after class unless I write them in Chinese.

Li said that some Chinese students were not able do it in English. His justification was that, “If I take note in Chinese I’ll spend a longer time than my classmates to take notes. I don’t have enough time to translate.”

**Difficulty with writing.** All participants acknowledged their difficulties with their writing skills in the U.S. Ting recognized the lack of proper writing instruction in China and pondered, “If I practiced academic writing more in college would help me like improve my performance here…Cause sometimes I feel my writing skills are very weak.” Wang acknowledged the importance of having good academic writing skills to succeed in her program, but was not sure on how to improve.
Right now I am suffering the hard part of English especially for the academic writing, which I really want to improve. But I need to find the right way to improve. I cannot just write every thing I can write is not called academic writing. I need to write higher standard of writing for my major. I need to find the right person who can correct it and tell me how is the right academic writing, how is the bad one.

She explained she took classes to improve her academic writing at Whitefield University, but the classes did not help her understand where her problem was, “In general they will tell you need to change a little bit from here, but they won’t tell you your exact problem.”

**Extra-curricular involvement.** Out of the four participants, only one had been involved in a project group, which was organized by one of the instructors in her department. This was a group for graduate students that aimed to conduct research projects related to news media. Two of the participants attended the Chinese Outreach Fellowship group, which held weekly meetings for Bible Study. However, they only spoke Chinese at those meetings. One participant was not involved with any campus or community activities at all. When extra-curricular involvement took place, participants’ interaction with U.S. peers occurred through academic projects. No sports-related or recreational activities were mentioned.

**Academic interaction and socialization.** This question prompted students to talk about their academic socialization, in other words, to talk about their interactions with professors and classmates. Participants’ answers could be divided in two different perspectives: interaction with instructors and advisors, and interaction with students.

**Interaction with instructors and advisors.** To understand their interactions with instructors and advisors in the U.S., first some background information about how Chinese students interact with their professors and supervisors in China is provided. According to the
participants, it is not common practice for Chinese professors to have office hours that they would tell students, “These are my office hours.” According to most participants, professors would give them their telephone number and some would give them their e-mail address and some would give them both. However, according to Xueli, hardly ever would participants contact professors. Moreover, in China, students do not feel pressured to talk to professors because final exams are usually the major form of assessment. Assignments such as projects, papers, and class discussions, like the ones they have in U.S. universities, are not common in China. Xueli explained why she would not talk to her professors in China:

You don’t have the pressure, like…they won’t give you a project or a something and you don’t know where to start and you need to talk to them, maybe you have nothing, you don’t have to worry about that… you know? It’s only the final you need to worry, so usually I don’t go to them.

Ting also reflected on her embarrassment about talking to professors in China.

I didn’t like to talk to professors cause most of my instructors they don’t have separate offices, is like a large office and they all share so if I talk to one teacher, others might hear me. So, I won’t go.

With this background, all participants were unanimous in saying they sought the help of their professors and advisors whenever they faced a problem at the university where this study took place, Whitefield University. Xueli observed that because of her difficulties with the assignments, she needed to check with professors on a regular basis.

You need to talk to them like frequently because they give you a something and for me and sometimes there must be some misunderstanding and I need to check with them to make sure I understood what they want me to do. So I need to check with them and also,
because I’m a little bit like behind, and if I’m a little bit behind in that work I need to talk
to them like where I am now and that kind of thing.

Talking to professors did not always make them feel comfortable. Xueli explained: “It depends
on the teacher. Actually, if the teacher is really nice…but not all the teachers.” Li agreed with
Xueli that not every professor had the same response to international students:

Just…I don’t think every professor is helpful…Here? I don’t think so. I don’t think so.

Some professors are very nice, you have a question you just ask them… But some
professors say “I’m very comfortable you come to me and ask any question” or
something…but I don’t think so. They have…hard to help you . I don’t think so.

Because Wang went to the Beijing Film Academy, a small college with emphasis on the art of
film making, she was exposed to a different academic environment where many classes focused
on art projects and students had a closer relationship with their professors. She noted that:

In China, the instructor is not only your professor in the class, is not only the one teacher
knowledge, is also your friends. You can contact them at any time when you need help.
You don’t have to e-mail them. You have their number, you can text them, you can call
them at any time. But here you cannot have professor’s phone number, you cannot call
them. The only way for you to contact with them is e-mail. And you have to make
appointment with them in order to discuss your problem, but in China, no. You can have
dinner, you can have lunch with them, they are very friendly.

She reported that her academic issues in China were related to more practical matters such as
when shooting a film. For instance, when a problem emerged during a film production, she
would contact her professors immediately. She acknowledged that at Whitefield University she
was exposed to a different academic environment and program, with different demands.
Here I was not involved in any practice like shooting a film so most of the problem I met is about reading and understanding the content of the paper so it can wait. When the professor explain the content I can listen. If she did not understand the content, then she would go to her professor’s office during their office hours and ask them about her question.

As for the relationship with their advisors, in China, the participants explained that college students have the professors who teach them and the supervisors who advise students on school matters and career opportunities. Supervisors also may help students find jobs. Therefore, at first glance, a supervisor’s role in China may be slightly different from the role of advisors in the U.S. For some Chinese students, though, the confusion with roles may have caused unrealistic expectations in relation to how much an advisor should help them. Some participants would be more satisfied with their interactions with their advisors than others. Wang, the participant in the communication department, admitted the willingness of her advisor to help her, but she would not resource to her all the time. She explained, “I know she is very busy. She has so many Ph.D. students. That’s why I try to solve the problem by myself and if I cannot solve them I will ask help from (her).” Li, the participant in the math department, met his undergraduate advisor only once when he enrolled with the university. He explained, “I just see her once. Because I think I can did a better job than her. I design my, I design my education. I don’t need her help.” As for his master’s advisor, Li would agree that his advisor was responsive but he was not completely satisfied.

When I ask them questions, I think they just answer my question. But you want to get some advise about your future but I don’t think they can give you. I don’t think they care about me. I don’t think so… They just care about their research. They don’t care about
cooperation with others. They don’t care about advise others. They just care about themselves.

**Interaction with classmates.** All participants agreed that U.S. classmates were usually helpful and friendly, but when it came to find study partners, one of them felt she was not successful. Xueli justified her lack of success based on the unbalanced nature of the partnership.

It’s hard because they know you don’t have as much…like they feel you are not equal to them and you feel you don’t have a lot to share with them and they are the giving part and you are the receiving part, so it’s hard. I tried to find a study partner but, no…I didn’t find one.

Li saw great advantage in finding study partners, but experienced the opposite. He mentioned occasions when he would come prepared for discussions of assignments while his partners would not.

I like individual studies then I’ll check my study with a group. You know, sometime I have difficulties I can’t solve it maybe I will discover with my friends, my classmates something…but…I want to prepare for discussion. But sometime I find my American classmates do not prepare for discussion. They just get together to do the assignment together. I dislike this. If you discuss with others you have prepare for this.

**Class participation.** All participants reported that their classes in China were lectures most of the time. They also agreed that Chinese students did not usually ask questions or participate in class discussions. They explained that this is grounded on the cultural belief that if you are not right about what you are going to say then you may run the risk of losing your face and be exposed to shame. Ting explained what “losing one’s face” meant:
I think is just like we don’t get used to talk that much in class and also we are afraid of making mistakes in public, like in front of other people. There’s a concept in Chinese we call “losing face”, so if you make a mistake in public is not only like yourself feel embarrass it means like you are losing your face. So, I think that’s probably one reason we are not willing to talk in public. If we’re not one hundred percent sure about the answer.

When asked about how they felt about expressing their thoughts and feelings in their classes at the university, Xueli expressed her fears about misunderstanding the questions and that her accent would cause discomfort.

Yeah it’s hard for me to express my thoughts and feelings in U.S. classrooms… because sometimes you are afraid that you don’t really understand the question, and so your expression is based on misunderstanding…also when you speak with the strong accent and that makes you feel, I mean, like it just feels uncomfortable…and also, I mean, if it’s in a …with very friendly classmates and nice professor, yeah, you will feel “Oh, yeah, I want to say what I think about this…” but sometimes you have…not always the nice classmates and nice professors.

Ting felt nervous about talking in her classes in China because the professor might be disappointed in her answer, but here she felt professors were not as concerned about establishing rigid boundaries between right and wrong.

I always felt nervous in China in class… to answer questions in class…cause in China if you answer something wrong or you didn’t say the point the professors want either your classmates will judge you and think how stupid you are…”This is so easy…” or the professors won’t be angry but they like they’ll show their disappointed on you. But here I
feel is free to talk whatever you want. Is even like I noticed sometimes my classmates, they say something… and … is… is not related to the question at all. I don’t think they answered the question but the professor they won’t say anything, so they say like “Nice try!” or "Good point." And the classmates won’t care about like your own opinion. Cause in China there is a line so here is right and here is wrong and you have to be on this side (the right side). I think here like there’s no clear like a boundary between right and wrong.

In addition, Wang believed that Chinese education did not provide children with many opportunities to express themselves. She recalled that, “most of my memory is all about listening, listening, and listening. Follow the rules, don’t ask question. But for me I always ask question, that’s why they (teachers) didn’t like me.” She reported that whenever she asked a question and the answer did not seem convincing enough, she would ask her professors for clarification and they would reply, “It comes from the textbook. The textbook is always the right.” Because classes were large, Wang explained why students were not allowed to argue with professors during class time: “You cannot do that in class because that will be with other students’ time. You can do that after class.”

**Initiatives That Have Impacted Participants’ Success**

When measuring their success when transitioning between academic systems, two major themes emerged from the interviews: improving their communication skills and finding real-life connections.

**Improving communication skills.** No matter their level of proficiency in English or how long they have been in the U.S., participants agreed that communication is a key aspect for Chinese student’s success at a U.S. university. Chinese students tend to live in areas where they
share apartments with other Chinese students, eat Chinese food, and speak Chinese most of their time when they come to study in the U.S. What feels like a safe environment at first, may become an obstacle for academic and social interaction in the long run. Ting noted that:

They know about it like they don’t talk enough, but still like they don’t know how to get involved, how to get involved in the class and also I think is their living environment cause they live with Chinese and all Chinese neighbors and they speak Chinese at home and it’s hard for them to switch the language back in school.

Communication-related suggestions appeared in many different forms:

• Try to talk in class, don’t be shy, I think that’s the most important thing. Cause I think speaking is always important, is the first impression people can get from you in the life or in work cause you won’t show your reading or writing abilities most of the time. (Ting)

• Don’t be afraid of talking to your professors. I think here professors are very friendly and helpful. So I think most of the international students, at least Chinese students, experience a hard time to understand the lectures in class at the very beginning so just talk to the professors cause sometimes I think if you ask the professors to explain to you like in person he can use a simple language, but he couldn’t use that language in class so it’s probably like if you go and ask after class it helps you to understand the class better. (Ting)

• The priority is the language. Try to overcome the language barrier. (Wang)

• Try to understand the culture here. And the most important thing is getting involved in this culture as soon as possible. I’m not a party guy, but going parties seems a very important to get into this culture. (Wang)
• Have project with your classmates and talk about your project after class so you can know more about the American culture, how the American students communicate with each other. That will be very helpful. (Wang)

• Chinese people, for Asian people, maybe they just focus on studying. If they are just focus on studying, they cannot engage in here, they don’t know American culture, they can’t involve in too many activities, how can they engage in, how can they engage in university? I realize, engaging in university is very important. We have to attend in a lot of activities to learn different things. (Li)

• Don’t hide, don’t hide yourself in a shell, you know. Open your shell. (Li)

• I try to stretch and explore about my own ability and also explore how others are doing interesting things. (Xueli)

**Finding real-life connections.** One of the most impacting changes for Chinese students’ academic success occurred when they found a connection between their studies and real life. For Ting and Li this connection seemed stronger. Ting realized that she has developed better studying methods and she felt more motivated to learn when she realized the connection to her previous working experience in China. She claimed that, “I can see the connection between the courses and my experience so it get me more motivation to learn here.” For Li understanding the reason why he came here helped him organize his life. He said, “You have know why you live here. You have to know why you study in America. You have know your purpose. Make you plan and make everything efficiently. Don’t waste time and don’t waste money.” Li also benefited from a change in his study habits, “I study more hours, I started to plan, I started to organize my course study.” For him, true knowledge resulted from connecting his learning experiences to real life: “I want to learn some knowledge, you know, is a very useful. What kind
...of knowledge is useful? It’s mean I can get a connection, a very strong connection with real life, with daily life…is not just academic, no.” Wang and Xueli are in the process of finding this connection. Wang measured her success as follows:

I only try to growing up, try to experience more things. Because life is not about what kind of destination you can get, is more about whether you can learn along the way you get to the destination. So I am learning and if I get what I want to learn maybe that’s the successful things.

Xueli acknowledged her struggles, but has become more aware of her abilities:

But after 15 months, when I look back, I can feel the difference in me…and….a…like…uhm..the attitudes towards how I view life were this people around me is…I can feel the difference…and a…uhm…and I like the difference, the change, yeah, and I feel..uhm…like I…ext… I feel I extend I…I found some of (my) potentiality, the potentials and I try to stretch and explore about my own ability and also explore how others are doing interesting things…and I think I’m trying to get more rounded developed…and…yeah…and I feel…uhm….yeah…I mean… I still..uhm…have a lot of struggles like to really…really…hum…feel well everything is organized in my life… but I feel..uhm…I just feel more comfortable with myself.

Summary

This chapter presented the data analyzed from the interviews of the four Chinese graduate students who participated in this study. The participants’ narratives were used to describe Chinese students’ beliefs about academic success, their expectations about how they would perform in courses while earning their master’s degree at the university, and the changes they went through to succeed in an English academic environment. First a framework of the Chinese
educational system was provided and the purpose of Chinese education was identified. Then the participants’ beliefs regarding academic success in the U.S. was described. Next their expectations in relation to courses, instructors, assessments, grades, and performance within this English academic environment were analyzed. Finally, the changes Chinese students went through to succeed in the new academic environment were addressed.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter includes a deeper discussion of the findings by research questions followed by implications. Recommendations are provided for future research to better understand academic issues involving the growing number of international students that enroll at English speaking universities. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the challenges four Chinese graduate students faced when moving from the Chinese educational system to an English speaking academic system. According to Ballard (1996) the methods and practices used by English teachers in China prepare students to pass college entrance language exams; however, they do not nurture the dominant thinking processes and strategies of Western academic culture. The participants came from an educational system that seems to prioritize the achievement of high-test scores in lieu of proficiency and critical thinking. When enrolling in an English academic milieu to pursue master’s degrees, not only do Chinese students deal with language and cultural barriers, but they may also lack the necessary skills to understand lectures, participate in class discussions, read texts in depth, write academic papers, and engage in college life (Ballard, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b). From the results of this study, it appears that the participants may have developed a myriad of test-taking skills that guaranteed their academic success in passing college entrance exams, but may have lacked in developing some fundamental abilities to thrive and succeed in Western-based graduate courses. The findings from this study are discussed according to each research question posed. The research questions I posed to address these issues are as follows:

1. What do Chinese students believe is necessary for their academic success at the university?
2. What were Chinese students’ expectations about how they would perform in courses while earning their master’s degree?

3. What changes do Chinese students believe they need to make in order to succeed at the university?

**Research question one: What do Chinese students believe is necessary for their academic success at the university?** The findings demonstrate how the participants’ views of academic success differed when they were students in the Chinese educational system from their views as graduate students in the U.S. In China their beliefs about academic success were closely related to traditional views about education and Confucian thinking (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b; Hu, 2002; Scollon, 1999).

**Success in China.** Results showed that academic success in China is strongly related to achieving the highest test scores on exams and being at the top ranks in score statistics. Several instances of Confucianism thinking and Chinese traditional values emerged from the participants’ interviews when they described their experiences in the Chinese educational system (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b; Hu, 2002; Scollon, 1999). A strong connection to traditional values was established when all participants referred to, for example, the textbook as the main source of knowledge, not only in English, but in all other subjects. Scollon (1999) pointed out how, according to the Chinese tradition, true knowledge originated from written texts such as classic and official literature. Hu (2002) observed that in more recent times the textbook contained the core of knowledge of Chinese education. A connection to Confucian thinking was also observed when participants referred to their teachers as those in charge of transmitting textbook knowledge (Hu, 2002; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b, Paine, 1992). In addition, participants’ description of their English instruction in China showed little
variation in the teaching steps and procedures (Paine, 1992). Hu (2002) noted that the teaching process in China is a sequence with little variation: The teacher reads, interprets, analyses, and elaborates points selected in the textbook. Participants in this study defined their roles as students as followers and the good student as the one who knew everything their teacher told them. With teachers being in charge of doing the interpretative and analytical work, participants took passive rather than active roles in the learning process (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Paine, 1992). In addition, all participants agreed that memorization was enforced as the main learning strategy (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b).

When expressing their beliefs about academic success in China, participants’ narratives indicated a strong relation between learning and obtaining high scores on college entrance national exams. The participants in this study also related success in life to highly paid jobs. In his article addressing the conceptions of learning in the Confucian tradition, Lee (1996) explained that obtaining high scores on national exams provided the common person with the possibility of moving up in the hierarchical rankings of society. Lee (1996) noted that the possibility of social mobility became a significant drive force to study hard for a better future. According to Lee (1996) the utilitarian function of education motivated generations of students in China to aspire to succeed by obtaining higher degrees. The participants’ accounts, however, seemed to indicate that this motivation was enforced upon students by the rigid structure of the Chinese education system and the impact on parents. In other words, the participants’ values were more closely related to the framework upon which Chinese education was grounded, rather than on their personal drive to learn. A weak connection was seen in relation to attaining moral virtues or spiritual values. Scollon (1999) suggested that education also meant the cultivation of moral values. No participants in this study associated academic success to concepts such as
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becoming a good person or achieving high spirituality (Scollon, 1999). Academic success in China has one meaning: obtain high scores on tests (Biggs, 1996a, 1996b; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Hu, 2002; Lee, 1996; Paine, 1992; Scollon, 1999).

**Success in the U.S.** The findings show that success in the U.S. was more closely related to the participants’ individual experiences. They expressed less clarity of what it entailed to be a successful student in the U.S. as an international student. Even though they acknowledged obtaining a high GPA as a measure of academic success, they had to deal with a completely different system of beliefs to achieve. They became responsible for their learning experiences, which forced them to interact with professors and classmates, and use different sources to develop their knowledge, other than the course book (Ballard, 1996; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a). They understood that the instructor’s role was no longer to transmit knowledge, but to guide and facilitate students (Ballard, 1996; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Brown, 2001, 2007, Richard & Rodgers, 2014). The purpose of their education transformed into more than achieving a high GPA: they had to adopt different attitudes to knowledge from the ones they believed would make them successful students in China (Ballard, 1996). They also had to learn the norms of interaction to function in a new cultural system. Again, in Ballard’s (1996) study, she suggested that the methods and practices used in China prepared students to pass college entrance exams but did not nurture the dominant thinking processes and strategies of Western academic culture.

When describing success in the U.S., participants’ accounts did not show the same cohesion as they had when talking about the Chinese educational system. Their responses indicated a weaker connection with one another. They had more individual meanings and expressed opinions based on personal interactions. Participants acknowledged that a high GPA
was a measure of success in the U.S., but they also mentioned other purposes of education in addition to high scores, such as having fun, leading a balanced life, or developing skills. Some of them became more aware of their learning experiences. Learning experiences were no longer connected to the results in exams, but had real life application. When asked if they considered themselves successful students in the U.S., participants expressed less clarity of what success meant. They either perceived themselves as not successful or did not know what it meant to be a successful student in the U.S. to a foreigner. According to Paine (1992), modesty is one of the characteristics emphasized by Confucian thinking. It may be the case that participants are adopting a humble attitude, which would be in agreement with Chinese traditional views. It may also be the case that test scores are no longer the only measure of success for them.

Research question two: What were Chinese students’ expectations about how they would perform in courses while earning their master’s degrees? Findings indicated that participants had no clear expectations about what an academic life in an English speaking country entailed. The researcher approached this question by investigating the participants’ perceptions about their readiness for English immersion and how much exposure they had had to the U.S. culture.

College entrance exams. All participants reported that English was one of the main subjects in the Chinese educational system to pass college admission exams (Ballard, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b). Until college, a strong association existed between learning English and getting prepared to pass college entrance exams (Ballard, 1996). In addition, a strong association existed between test content and learning experiences. For instance, all participants reported that as national exams focused on grammar rules and vocabulary, their

A weak connection occurred between developing skills such as listening, speaking, or writing and participants’ learning experiences. Participants only mentioned speaking, listening, or writing skills when they were part of tests and/or national examination requirements. Cortazzi and Jin (1996a, 1996b) also found that writing, listening, and speaking were given low priority to English language instruction in China. In college, the connection between learning English and course curriculum was closely related to the type of major participants applied to.

**Exposure to English language.** Findings have shown that exposure to the English language happened most frequently and intensively with English major participants than with non-English major participants. Participants reported that English-major students had English classes throughout their four-year undergraduate program whereas non-English major participants had only one or two years of compulsory English instruction throughout their four-year programs. However, this study has shown that increased exposure to the English language through college courses did not always result in better language proficiency. Out of the two English major participants in this study, one of them realized he could not communicate in English as soon as he had his first contact with native speakers. He decided to switch programs (from English to math) due to his lack of proficiency and interest in studying the language. Participants tended to agree that their English classes in college did little to prepare them for the U.S. academic context (Ballard, 1996). The fundamental skills Chinese students needed to engage in Western university life, such as listening comprehension to understand lectures and discussions, speaking to participate in class discussions, reading comprehension to understand the content of reading assignments, writing to write academic papers, and interaction skills to
engage with native speakers tended to be scantly addressed in school curricula and might have been superficially taught at college level (Ballard, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b). One of the participants claimed that Chinese instructors of English at her university in China lacked the proper writing skills to teach students.

**Learning about English cultures.** Moreover, a week connection was established between English textbooks and learning about English cultures (U.S. and British). No participants mentioned learning about U.S. culture when they were in school in China. Cortazzi & Jin (1996a, 1996b) claimed that Chinese approaches to language teaching were traditionally concerned with mastery of knowledge, which stood upon four pillars: the teacher, the textbook, grammar, and vocabulary. It seemed that, academically speaking, the U.S. culture was a topic addressed only when participants were in college, not earlier. In addition, a stronger connection existed between teaching U.S culture in English-major than non-English major programs. Participants in the English major programs reported having specific courses about U.S. culture, while non-English major participants did not. Participants in this study lacked further exposure to the U.S. culture and hardly ever had experienced with authentic materials during lessons, such as songs, films, and websites (Brown, 2001, 2007; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In college, this exposure increased more significantly for English major than non-English major participants. However, the English-majors did not necessarily have better language proficiency, deeper cultural understanding, or preparedness for an academic life in the U.S (Ballard, 1996; Biggs & Watkins, 1996).

**Expectations about professors, assessments, grades and performance.** This research also showed that when participants were asked to comment on expectations about professors, assessments, grades and performance, their narratives differed based on their experiences in each
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department and program at the university. When asked about their expectations about professors in the U.S., most participants agreed that they did not have any clear expectation prior to coming to the U.S. university. After having had some classroom experience, participants responses varied based on how professors reacted to their emerging needs. Generally speaking, all participants in this study agreed that professors teaching in the U.S. had different attitudes to students when compared to their professors in China (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Hu, 2002). Students in the education and English department thought their professors tended to adopt a friendlier and more flexible attitude, possessing a readiness to negotiate (e.g., deadlines). Education professors and T/ESOL professors and instructors also spent extra time with students to explain lesson content than the professors in the communication and in the math departments (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). Hence, a stronger connection was established between instructors and participants in education and T/ESOL programs than in the math department or in the communication department.

When reporting expectations about their course assessments, half of the participants recalled that, as undergraduate students in China, they did not have much homework. All participants explained that the most frequently used type of assessment in China was the final term exam, in the humanities colleges, and mid-term and final exams in the science colleges. Those exams used a multiple-answer design. In the U.S., participants in the humanities tended to have other types of assessment than final exams or multiple-choice tests, which included projects, presentations, and papers. Some of these assessments required shorter deadlines than the ones they had in China and frequent meetings with their professors for clarification purposes. The participants believed they used different learning skills to execute the projects and papers than the ones they used in China. One of the participants felt overwhelmed with the different
types of assessments and deadlines. Ballard (1996) suggested that language and cultural problems mask most fundamental issues related to attitudes to teaching and learning within the different cultures, which demand the use of different types of strategies to meet academic requirements in each environment.

Lastly, in relation to expectations about grades and performance, it might have been expected that Chinese students would come to the U.S. with the sole purpose of getting high GPAs in their programs. Nevertheless, this assertion has not been true to all of them. Some participants wanted their learning experiences to be meaningful to them and connected to real life. Results showed that the participants in the education programs were satisfied with their grades and performance. One of the explanations given was that they could rely on the existing syllabus and rubrics, and the possibility of discussing grades based on the rubrics. Only one of the participants thought her professor did not care about her background when assessing her. She regretted that, unlike China, her professors did not have a system to grade students based on participation and attitude to learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996a; Hu, 2002). She explained that even though she had put a lot of effort into understanding the content of her classes, her lack of background knowledge interfered with her performance. Biggs and Watkins (1996) suggested that some beliefs Chinese students did not hold true between the Eastern and Western academic systems, which generated misconceptions.

It appeared that the participants’ expectations, and satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their programs and professors were connected to how their professors responded to them, how they were assessed and evaluated. Certain Chinese graduate students may fail to understand the university’s assessment system, which uses multiple types of assessment based on projects, papers, and presentations, as well as exams. The results indicate that some professors assessed
international students in the same way that they assessed English-speaking peers rather than on what these international students could really do (Ballard, 1996). Biggs and Watkins (1996) have emphasized the importance of giving explicit explanations about task requirements. They have claimed that local and international students do not share the same academic background and differences in understanding in terms of production and outcomes are likely to occur.

**Research question three: What changes do Chinese students believe they need to make in order to succeed at the university?** All participants believed that communication was one central issue to the success of Chinese students at the university (Ballard, 1996; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b). Participants agreed that, in general, Chinese students did not know how to interact with professors and classmates. Some participants may have had unrealistic expectations about the role of their U.S. advisors about adopting parental roles, providing career counseling, and/or recommending jobs (Hu, 2002). Nevertheless, all participants agreed that communication was a key factor for their success at the university and, to some extent, all of them engaged in establishing different types of interactions with their peers, professors, and advisors from the ones they were used to in China.

**Classroom participation.** Cultural beliefs about classroom participation in China also seemed to affect participants’ success at the university by preventing them from adopting more active roles in classroom discussions (Ballard, 1996; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Brown 2001, 2007; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b). Participants in the humanities reported fear of embarrassment about misunderstanding questions and about their accent. They also reported that it seemed that professors in China and in the U.S. possessed different attitudes about student participation. In China, professors and classmates expect there to be the right answer all the time. It makes no sense to them to provide a comment or an answer the participant is not sure of (Hu, 2002). This
study indicated that, unlike the U.S., the Chinese educational system does not encourage or promote communicative competence in academic environments (Brown 2001, 2007; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996a, 1996b; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Only one of the English-major participants reported on attempts made by some of her English professors to promote interaction in the classroom when she was in college. For some participants, traditional methods in China gave them a sense of control of their learning processes that they did not experience in the U.S. Real-life interactions and ownership of their learning experience seemed a lot more challenging and uncomfortable (Burnaby & Sun, 1989).

**Reading comprehension skills.** As for demands related to specific departments at the university, according to participants’ answers, reading comprehension skills seemed to be a greater concern for students in the humanities area than in the math area (Ballard, 1996). Students in the humanities area reported that they could not complete the entire reading assignment due to lack of time and/or understanding. They also reported on using remedial strategies to cope with the lack of understanding, such as using Google, asking classmates, or talking to professors. The participant in the math area noted that reading was not a matter of concern for him, but writing was (Ballard, 1996).

**Writing skills.** The Whitefield University Student Handbook did not mention writing skills as a relevant factor for academic success. Participants in this study expressed concern about their current level of academic writing but did not know what strategies they could use to improve (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). Ballard (1996) noted that most international students have “little experience of writing extended and systematic discourse even in their own languages” (p. 161). Cortazzi and Jin (1996a, 1996b) explained that writing is given low priority in Chinese language instruction. They observed that at the lower levels, teachers implement writing
activities in English classrooms in China, in which students write mostly at sentence level. At the higher levels, teachers realize their students’ difficulties with more elaborated writing techniques but the intense focus on testing prevents them from further developing their students’ writing skills. In addition, Chinese teachers seem to have been unaware of process-oriented approaches that develop strategies such as planning, pre-writing, or drafting “to improve students’ writing” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b, p. 69). The lack of emphasis on writing skills in the Whitefield University Student Handbook may imply that academic writing is not a relevant aspect for students’ success at this university. However, at this same university international students tend to be assessed for their academic written production on the same basis that their native English speaker classmates.

**Changing study habits.** Results indicated that success was related to changing study habits (Ballard, 1996). The Chinese participants used memorization as their most frequently used learning strategy in China (Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Thorne & Thorne, 1992). The different methods and types of assessment at the university demanded participants to adopt new strategies of learning (Ballard, 1996). When prompted about their best learning strategies, some participants expressed either misunderstanding of the question, uncertainty about the efficacy of the strategies they learned in the U.S. or they said they might have felt more comfortable with the U.S. methods or strategies. It seemed that professors and instructors who spent extra time with their international students to explain what was expected from them helped participants to complete assignments and transition better from Eastern to Western academic systems (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). Results have indicated that no matter which field of knowledge they were enrolled in, the greater the connection between Chinese participants’
current studies and real life, the more motivated they felt to use new strategies to learn and change their study habits.

Other than obtaining high scores to pass exams, the participants’ learning experiences in the U.S. acquired some new meanings. For some of them it meant learning about their abilities and potentialities, for others it meant establishing a strong connection to real life. Participants’ connection and commitment to their learning experiences changed. Knowledge no longer seemed to be a tool to conserve and perpetuate ideas and values, but to change and create new ones.

**Implications**

Through the accounts of four Chinese graduate students, this study aimed to understand the challenges they might experience to become successful students in U.S. classrooms. Being familiar with the university academic standards or having a list of tips for academic success might not be enough to assist them in their route to success. Even though their educational background in China introduced them to the study of English, their learning experiences were focused on exams. The skills they developed to achieve high scores in those exams might not transfer to Western educational systems. This study showed that Chinese graduate students have expressed difficulty with their basic proficiency skills to participate in class and work through their assignments, with socialization strategies to participate in both academic and community life, and with using analytical thinking processes when investing in academic work. This study concluded with the participants’ realization that in order to succeed in the U.S., they had to change the way they related to their learning experiences and the way they interacted.

With U.S. classrooms becoming more and diverse and with the high financial investment international students make in their education abroad, it seems that both U.S. and international administrators and faculty have a fundamental role in helping Chinese graduate students and
their peers from around the world to transit between culturally different educational systems and succeed. Questions about best classroom practices and activities come into play. It appears that interactive activities that promote awareness of different cultural aspects and improve socialization with their native peers are paramount for students to live and work together (Byram, 2008). Even though international students are to be accepted and respected within the scope of their pronunciation abilities, they might feel better integrated through pronunciation activities that make their communication flow and their message understood. Activities that improve reading strategies and develop their academic analytical processes may improve overall participation and connection to the new educational environment. Another aspect to reflect upon refers to differentiation strategies that can be employed to bring language and culture together. One of the participants commented on a strategy she found helpful. One of her professors used academic articles that addressed the specific cultures of her international students. By establishing connections between academic issues within their own culture, academic English became more accessible to her.

However, the investment in integrative procedures and accommodation activities might not be effective if international students are not linguistically, socially and/or culturally prepared for an academic life abroad. From a linguistic perspective, language entrance exams may not accurately inform about international students’ current ability to perform in Western academic systems. At the graduate level, Whitefield University recommends the following official TOEFL, MELAB, IELTS scores:

- 80 TOEFL IBT
- 77 MELAB
- 7.0 IELTS
• Completion of ESL Intensive English for Academic Purposes Level 112

These are just recommendations. They do not prevent students with lower scores from entering the university. In addition, the university does not appear to have minimum scores for each skill separately. Academic writing seems to be a problem in areas where academic research is in demand. It is shared knowledge that U.S. universities are ranked based on the amount of research they do every year. Therefore, it should be a concern for the university that international students are accurately assessed and receive proper training in academic writing if it wants to increase the participation of international students in academic research. Some participants in this study felt frustrated that the feedback they were getting about their written production was not helping them to understand where their writing issues were.

Graduate Chinese students usually spend two years in their graduate programs. Two years might not be enough time to work on all emerging academic and social issues within classroom situations. In addition, diagnosing problem areas does not entail immediate solutions. However, this study has shown that instructors who offer support and spend extra time with students to explain the content and to go over assignments after class are most likely to have better response and engagement from international students. It also seems that the more objective instructors are about how they grade papers and assignments, the less problems they are likely to face. It seems pertinent that the different programs, departments, and colleges establish which standards should be adopted by the university as a whole, which ones should be discussed within the requirements of each department. Making clear what these standards are for both international and non-international students may reduce misconceptions and unrealistic expectations.
Culturally speaking, participants also felt they would benefit from more detailed explanation about the expectations and culture of their specific departments and programs. They suggested that international students, who have been in the U.S. longer but within the same program, met with them and talked to them about their specific programs and courses at the start of the semester. Because they come from the same culture, these students might help them understand what will be expected from them academically and socially. Participants also expressed the desire for learning communities in which they could meet for academic and social purposes.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

My recommendations are based on the limitations I faced throughout this study. One of them related to finding updated articles about what happened to the implementation of communicative language teaching in Chinese classrooms. From the participants’ accounts, it seemed that their English classes were largely taught through reproductive methods rather than more communicative ones. Doing on-site observations of English classrooms in rural and urban contexts would provide me with a more accurate sample of what is currently happening in English language classrooms in China.

In order to address cultural and social aspects of what a life at a Midwestern medium-sized U.S. university entails, technology resources could also be explored so as to create an open channel of communication with students interested in applying to the university. A blog on the university website in which students enrolled at the university would talk to prospective international and local students is one example. Research could address the purpose of the blog, how it should be implemented, and what types of issues would draw the curiosity of international
students. Further investigation of techniques that would facilitate international students communication through pronunciation activities also seem relevant to me at this point.

Conclusion

This research provided me with several perspectives that I can take to investigate how to improve learning conditions of international students. Participants have shared their interest in improving their pronunciation, writing, and mostly communication skills. They have also expressed strong desire in socializing more with U.S. peers and engaging in academic life. In the short run, my goal is to observe language classrooms in schools in China to have an on-site perspective of how Chinese students learn English and what type of written texts they have to produce for academic purposes. I also want to observe them in their social contexts and how they interact. I truly hope that going back to teaching and to daily practice with international students will provide me with a more realistic perspective of what is happening in diverse classrooms in Western academic environments. In the long run, through continuous practice and academic investigation I hope to understand, develop, and improve curricula and attitudes to better meet international students’ needs.
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APPENDIX A: ENGLISH GAOKAO SAMPLE TEST

2014年普通高等学校招生全国统一考试（湖南卷）

英语

本试题卷分四个部分，共12页，每题120分钟，满分150分。

Part I Listening Comprehension (30 marks)

Section A (22.5 marks)

Directions: In this section, you will hear six conversations between two speakers. For each conversation, there are several questions and each question is followed by three choices marked A, B and C. Listen carefully and then choose the best answer for each question.

You will hear each conversation TWICE.

Example:
When will the magazine probably arrive?
A. Wednesday. B. Thursday. C. Friday.

The answer is B.

Conversation 1

1. What will the woman do first?
A. Take a shower. B. Go camping. C. Set up a time.
2. When will the man probably call the woman?
A. Thursday. B. Friday. C. Sunday.

Conversation 2

3. What is the man going to do?
A. Have a coffee break. B. See a doctor. C. Buy a pet.
4. What happened to the man?
A. He fell ill. B. He lost his dog. C. He slept badly.

Conversation 3

5. What is the woman?
A. A bus driver. B. A waitress. C. A tour guide.
6. What does the man want to get?
A. Some gifts. B. A menu. C. A bus schedule.

Conversation 4

7. What did the man do yesterday?
A. He saw a movie. B. He watched TV.
C. He visited some friends.

8. What time will the speakers probably meet this Saturday evening?
A. At 6:30. B. At 7:00. C. At 7:30.
9. Which of the following will the man buy?
A. Some drinks. B. A birthday cake. G. Concert tickets.

Conversation 5

10. What is the woman doing now?
A. She is serving a customer.
B. She is conducting an interview.
C. She is doing some recording.
11. When does the man go to the nursing home?
12. Where will the man probably be working next Monday?
A. At the airport nearby.
B. In the studio next door.
C. At the store downtown.

Conversation 6
13. Why does the woman call the man?
A. The oven doesn’t work.
B. The heater won’t start.
C. The plug is broken.
14. Who will handle the problem first tomorrow evening?
15. Who is the woman speaking to?
A. Her husband. B. Her house owner. C. Her boss.

Section B (7.5 marks)
Directions: In this section, you will hear a short passage. Listen carefully and then Jill in the numbered blanks with the information you have heard. Fill in each blank with NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS.
You will hear the short passage TWICE.

Voice Mail from Kelly Black
1. Call Mr. Brown to 16 the appointment time.
2. E-mail the staff members about next week’s 17.
3. Ask the repairman to fix the broken 18 in the office.
4. Give a list of all the employees to the 19 owner.
5. Take 20 on the desk to the post office.

英语试题第2页（共12页）

Part II Language Knowledge (45 marks)
Section A (15 marks) Directions: For each of the following unfinished sentences there are four choices marked A, B, C and IX. Choose the one that best completes the sentence. XXX

Examples:
The wild flowers looked like a soft orange blanket the desert.
A. covering B. covered C. cover D. to cover

The answer is A.
21. Children, when by their parents, are allowed to enter the stadium.
A. to be accompanied B. to accompany
C. accompanying D. accompanied
22. If Mr. Dewey ______ present, he would have offered any possible assistance to the people there.
A. were B. had been G. should be D. was
23. your own needs and styles of communication is as important as learning to convey your affection and emotions.
   A. Understanding B. To be understood
   C. Being understood D. Having understood
24. As John Lennon once said, life is ___ happens to you while you are busy making other plans.
   A. which B. that C. what D. where
25. — I’ve prepared all kinds of food for the picnic.
   — Do you mean we ___ bring anything with us?
   A. can’t B. mustn’t C. shan’t D. needn’t
26. You will never gain success you are fully devoted to your work.
   A. when B. because C. after D. unless
27. There is no greater pleasure than lying on my back in the middle of the grassland, ___at the night sky.
   A. to stare B. staring C. stared D. having stared
28. Since the time humankind started gardening, we ___ to make our environment more beautiful.
   A. try B. have been trying C. are trying D. will try
29. Only when you can find peace in your heart ___ good relationships with others.
   A. will you keep B. you will keep C. you kept D. did you keep
30. what you’re doing today important, because you’re trading a day of your life for it.
   A. Make B. To make C. Making D. Made
31. I am looking forward to the day my daughter can read this book and know my feelings for her.
   A. as B. why C. when D. where
32. All we need is a small piece of land where we can plant various kinds of fruit trees throughout the growing seasons of the year.
   A. are B. was C. is D. were
33. It’s not doing the things we like, but liking the things we have to do makes happy.
   A. that B. which C. what D. who
34. Whenever you, a present, you should think about it from the receiver’s point of view.
   A. bought B. have bought C. will buy D. buy
35. ourselves from the physical and mental tensions, we each need deep thought and inner quietness.
   A. Having freed B. Freed C. To free D. Freeing

Section B (18 marks)

Directions: For each blank in the following passage there are four words or phrases marked A, B, C and D. Fill in each blank with the word or phrase that best fits the context.

The summer before I went off to college, Mom stood in her usual spot behind the ironing board (烫衣板) and said, “Pay attention: I’m going to teach you to iron.”

Mom clearly explained her ___ for this lesson. I was going to be ___ and needed to learn this vital skill. Also, I would be meeting new people, and properly ironed clothes would help me...
make a good_____.

“Learn to iron a shirt,” xxxkcom Mom said, “and you can iron anything.”
But ironing shirts was not____ work. It didn’t make use of long muscles we used to throw a
baseball, and it wasn’t a____ operation like ice-skating. Ironing was like driving a car on a
street that has a stop sign every 10 feet. Moreover, an iron produced steam and it carried an
element of____. If you touched the wrong part of it, you’d get burnt. If you forgot to turn it
off when you____, you might burn down the house.
As for technique, Mom____ me to begin with the flat spaces outward, always pushing the iron
forward into wrinkled (有褶皱的) parts. Collars had to be done right. Mom said they were close to
your face, where everyone would____ them.

英语试题第4页（共12页）

Over the years, I’ve learned to iron shirts skillfully, which gives me a sense of____. Whatever
failures I suffer in my life, an ironed shirt tells me I am good at something.____, through
ironing I’ve learned the method for solving even the most troublesome problems. “____ wrinkles
one at a time,” as Mom might have said, “and before long everything will get ironed
out.”

36. A. reasons B. rules C. emotions D. methods
37. A. helpful B. confident C. powerful D. independent
38. A. conclusion B. suggestion C. impression D. observation
39. A. useful B. easy C. special D. suitable
40. A. direct B. single C. smooth D. strange
41. A. doubt B. pressure C. surprise D. danger
42. A. went away B. fell down C. jumped off D. looked up
43. A. taught B. chose C. forced D. sent
44. A. touch B. design C. see D. admire
45. A. honesty B. freedom C. justice D. pride
46. A. Instead B. Besides C. Otherwise D. However
47. A. Make up B. Deal with C. Ask for D. Rely on

Section C (12 marks)

Directions: Complete the following passage by filling in each blank with one word that best fits
the context

We can choose our friends, but usually we cannot choose our neighbors. However, to get a happy
home life, we have to get along with____ as well as possible.
An important quality in a neighbor is consideration for____. People should not do things____
will disturb their neighbors unnecessarily. For example, television sets need not be played at full
volume (音量)____ loud pop music should not be played very late at night. By avoiding things
likely to upset your neighbors, you can enjoy____ friendly relationship with them.
An equally important quality is tolerance. Neighbors should do all they can to avoid disturbing
other people.____ there are times when some level of disturbance is unavoidable.____ neighbors
want to get along well with each other, they have to show their tolerance. In this way,
everyone will live____ peace.

Part III Reading Comprehension (30 marks)

Directions: Read the following three passages. Each passage is followed by several questions or
unfinished statements. For each of them there are four choices marked A, B, C and D. Choose
the one that fits best according to the information given in the passage.

A

Want to improve your writing skills? New Writing South is directing the way!

* Towner Writer Squad (班组) for kids aged 13-17

Led by comedy and TV writer, Marian Kilpatrick, Towner Writer Squad will meet once a month at the contemporary art museum for 11 months, starting 12 October, 2014. The FREE squad sessions will include introductions to a wide range of writing styles, from poetry to play writing and lyrics (抒情诗) to flash fiction, to support the development of young writers.

Application & Selection

If you would like to apply to be part of the Towner Writer Squad, please send a sample piece of your writing (about 500 words), responding to the title ‘LUNCH,’ with your name, age, address and e-mail address to: debo@newwritingsouth.com.

Once all applications are in, you will be invited to an open selection event on 17 September, 4-5pm, at the gallery of Towner. This will be an informal opportunity to meet the Squad Leader, Squad Associate and other young people. You will also have a chance to get to know the fantastic gallery space and get a taste of what’s to come.

Deadline for applications: 8 September, 2014

For further information go to: facebook.com/towner or towner.org.uk or newwritingsouth.com

Any questions — feel free to send your e-mail to Towner Writer Squad Associate: whame@towner.gov.uk

* * * * * * * * *

* Beginner Writing Project for kids aged 10-13

Due to popular demand, a writing project will be started for eager beginners.

Start time: 6 September, 2014

Meet every other Saturday, 2-4pm, at the Towner Study Centre.

Study and write at your own pace — you do not have to rush — as you have a year to go through the project. Practise under the guidance of some experienced writers and teachers who can help you with basic writing skills. Most importantly, build confidence and have fun while writing!

No previous experience or special background is required. Many others have been successful this way. If they can do it, why can’t you?

Fee: £179

For more information go to: newtowner.org.uk or generate.org.uk

56. Towner Writer Squad will be started _______.
A. to train comedy and TV writers
B. to explore the fantastic gallery space
C. to introduce a contemporary art museum
D. to promote the development of young writers

57. To join the Writer Squad, each applicant should first _______.
A. provide a piece of their writing
B. meet the Writer Squad Leader
C. offer their family information
D. complete an application form

58. Applications for the Writer Squad should be e-mailed no later than ________.
A. 6 September, 2014
B. 8 September, 2014
C. 17 September, 2014
D. 12 October, 2014

59. What is most important for the beginners?
A. Practising as much as possible.
B. Gaining confidence and having fun.
C. Studying and writing at their own pace.
D. Learning skills from writers and teachers. 60. More information about Beginner Writing Project can be found at ________.
A. facebook.com/towner
B. newwritingsouth.com
C. newtowner.org.uk
D. towner.org.uk

B

In the mid-1950s, I was a somewhat bored early-adolescent male student who believed that doing any more than necessary was wasted effort. One day, this approach threw me into embarrassment. In Mrs. Totten’s eighth-grade math class at Central Avenue School in Anderson, Indiana, we were learning to add and subtract decimals. Our teacher typically assigned daily homework, which would be recited in class the following day. On most days, our grades were based on our oral answer to homework questions. Mrs. Totten usually walked up and down the rows of desks requesting answers from student after student in the order the questions had appeared on our homework sheets. She would start either at the front or the back of the classroom and work toward the other end. Since I was seated near the middle of about 35 students, it was easy to figure out which questions I might have to answer. This particular time, I had completed my usual two or three problems according to my calculations.

What I failed to expect was that several students were absent, which threw off my estimate. As Mrs. Totten made her way from the beginning of the class, I desperately tried to determine which math problem I would get. I tried to work it out before she got to me, but I had brain freeze and couldn’t function.

When Mrs. Totten reached my desk, she asked what answer I’d got for problem No. 14. “1... I didn’t get anything,” I answered. and my face felt warm.

“Correct,” she said.

It turned out that the correct answer was zero.

What did I learn that day? First, always do all your homework. Second, in real life it isn’t always what you say but how you say it that matters. Third, I would never make it as a mathematician.

If I could choose one school day that taught me the most, it would be that one.

61. What does the underlined part in Paragraph 1 indicate?
A. It is wise to value one’s time.
B. It is important to make an effort
C. It is right to stick to one’s belief.
D. It is enough to do the necessary.
62. Usually, Mrs. Totten asked her students to _______.
   A. recite their homework together
   B. grade their homework themselves
   C. answer their homework questions orally
   D. check the answers to their homework questions
63. The author could work out which questions to answer since the teacher always _______.
   A. asked questions in a regular way
   B. walked up and down when asking questions
   C. chose two or three questions for the students
   D. requested her students to finish their usual questions
64. The author failed to get the questions he had expected because _______.
   A. the class didn’t begin as usual
   B. several students didn’t come to school
   C. he didn’t try hard to make his estimate
   D. Mrs. Totten didn’t start from the back of the class
65. Which of the following can be the best title for the passage?
   A. An Unforgettable Teacher
   B. A Future Mathematician
   C. An Effective Approach
   D. A Valuable Lesson
62. Usually, Mrs. A. recite their
   C

The behaviour of a building’s users may be at least as important as its design when it comes
to energy use, according to new research from the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC). The
UK promises to reduce its carbon emissions (排放) by 80 percent by 2050, part of which will be
achieved by all new homes being zero-carbon by 2016. But this report shows that sustainable
building design on its own — though extremely important — is not enough to achieve such
reductions: the behaviour of the people using the building has to change too.

The study suggests that the ways that people use and live in their homes have been largely
ignored by existing efforts to improve energy efficiency (效率), which instead focus on
architectural and technological developments.

‘Technology is going to assist but it is not going to do everything,’ explains Katy Janda, a
UKERC senior researcher. ‘Consumption patterns of building users can defeat the most careful
design.’ In other words, old habits die hard, even in the best-designed eco-home.

Another part of the problem is information. Households and bill-payers don’t have the
knowledge they need to change their energy-use habits. Without specific information, it’s hard
to estimate the costs and benefits of making different choices. Feedback facilities, like
smart meters and energy monitors, could help bridge this information gap by helping people see
how changing their behaviour directly affects their energy use; some studies have shown that
households can achieve up to 15 percent energy savings using smart meters.
Social science research has added a further dimension, suggesting that
individuals’ behaviour in the home can be personal and cannot be predicted — whether people
throw open their windows rather than turn down the thermostat, for example.

Janda argues that education is the key. She calls for a focused programme to teach people about
buildings and their own behaviour in them.

66. As to energy use, the new research from UKERC stresses the importance of______.

A. zero-carbon homes B. the behaviour of building users
C. sustainable building design D. the reduction of carbon emissions

67. The underlined word “which” in Paragraph 2 refers to “______.”

A. the ways B. their homes
C. developments D. existing efforts

68. What are Katy Janda’s words mainly about?

A. The importance of changing building users, habits.
B. The necessity of making a careful building design.
C. The variety of consumption patterns of building users.
D. The role of technology in improving energy efficiency. ZXXK

69. The information gap in energy use ______.

A. can be bridged by feedback facilities
B. affects the study on energy monitors
C. brings about problems for smart meters
D. will be caused by building users’ old habits

70. What does the dimension added by social science research suggest?

A. The social science research is to be furthered.
B. The education programme is under discussion.
C. The behaviour of building users is unpredictable.
D. The behaviour preference of building users is similar.

Part IV  Writing (45 marks)
Section A (10 marks)
Directions: Read the following passage. Fill in the numbered blanks by using the information from
the passage.

Write NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS for each answer.

Many of us invest valuable time, energy and money planning our vacations. We do this because
we know for sure that going on vacations must be good for us. Research proves this feeling
without a doubt. Vacations help us perform better at work, improve our sleep quality and cushion
us against depression.

Yet, despite these benefits, many of us return home with a feeling that our last vacation was OK -
but not great. In order to change this, some mistakes should be avoided. A classic one for
vacation planners is attempting to maximize value for money by planning trips that have too many
components (组成部分). Perhaps you’re planning a trip to Europe, seven cities in 10 days, and
you realize it will cost only a little more to add two more destinations to the list Sounds fine in
theory, but hopping from one place to the next hardly gives an opportunity to experience what
psychologists call mindfulness — time to take in our new surroundings, time to be present and
absorb our travel experiences. Another mistake is that we worry too much about strategic issues
such as how to find a good flight deal, how to get from A to B, or which destinations to add or
subtract from our journey. These issues may seem important, but our psychological state of mind is far more important. Actually, vacation happiness is based on the following top rules. First, choose your travel companions wisely, because nothing contributes more significantly to a trip than the right companions. Second, don’t spend your vacation time in a place where everything is too expensive so as to maintain a positive mood. Third, shop wisely, for meaningful experiences provide more long-term happiness than physical possessions.

Section B (10 marks)
Directions: Read the following passage. Answer the questions according to the information given in the passage.

Kids and Ponds

Years ago there was a group of kids who would hang around at some local ponds in the woods near their houses in Warwick, Rhode Island. In summer they caught frogs and fish. When winter arrived they couldn’t wait to go skating. Time passed, and the ponds became the only open space for the kids to enjoy themselves in that neighborhood.

One day, a thirteen-year-old boy from this group of kids read in the local newspaper that a developer wanted to fill in the ponds and build over a hundred small houses called condominiums. So the boy went door to door and gathered more than two hundred signatures (签名) to stop the development. A group of citizens met and decided to support him.

At the meeting of the town planning board (委员会), the boy was quite nervous at first and spoke very softly. But when he saw the faces of his friends and neighbors in the crowd and thought about what was happening to their favorite ponds, his voice grew louder. He told the town officials that they should speak for the citizens. He also insisted that they should leave enough space for children. A few days later, the developer stopped his plan.

Nine years later, when that teen was a senior in college, he was informed that the developer was back with his proposal to build condominiums. Now twenty-two years old, he was studying wetlands ecology. He again appeared before the town planning board. This time as an expert witness, he used environmental protection laws to explain restrictions on development in and around wetlands and the knowledge of wetlands ecology to help improve the development. Finally some condominiums were built, but less than half the number the developer wanted. The ponds
where those kids used to hang around were protected by a strip of natural land, and are still there today.

81. What did the kids like to do at the local ponds in winter? (No more than 6 words) (2 marks)

82. How did the boy win the citizens’ support? (No more than 10 words) (2 marks)

83. What did the boy tell the town officials? (No more than 16 words) (3 marks)

84. What helped the boy to protect the ponds successfully nine years later? (No more than 12 words) (3 marks)

Section C (25 marks)
Directions: Write an English composition according to the instructions given below.  
学校正在组织科技创新大赛，你想为日常生活中某件物品（如钢笔、书包、鞋子……）设计添加新功能来参赛。请以“My Magic”为题写一篇英语短文，介绍你的创意。  
内容：  
1. 说明设计理由  
2. 介绍新功能。  
注意：  
1. 词数不少于120个  
2. 不能使用真实姓名和学校名称。  
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
Bowling Green State University
Graduate Students

Title of Project: Moving between Academic Systems: Chinese Students and the Educational Challenges within Western Universities
Principal Investigator: Anna Clara Martins, School of Teaching and Learning
Contact Information: 529 Education Building, Bowling Green, OH, 43402; 419-377-1193; annaclm@bgsu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: By interviewing you I expect to have some deeper understanding of your educational background in China, the methods through which you learned English, the differences between studying English to pass language proficiency tests and using English as the first language for academic purposes in Western universities. I would also like to investigate your academic expectations in relation to studying and performing in a Western university and the challenges posed by Western socialization and academic thinking. Last but not least, I would like to examine your expectations in relation to faculty response in both ESL and content classrooms to bridge cultural and academic gaps between Eastern and Western academic contexts. The research questions are: 1. What do Chinese students believe is necessary for their academic success at the university? 2. What were Chinese students' expectations about how they would perform in courses while earning their master's degree? 3. What changes do Chinese students believe are necessary to make to succeed at the university?

2. Procedures to be followed: If you sign this consent form, you will be committing to participate in the research. For the research, I will interview at three different meetings, for about 60-120 minutes each time. In the first interview session, first, I will talk to you for an hour or two, and ask questions about your background (e.g., name, city, province, school). Next, I will ask you about your education in China, your experience as an English learner, and your feelings about learning English. Lastly, I will ask you about your expectations about being a graduate student in the United States. I will then listen to your audio recording in my office and will transcribe our conversation.

During our second meeting, which will happen within two weeks after the first meeting, I will go over the first interview transcript with you and clarify any doubts or questions. Then, I will ask you about your academic experience in the U.S. I also will ask you about your expectations in relationship to your courses, your professors, and evaluation/grades. I also will ask you about your perceptions of being a student in China and a student in the U.S. Lastly, I will ask you how your experience as an English language learner in China influenced you when attending classes in the U.S. After this second session, I will listen to your recording and transcribe the interview.

At our last meeting, I will first go over the transcription and clarify any questions related to our second meeting. I will ask you to share with me how your experience as a
graduate student in the U.S. could help other Chinese students who want to study abroad.

We will meet according to your availability but I'd like to keep our meeting intervals close to two weeks from each other. I will show a written copy of the questions I will be asking you at the beginning of each interview session.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Deciding to participate or not will have no impact on your relationship with Bowling Green State University. In order to protect your privacy, I will not use your real name. If I ever need to make any reference to you or quote you, I will use a pseudonym. A pseudonym is a name that is not your real name. I will ask you if you want to choose a pseudonym. If I ever need to make reference to you, I will use this pseudonym throughout my research. If you do not want to choose the pseudonym, I will choose one for you. Using a pseudonym protects your privacy. At the end of this document, you will be given the option to choose a pseudonym.

4. Benefits: The goal of this study is to understand Chinese students' expectations when they come to study in Western universities and the challenges posed by Western academic learning and teaching environments. By having a broader perspective of their Chinese students' cultural and educational backgrounds, Western faculty might be better able to bridge cultural and social gaps as well as to understand that in order that Chinese students achieve academic success these students might have to be prepared to function not only in English but also within the framework of Western academic thinking. The benefits of this study will extend to other international students as well.

5. Duration/Time: There will three interviews. Each interview will last between one and two hours. I would like to have them happening two weeks apart from each other. As shortcomings can happen, a 24-hour prior notice cancellation is to be sent by whoever (the researcher or the participant) needs to make the change.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: Only you, the student, and I, the researcher, will know your identity. If the research is published, information will not be given to identify you. Names will be removed from the data and replaced with a pseudonym. You can choose a pseudonym before you sign this consent form and I will use it throughout the research whenever I need to make a reference to you or quote you. Our conversations will be highly likely quoted in my research. If that is the case, you will be informed. If you agree with the quotation, I will protect your identity by using a pseudonym. If you do not agree, I will not use the quotation. Between the interviews, I will send a digital copy of the interview transcriptions to your e-mail address for approval of legitimacy. We will use the beginning of the following interview session to clarify any doubts or questions that might occur. I will store the audio data in a secure computer protected by password. I will be the only person to have that password. The transcribed files will be kept in a locked file cabinet on campus in my advisor's BGSU office. I will be the only person to have the key to that file cabinet locker. I will keep both the digital data and the printed data and documents for a period of seven years. This is the recommended time for publication purposes. After that period, the digital files will be deleted and the printed data and documents will be cut and thrown away. You will be given a full copy
of the research, which will contain, among other information, the methods for data collection, data analysis, and final conclusion prior to the final project submission. Finally, I will be willing to share my master’s thesis with you when it is completed and approved by my committee.

7. Right to Ask Questions: You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. You are able to ask me questions about the research. You could contact me via E-mail at annacl@bgsu.edu or by phone at 419-377-1193. Also, you could contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Brigid Burke, with questions at bburke@bgsu.edu or 419-372-7324. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

8. Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary. You can decline to answer specific questions during the interview(s). You can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying me.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in the research study.

Please, choose the options that apply:

________ I agree that you interview me

________ I do not agree that you interview me

________ I consent that the interviews are audio recorded

________ I do not consent that the interviews are audio recorded

________ I consent that notes are taken during the interviews

________ I do not consent that notes are taken during the interviews

________ I want to choose a pseudonym to be used in this research. This pseudonym is ____________________________.

________ The researcher will choose a pseudonym for me. This pseudonym is ____________________________.

If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep your records if you would like one.
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<th>Printed Name</th>
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<td>I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.</td>
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APPENDIX C: CHINESE STUDENTS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part A – Biographical Information

1. Name______________________________________________________________

2. Age __________________________________________________________________

3. Sex __________________________________________________________________

4. Country __________________________________________________________________

5. Province __________________________________________________________________

6. City ____________________________________________________________________

Part B – Chinese Student Expectation

7. How many years did you study English before coming to the United States?

8. Tell me about your experience of learning English in China. How were your English classes?

9. Tell me about your experience in the U.S.
   • Why did you come to the United States?
   • How long have you been in the United States?
   • Why did you decide to study in the United States?

10. What were your expectations about courses when coming to study here?
   • What were your expectations about professors?
   • What were your expectations about assignments?
   • What were your expectations about evaluation/grades?

11. Do you see yourself as a successful student? Why?

12. How did your language teachers in China prepare you for an academic life in the U.S.?

13. Tell me about your experience moving from the Chinese to the U.S. academic system.
14. Tell me about the differences from being a student in the U.S. and a student in China.

15. Have you ever had to change your studying habits here? Why? Why not?

16. Has your English instruction in China affected your performance in the U.S. classroom?
   - How did it help?
   - How did it lack?

17. Tell me about your participation in class in China, and then about your classroom participation in the U.S.
   - What is the same?
   - What is different?
   - What do you believe Chinese students need to do to be successful here?

18. Tell me about your relationship with instructors in China and your relationship to your instructors and professors in the U.S.
   - What is the same?
   - What is different?
   - What do you believe Chinese students need to do to be successful here?

19. How comfortable do you feel about expressing your thoughts and feelings in U.S. classrooms?

20. What can the university do differently for Chinese students be successful?

21. What things would you do differently if you went back to China and had to prepare other Chinese students who want to come and study in Western Universities?