CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORIENTATION TO A
U.S. PUBLIC INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to gather information that would inform international student advisors about ways to create a new international student orientation program that would facilitate a successful cultural transition from Chinese culture to U.S. culture. Different language, different culture, different educational philosophy, different educational systems, different requirements, and different expectations challenge Chinese international students in academic study and personal development during their time as an international student in the United States. Cultural surprise and culture shock in the host environment confront them as they work to understand and operate within the values and norms of U.S. culture. Making a successful cross-cultural transition in the classroom and in the wider society promotes the ultimate goal of attaining skills needed to lead the future of the world community. With targeted orientation activities and educational interventions, Chinese international students can increase their self-awareness and intercultural sensitivity, and reduce the time needed for successful adjustment in the host culture. Developing skills in intercultural sensitivity promotes student development in personality, attitudes, and beliefs. Chinese international students can recognize, respect, accept, and appreciate the value of cultural differences to their advantage. A successful study abroad experience helps them increase their intercultural competence and enables them to flourish in the vibrant U.S. campus culture. Interacting with culturally confident Chinese international students, U.S. students can also increase their multicultural competence.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my respected grand-parents and parents of our Family Lin who went to be with the Lord, but are always with me in my heart.

Lin Zijian and Lu Jinxiang

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the U.S. Congress passed the Fulbright Act in 1946, higher education for international students has been supported for more than 60 years. In 2004, international students studying in U.S. institutions of higher education came from approximately 170 countries, which meant the United States hosted over one half of all international students (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). In 2010–11, the total number of international students had increased to 723,277 (McMurrie, 2011). The academic excellence and diversity found in U.S. institutions has attracted more and more international students, placing the United States as the first priority among host countries for international students to study abroad (Institute of International Education, 2011).

Since 1978, Mainland China has contributed the greatest increase of scholars to the international student population (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011). After the government of the People’s Republic of China worked aggressively to expand international scholarly and technological exchange to enhance the level of modernization in the late 1970s, the number of Chinese students from mainland China coming to the United States increased from zero at the beginning of 1978 to nearly 20,030 by 1988 (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011). The number doubled by 1993 (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011). In 2003, a total of 64,757 Chinese international students
studied in U.S. colleges and universities (H. Yang, Harlow, Maddux, & Smaby, 2006). In 2011, the Mainland Chinese international student enrollment in the United States soared to a total of 157,558, comprising almost 22 percent of the total international student population, making China the leading country sending students for the second consecutive year (Institute of International Education, 2011). These data show 56,976 Mainland Chinese international students studying for bachelor’s programs, 76,830 Chinese students pursuing graduate programs, and 10,484 studying non-degree programs. Compared with 2010, Chinese students increased by 23 percent in total and by 43 percent at the undergraduate level in 2011 (Institute of International Education, 2011). The most notable change is that more and more students are studying for their baccalaureate degrees, and such a large influx of students deserves special attention.

Chinese international students have experienced many challenges in the transition from their homeland to study in the United States. These challenges result from different cultures, philosophies of education, pedagogies, academic requirements, and forms of performance evaluation (C. P. Chen, 1999; Cuyjet, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2011; Olivas & Li, 2004; Yan & Berliner, 2009). In China, high schools do not provide guidance counselors (Hathaway, 2011) to recommend higher education institutions and programs. Students have limited information about colleges and universities as well as campus culture even among institutions of higher education in China. Although information related to U.S. higher education can be searched, cultural differences cannot be read but must be experienced. The more different the two countries or cultures are, the more stressful the adjustment is likely to become (B. Yang & Clum, 1994). Coming from an Eastern developing country that was isolated from the rest of the world for about 30 years, Chinese international students universally have experienced stressful cross-cultural adjustments (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011).
Chinese education has its own unique characteristics. In China, students are educated from elementary school by teachers with strict discipline and definite direction of behavioral and learning criteria. Teachers are regarded as dispensers of knowledge, leaders, and experts in each aspect of their scholarship and are expected to instruct students comprehensively and completely (Wei et al., 2007). Chinese students who are accustomed to the “teacher-centered style” (Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005, p. 289) from elementary school have been taught to maintain harmonious classroom circumstances by keeping silent to show their respect to the teacher and prepare to answer the teacher’s questions instead of breaking the flow of the teacher’s instruction. In China, the model of a professor providing instruction and students receiving knowledge is normal, and the typical behavioral norms are to show classroom order and respect toward the instructor (C. P. Chen, 1999).

The standard normative criterion that defines excellent students includes listening to and obeying the instructor without question. Students are encouraged to answer the teacher’s questions to review their understanding of key points, and independently raising questions in a classroom means that one is challenging the instructor’s authority to some degree (Wei et al., 2007). In a Chinese classroom, professors design and control the classroom pace and rhythm to deliver knowledge as much as possible and do not expect to be interrupted by individual and specific questions that are not considered relevant to the content in that session (Wei et al., 2007). When students choose to ask questions to professors after class, they are expected to frame their questions in a prudent and tactful manner, using vague language that includes indirect requests. Chinese traditional educational philosophy teaches that students behave with “silence or culturally verbal passivity” (Yan & Berliner, 2009, p. 453) to show their respect to
their professors. They usually expect to get authorized feedback from their professors accordingly.

Different educational requirements between China and the United States lead to varying instructional methods and forms of evaluation. Chinese students accustomed to education in China are easily lost when they encounter U.S. instructional and educational expectations. Therefore, as members from an Eastern developing country, Chinese students have experienced more academic pressure than European students in the United States because of the extreme cultural differences (Wei et al., 2007). When they interact with U.S. professors, Chinese students experience additional challenges because of language insufficiency, which impedes their expression further. Language insufficiency and cultural differences challenge Chinese international students in each aspect of student life on U.S. campuses.

When they come to the United States, Chinese international students usually encounter various forms of culture shock based on cultural differences. In China, students have been educated to accept “collectivistic cultures” (Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 5) so that they can naturally develop intimate relationships with their classmates. When they study in China, students seek to establish friendships first, which makes them help each other. Chinese international students have the established idea that only among friends are people willing to share a lot of information, including personal information. Therefore, they work to make friends in the host environment, because when they need assistance they prefer to ask their friends, even in the United States.

In China, modesty and humbleness are regarded as merit and virtue. Therefore, people are encouraged to learn from others to make progress instead of expressing their ideas directly. Chinese students are conditioned to perpetuate indirect communication and implicit expression to reach spiritual harmony with others (G. M. Chen, 1993). In some cases, direct expression
could be viewed as foolish and losing face. However, indirect communication frequently results in low self-disclosure. As a result, the different worldview in the host culture provides Chinese international students with major conflicts in values and norms accordingly. Cultural differences hinder Chinese students in social interaction and social adjustment (Feng, 1991). When they work to solve problems using their traditional coping mechanisms, they often reach unexpectedly bad results. They usually feel depressed or frustrated over their lack of success, which can prevent them from achieving a successful acculturation (C. P. Chen, 1999; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wei et al., 2007). When they experience acculturative stress (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006), the stress tends to be associated with personal failure, losing face, and embarrassment, which discourages them even more from seeking further assistance (Wei et al., 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2009).

The methods of educational evaluation used between China and the United States are frequently incompatible with each other, which leads to confusion among Chinese international students. To show respect to their professors, Chinese international students keep silent or express cultural verbal passivity in classroom discussions and interactions. However, their silence and passivity is considered ineffective in terms of participation, engagement, and interaction by U.S. professors, although the students are working hard to master the course content. Chinese students who express themselves in a deferent manner with a self-depreciating attitude are often viewed as lacking in scholarly ability, with low initiative, and requiring too much direction instead of working independently (Wei et al., 2007). When they ask for specific directions from their professors or supervisors, Chinese students have been perceived as being unable to see what to do by themselves, even to the point of being uncooperative with their student peers. What are the cultural, educational, and interpersonal miscommunications that
must be addressed to transition from one cultural or educational system in China to a markedly different cultural or educational system in the United States?

These transitional challenges originate in the differences in education between China and the United States. U.S. higher education assigns the educator with the responsibility to educate a student as a whole person, helping the student’s well-rounded development in intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects; at the same time students should be responsible and active in their own broad development, gaining knowledge in each discipline, vocational skill, citizenship, and personality (American Council on Education, 1949). Education is a process to increase students’ analytical reasoning, critical thinking, and all-around development. The student’s role is to actively participate in learning activities in order to reach his or her own goals (Noddings, 2007). Dewey’s (1938) “progressive education” (p. 7) advocates and praises interaction as a vital method of instruction by which students can be engaged into a deeper level of learning. Dewey changed traditional education that forced students to accept external instructional influences without addressing student cognitive level, capacity of learning, interest, and need. The traditional form of education was referred to as the banking concept of education by Paulo Freire (1970), who insisted on democratic social relations in education between educator and student. Student–teacher interaction is regarded as an effective way to understand and respect students as well as help them reach better learning outcomes in the process of instruction. Compared with Chinese teacher-centered education, U.S. education presents student-centered teaching–learning activities.

The ultimate objective of U.S. education is to educate and cultivate student thinking. The instructional mode follows from the guidelines of educational philosophy and learning objectives. Educational requirements and forms of evaluation are also developed in accordance
with philosophy, objectives, and pedagogy. Student participation, classroom discussion, and interaction, teamwork, group projects, and presentations are essential steps to facilitate the progress of instruction and meaningfully measure student performance. Dewey’s (1938) idea is that the philosophy of education is the philosophy of life. Educational requirements should reflect diverse cultures in life.

In the United States, the social coping skills of humbleness and modesty can be viewed as a lack of confidence or competence, which makes otherwise diligent Chinese students feel social isolation and alienation (C. P. Chen, 1999; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). In U.S. society, “individualistic cultures” (Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 5) are focused on independence and self-realization. These cultural differences in interpersonal interaction style make Chinese students seem superficial in their interactions with classmates outside the classroom because the sociocultural unfamiliarity keeps them at a distance (Zhou et al., 2005). Without adequate knowledge of U.S. cultural values and norms, Chinese students find it difficult to converse with U.S. students and acquire U.S. friends (Feng, 1991; Sun & Chen, 1997). The low levels of self-disclosure typical among Chinese international students make them be regarded as unwilling to share their thoughts with others in multi-dimensions, such as “intent, amount, depth, valence, and honesty” (G. M. Chen, 1993, p. 604).

As products of Chinese education, Chinese international students have to understand the perspectives in U.S. higher education that are different from those of China. To develop a high level of “intercultural competence” (J. M. Bennett, 2008, p. 16), they have to adapt to host culture norms and adjust themselves in related aspects of the host culture. Chinese international students need to realize the impact of cultural differences that in turn helps them gain
intercultural competence. To have a successful transition, Chinese international students need to be provided with an effective intercultural intervention.

Following Janet Bennett’s theory, intercultural competence can be accumulated cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively through study abroad, and the first priority is to have “cultural self-awareness” (J. M. Bennett, 2008, p. 18). Milton Bennett created the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) describing six stages of personal development of increasing intercultural sensitivity to cultural difference (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). The first three stages reflect “ethnocentrism” (M. J. Bennett, 1986, p. 179), in which people are used to judging individuals with their own cultural values and norms. The second three stages are in the process of “ethnorelativism” (M. J. Bennett, 1986, p. 179), in which people are able to recognize and adapt to a variety of cultural values and norms and effectively interact with people to respect their own cultures.

The DMIS has been used in the practice of language learning, study abroad, and assessing international environments (J. M. Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003; Jackson, 2009; Straffon, 2003). When educators realize students need cultural learning and employ the theory in the practice of instruction, students increase their intercultural sensitivity. They behave with the capability of transcending ethnocentrism, appreciating diverse cultures, and generating appropriate affection and behavior in communication and effective interaction (Straffon, 2003). As a result, educators facilitate students’ development of intercultural competence.

When students develop their intercultural competence, they review and respect their own culture, reflective activities that match Baxter Magolda’s (2001, 2008) self-authorship student development theory. Achieving self-authorship is critical for student development in cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. The process of achieving self-authorship is from
external influences to internal self-definition. Therefore, at the initial period, educators play important roles to help students reach self-authorship. The theory assists international students in their ethnic identity development and epistemological development at the same time, in which each process positively affects the other.

Therefore, in a U.S. college or university, professors’ and peers’ interests, appreciations, and support are vital facilitators to international student development, especially for Chinese international students. Chinese international students need to activate their own motives in developing intercultural sensitivity; achieving self-authorship; realizing educational differences in requirements, pedagogy, and practice; developing initiatives and autonomy; increasing self-disclosure; and increasing social-efficacy. They also need to seek host-nation college professional staff support, such as counseling, peer, and social support. Chinese international students can increase their intercultural competence when they increase intercultural sensitivity, build respect for different values and norms, tolerate cultural ambiguity, and are active rather than passive in interpersonal interactions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Institutions of higher education in the United States have accepted large numbers of international students. From 1978, the number of Mainland Chinese international students has increased significantly (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011). More and more Chinese students have pursued their degree programs at universities and colleges in the United States. In 2011, the Chinese international student population registered the largest increase of incoming international students for the second year in a row (Institute of International Education, 2011). Additionally, more Chinese international students were pursuing undergraduate education. The number of Chinese students who were pursuing bachelor’s programs increased 43 percent in 2011 (Institute
of International Education, 2011). Most of them did not have any experience studying in a Chinese college or university. They were not familiar with either Chinese or U.S. campus cultures. Lacking a counselor’s guidance, most Chinese international students who come to the United States for the first time have to encounter a lot of challenges in U.S. higher education institutions (Hathaway, 2011).

Due to cultural differences, Chinese international students have experienced more challenges than international students from English-speaking countries, especially during the first year in transition (C. P. Chen, 1999; Cuyjet et al., 2011; Olivas & Li, 2004; Yan & Berliner, 2009). Coming from an Eastern developing country, Chinese international students have accepted that education in China is different from that of the United States. The differences in education between China and the United States have made Chinese international students who have otherwise performed excellently fail to adapt to U.S. education. For example, language insufficiency is a common reason for Chinese international students to avoid actively participating in classroom discussion and interaction. They have to think over how to express their thoughts in correct ways. On the other hand, they wonder when and how to fit into the discussion and how to express and interact similarly to local students in a natural, confident, precise, and concise way. Although they do their best, as these students listen to their professor and peers, they cannot understand them completely. They want to offer their opinions and ideas, but they cannot express themselves in English as well as local students.

Cultural differences between China and the United States can be observed in relationships between teachers and students. In Chinese language, the word teacher can also be called shi zhang, which means master and elder generation. Therefore, teachers are individuals who should be respected and treated with deference. Influenced by Confucianism, Chinese
international students have the habit to respect lineal-hierarchical human relationships with advisors and professors (H. Yang et al., 2006). In Chinese traditional culture, teachers are regarded as the authorized guiders who have experience and are full of knowledge in each field. Students expect to acquire knowledge, skills, and experience from teachers. Therefore, when they communicate with professors, Chinese international students are accustomed to listening to and expecting to learn from their advisors and professors. Asking professors for solutions means that Chinese students respect and accept the professors’ ideas and follow their direction.

Obviously, their behavior is different from mainstream U.S. philosophy and pedagogy, which views education as a process of democracy (Freire, 1970). Chinese international students have been evaluated by U.S. professors as lacking personal initiative and autonomy (Zhou et al., 2005). What professors say in response to students has a vital influence on Chinese international student development. In China, a teacher’s criticism can be fatal because peers, even parents, can change their perceptions of the student within a short period of time. Chinese international students can feel they have lost face and thus become frustrated with their educational experiences.

In Chinese culture, face saving is vital in the process of interpersonal interaction to establish and maintain relationships because Chinese culture advocates collectiveness, cooperation, and self-control. Individuals pay greater attention to consider the range of possible responses from their counterparts. They hope to develop and maintain long-term friendships with peers. They prefer to share information with friends. However, they can get bad results when they handle something only with interpersonal coping skills they acquired in China. L. Chen (1994) provided four examples describing Chinese students’ transition in U.S. culture: housing, communicating with local people, interacting with peers, and shopping. In the housing
case, Mr. An searched for a room for a long time due to his limited information about how to find a room in the United States, which was different from that in China. He misunderstood Alice’s kindness of offering a room as friendship instead of the U.S. norm of “basic humanism” (L. Chen, 1994, p. 131). Mr. Cong treated his peers in the same way as his classmates in China. To keep his friendship with a classmate, he even did not refuse to accept marijuana and shared this information with other classmates. Ms. Bian experienced “no free lunch” at the airport and when she was shopping (L. Chen, 1994, p. 127). Ms. Dai was shocked that her landlord apologized for her moving Ms. Dai’s belongings when it was raining. The culture differences made these Chinese students experience culture shock and behave in somewhat embarrassed ways (L. Chen, 1994). Only when these students learned U.S. values and norms could they be successful in their coping procedures.

Traditional Chinese culture has accustomed Chinese international students to be wary of self-disclosure to others. However, low self-disclosure can impede Chinese international student acculturation and reduce their comfort in communications with others (G. M. Chen, 1993). Asking for information without an equal amount of self-disclosure impedes students from getting valuable information and assistance in the host culture. They feel that they do not behave as openly as U.S. people. They find it difficult to establish friendships with U.S. students. Relationships with local students seem superficial, based only on academic activities where local students are willing to provide assistance, and do not extend to informal friendship relations.

There is a multitude of research (C. P. Chen, 1999; Huang, 2006; Olivas & Li, 2004; Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, & Baron, 1991; Wang & Mallingckrodt, 2006; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005) analyzing the challenges encountered by Chinese students, and the research provides adjustment options in the context of sociocultural perspectives for Chinese students or any other nationality
of international students. Furthermore, relevant research can be easily accessed about educational philosophy and pedagogy in U.S. higher education institutions.

However there is no previous research investigating the development of an orientation toward U.S. higher education to prepare Chinese students for understanding the norms and core values of the U.S. higher education system so that they can adjust themselves to the philosophy of student development in the host culture as a developing whole person.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present study was to gather information that would inform international student advisors about ways to create a new international student orientation program that would facilitate a successful cultural transition from Chinese culture to U.S. culture. Such an orientation program should include segments to help Chinese students recognize the norms and core values of higher education in the United States including academic study, campus life, and social networking on campus. This orientation should help Chinese students learn how higher education influences student development in personality, attitudes, and beliefs. This also helps Chinese students learn the cultural differences in their relationships between professors and students in teaching–learning activities by emphasizing the importance of student interests and needs, the merits of self-direction, and real-life experiences for learning and development. By preparing Chinese students for the higher educational differences between the two cultures before they leave for the United States, many possibly embarrassing or compromising cross-cultural situations may be avoided.
Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the following research questions related to the norms, values, and characteristics of U.S. higher education from the perspectives of academic affairs and student affairs:

1. How do Chinese international students describe the challenges they have experienced to fit into U.S. campus culture?

2. What do Chinese international students believe is the essential assistance that they need from U.S. faculty and/or staff members for their successful transition?

3. How do U.S. faculty and student affairs professionals describe adjustment issues they perceive are encountered by Chinese students?

4. What recommendations do U.S. faculty and student affairs professionals have for assisting Chinese students?

Significance of the Study

The present study describes the potential challenges that Chinese international students encounter in making the transition from Chinese culture to U.S. culture in their first-year experience. The potential challenges come from cultural differences between two nations. My research describes the potential challenges rooted in cultural differences and, therefore, may help new international students be conscious that they need to prepare for the cultural transition early. If they are aware of the importance of cultural transitions and learn to do so, they can actively face the issues and work to overcome the challenges instead of being in panic, even feeling depressed. Alternatively, Chinese international students can be sensitized to explore and discover cultural differences. The transition process can be made much more successfully with their increasing involvement in U.S. university life.
Living in the host culture does not mean that Chinese students can seamlessly merge into U.S. culture. A transitional learning process that focuses on cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions introduces them not only to academic study, but cultural learning to recognize U.S. cultural values and norms (J. M. Bennett, 2008). Cultural learning helps students to recognize their identities, review Chinese culture, and increase intercultural competence. Increasing Chinese student populations in U.S. higher education institutions in turn helps to diversify and add greater vibrancy to U.S. campus culture. Communicating and interacting with Chinese international students, U.S. students have more opportunities to learn Chinese culture. In practice, U.S. students increase their multicultural sensitivity. Learning a different culture encourages U.S. students to study abroad and promote cultural exchanges with other nations. Their multicultural competence promotes them to become global citizens.

The U.S. philosophy of higher education focusing on student-centered learning was central to the present research. Philosophy influences educational procedures and pedagogy. These educational procedures and pedagogy must be made to meet the needs of the changing student population. To help Chinese international students achieve a better academic transition, faculty members need to understand cultural differences manifested from different student populations (Crose, 2012). Understanding cultural differences is important to provide Chinese students with essential and critical instruction to overcome the many academic, social, and cultural challenges associated with international study.

Among many cultural differences, almost all Chinese international students fail to appreciate the importance of learning outside the classroom. The present research introduces the value of student affairs and services to Chinese international students and promotes the goals of student development as a whole person (American Council on Education, 1949). The
relationship of student engagement and student accomplishments in the community was addressed. The ultimate goal of the U.S. study abroad experience is to help Chinese international students understand, respect, and appreciate different cultures and increase their intercultural competence.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The presence of more and more international students in the population and culture of U.S. higher education has changed it into a more and more culturally diverse academy (Otten, 2003). In turn, communities positively influence international students by enhancing multicultural competence and broadening their horizons. In the academic year of 2010–11, international enrollments in U.S. higher education institutions grew by nearly five percent (McMurtrie, 2011). U.S. higher education has absorbed and cultivated a great amount of scholars and professionals in each field (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Rice et al., 2009).

Study abroad experience in the United States not only provides international students with intercultural experience but also cultivates greater sensitivity to promote intercultural competence and global citizenship. Previous research has indicated that international students with various educational and professional backgrounds and personal pursuits encountered challenges in academic study and personal development in the host environment (C. P. Chen, 1999; G. M. Chen, 1993; J. C. Chen & Danish, 2010; L. Chen, 1994; Feng, 1991; Lin & Betz, 2009; Olivas & Li, 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Rice et al., 2009; Sun & Chen, 1997; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wei et al., 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011; B. Yang & Clum, 1994; H. Yang et al., 2006; Zhou et al., 2005). In particular, Chinese international students have been
challenged, especially during the first year of their study in the United States, because of the linguistic and cultural extremes between these two nations (L. Chen, 1994).

Even though cultural extremes and language barriers exist, more and more Chinese students continue to study in the United States. The number of Chinese international students has increased significantly from the late 1970s (Feng, 1991; Sun & Chen, 1997; Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011; H. Yang et al., 2006). The number of Chinese international students in the United States increased three percent in 2009–2010 (Lewin, 2010). In that year, Chinese students from mainland China made up 30 percent of the incoming international students in the United States (Lewin, 2010). In 2011, Mainland Chinese international students increased to a total of 157,558, making China for the second year the leading country that sent the highest number of international students to the United States (Institute of International Education, 2011). The data further show that the increasing number of Chinese international students came to the United States to pursue bachelor’s programs (Fischer, 2011; McMurtrie, 2011). However, these students lacked guidance counselors in China to assist them in selecting a university and a program (Hathaway, 2011). Without the help of guidance counselors, many students had to turn to private agencies. Many agencies have collected information about U.S. higher education institutions related to school ranking, programs of study, and admission requirements but lack comparisons among communities and campus cultures (Hathaway, 2011; Fischer, 2011).

In the United States, Chinese international students have encountered a wide range of adjustment factors resulting from extremes in community and campus culture, educational philosophy, educational system, and practice (C. P. Chen, 1999; Cuyjet et al., 2011; Olivas & Li, 2004; Yan & Berliner, 2009). The universality of these challenges to Chinese students has prompted much attention. Much past research has analyzed challenges and acculturation stress
of international students. For example, due to cultural difference, Chinese international students commonly experience acculturative stress (Wei et al., 2007) in the host environment. Additionally, much past research has provided effective advice for international students trying to fit in to the host environment. However, no previous research has provided a systematic orientation on academic and cultural transition assisting Chinese international students in overcoming the cultural challenges in the host environment.

The following literature review is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the perceived differences between Chinese and U.S. higher education, particularly the aspects of philosophy and objectives, pedagogy, academic practices, and personal development. The second section details the research on Chinese international student experiences in academic transition, acculturation, and cultural and social adjustment to the host environment. The third section details the work of previous researchers who have investigated these adjustment experiences and promoted student development, including the DMIS and the theory of self-authorship. These theoretical frameworks and theory provide effective strategies of intervention guiding the practice of student adjustment within diverse environments. The fourth section details effective interventions recognized by Chinese international students for their successful transition, followed by recommendation for adjustment.

**The Perceived Differences Between Chinese and U.S. Higher Education**

This section describes the uniqueness of U.S. higher education in the aspects of philosophy and objectives, pedagogy, and common practice as perceived by Chinese international students. The differences between Chinese and U.S. higher education practices have challenged Chinese international students to fit into the host culture, especially during the first year. Actually, the different educational pedagogy and practices emanate from U.S.
educational philosophy and objectives. Understanding the uniqueness of U.S. educational philosophy and objectives is critical for the successful transition of Chinese international students into U.S. higher education.

Philo(sic)osophy and Objectives

U.S. higher education has the central purpose of preserving, transmitting, and enriching culture in the process of teaching and research (American Council on Education [ACE], 1949). Educators have the responsibility to educate the student as a whole person, which means to help a student become well-rounded developmentally in intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects. A student is expected to be a responsible and active participant in the process of development by gaining knowledge in each discipline, vocational skill, and citizenship as well as in personality. College students are treated as individuals and educated with individual differences in backgrounds, abilities, interests, and goals for their “optimum development” (ACE, 1949, p. 19). They are expected to develop comprehensively in “knowledge, skills, and attitudes consistent with their abilities, aptitudes, and interests” (ACE, 1949, p. 19). A college or university is regarded as a community of learners to broaden student acquisition in many aspects:

Through his [sic] college experiences, he should acquire an appreciation of cultural values, the ability to adapt to changing social conditions, motivation to seek and to create desirable social changes, emotional control to direct his activities, moral and ethical values for himself and for his community, standards and habits of personal physical well-being, and the ability to choose a vocation which makes maximum use of his talents and enables him to make appropriate contributions to his society. (ACE, 1949, p. 20)

To promote the philosophical objectives of higher education, U.S. institutions of higher education expanded the role of student affairs to collaborate with academic affairs for the
purpose of improving student learning experiences and outcomes (Sandeen, 2004). Since 1890, student affairs staff members have been working with students to broaden student multicultural learning experiences. Student affairs professionals have been working on student engagement in academic study, student involvement in group projects, and improving student learning communities, such as language learning, service-learning, leadership development programs, and peer-related programs (Sandeen, 2004). In U.S. colleges and universities, academic affairs and student affairs work together for student growth. Student affairs professionals also supervise the integration of student organizations into educational programs that support the mission of the institution (ACE, 1949).

The role of student affairs administrators in supporting international education in the late 20th century included the same responsibilities, such as “educational discipline, the joining of curriculum and student life, and student services” (Ping, 1999, p. 13). However, two new responsibilities have been added. The first responsibility is to help international students integrate successfully into academic study and campus life. The second responsibility is to support the awareness and importance of multicultural education among U.S. students to appreciate the cultures represented by international students. Student affairs administrators within U.S. higher education institutions have established and expanded the programs and activities for student understanding, cross-cultural competence, and empathy with different cultures. The research on international education advocates cultivating “sensitivity to dissimilarities and ambiguities, a broad set of interests, and openness” (Ping, 1999, p. 16) and educating students to develop thoughts of liberty and life across diverse cultures.

Internationalization promotes educating a student in “wholeness” (Ping, 1999, p. 16). It helps to develop students’ empathy, understanding, and appreciation of cultural differences to enrich
personal identity, which will be expanded further in the theoretical framework to be addressed below.

The roots of student development theory on which student affairs depends in modern U.S. higher education can be attributed to the educational philosophy shaped by John Dewey (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Dewey is the most influential figure who shaped liberal and progressive democratic practices in education and set up the principles for educators in teaching practice. For Dewey, the philosophy of education is a philosophy of life (Noddings, 2007). Education is as natural and simple as growth. As the purpose of life is more life, growth tends toward further growth. Dewey asserted that educational activities must have goals or outcomes, meaning that teachers must have goals for their chosen activities and students must actively participate in the activities with their own goals. Educators must balance external control and positive growth (Dewey, 1938). Dewey’s philosophy emphasized the analysis of experience within the context of education (Noddings, 2007). He pointed out that the goal of education is to positively and constructively develop correct experiences into subsequent experiences (Dewey, 1938). For example, student language experience can influence students’ future experience of communication.

Comparatively, U.S. education stresses the role of student involvement in the learning process. Compared with U.S. education, Chinese education has been shaped by Confucianism for more than 2000 years with the purpose of preparing students for roles in the elite social classes, such as influential officials (L. Tao, Berci, & He, 2011). Mencius, a successor of Confucius’s thought, advocated a primitive idea of democracy and revolution (Chang & Card, 1992). Therefore, Chinese education is a combination of elite and mass education, in which higher education is regarded as elite education.
Learning from the West by introducing Western science and technology was a novel and natural approach to expand Chinese education (L. Tao et al., 2011). Adopting modern patterns of schooling led to the philosophy of “Chinese learning for the foundation; Western learning for practical use” (L. Tao et al., 2011, para. 8). Many excellent Chinese students were sent by the Chinese government to study in the United States and Europe, who then brought Western thoughts of science and democracy back to China.

Chinese educational practices mirrored Western styles of education between 1911 and 1949. During that period of time, the new Republic set up the aim of education to the “reproduction of a scholar class to the desire to bring about needed social change while preserving the cultural/social unity” (L. Tao et al., 2011, para. 9). The first Minister of Education, Cai Yuanpei, proposed a system focusing on retaining Chinese identity and sustaining the technological needs of the country. This educational system was practiced in some areas in China. With this system, Chinese education introduced the U.S. structural model and Dewey’s pragmatic education theory. Intellectual discussion and practice of the combination of traditional Chinese culture, modern science, and Western democracy were prevalent until the Japanese invasion in 1937. During the eight years’ anti-Japanese war from 1937 to 1945 and civil war from 1945 to 1949, the Chinese educational system did not change.

From 1949 to 1976, Confucian texts were abandoned and Western educational philosophy was replaced by Soviet educational and philosophical patterns emphasizing engineering programs, labor production, and the Cultural Revolution (L. Tao et al., 2011). In 1978, Deng Xiaoping designed a series of reforms, in which the Chinese educational system was transformed as a priority. Since then, the quality of education has been stressed and the curricula and pedagogy in higher education has been introduced from abroad, especially in the scientific
areas, which has helped Chinese students learn from advanced nations again, even though more changes are still expected (L. Tao et al., 2011).

Due to historical and cultural reasons, the underlying philosophy and objectives of higher education in China are different from those of the United States. Because philosophy and objectives are guidelines for the pedagogy in education, different philosophy and objectives must foster a different pedagogy.

**Pedagogy**

Dewey (1938) viewed the pedagogy of education as an extension of natural experiences in life. He pointed out that the responsibility of a good educator was similar to that of a good mother. When a mother educates a child, she absorbs theories about child development from experts. However, she does not apply each theory to her child but combines her understandings and experience in practice. The most important point for a good mother is that she recognizes her child’s needs, interests and character. Dewey advocated “progressive education” (p. 7), which emphasizes the cohesion between a student’s actual experience and the learning process. He put forward a plan to conduct educational practice by making sure the content and methods of education fit the needs of students by enhancing their own self-interests. In progressive education, the student’s role in learning is highlighted; the role of an educator is to cultivate students by arousing curiosity, promoting initiative, and facilitating desires and purposes with individualized attention to each learner. Meanwhile, an educator, the leader in the learning activities, realizes and respects student needs and capacity via individual and classroom interaction (Dewey, 1938). Interaction in progressive education is an essential and important method by which instructors know students’ needs, interests, puzzles, and questions. Interaction drives the teaching–learning process into a deeper level, in which student engagement is a
necessity (Noddings, 2007). Interaction helps students realize the purpose of their study and engage in designated educational activities.

Dewey’s pedagogy supported by his philosophy of education is recognized as the prevailing guideline for teaching practice. Kolb (1981, 1984, 1985) is an influential researcher who developed Dewey’s philosophy of education into academic practice. Kolb pointed out that student learning had four stages: “concrete experience,” “reflective observation,” “abstract conceptualization,” and “active experimentation” (Kolb, 1984, p. 40). At four stages of learning, students accumulate knowledge through the transformation of experience. They are expected to participate actively in feeling, observing, and reflecting on their diverse experiences (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). They internalize concepts and theories by integrating their own feelings, observations, and personal reflections. These concepts and theories assist them in making decisions and solving problems (Evans et al., 2010). Kolb (1981, 1984) proposed that student development through these four stages increases the learner’s level of complexity and relativism in viewing society. Students acquire these capabilities in the process of studying an academic program. The capability includes both the truth and the process of getting to the truth. The truth means what it is, why it is, and when, where, and how it is applied into practice (Kolb, 1981, 1984). Personal styles, attitudes, and social relationships are essential and critical elements for students to get the truth. Kolb (1981) emphasized the positive relationship between student learning styles and academic performance, learning outcomes, and social adaptation.

However, “traditional education” (Dewey, 1938, p. 7) as described by Dewey is still prevailing in many countries. In traditional education, students must learn prior knowledge and experience, which is not sufficient to motivate them to solve future problems. Dewey (1938)
argued that traditional education was an external influence that neglected student interest in learning, capability of acquisition, and present experience. Freire (1970) did not agree with this kind of traditional education either. Freire centered a philosophy of education by his famous attack on what he called the banking concept of education, in which students were viewed as an empty account to be filled by teachers. He criticized the idea that students were treated as receiving objects, whose thinking and action were controlled and creative power was inhibited. Freire emphasized that “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously students and teachers” (p. 72). Freire mentioned the terms teacher-student and student-teacher. He believed that a teacher who learns and a learner who teaches are the basic roles of classroom participation. Freire insisted on the democratic social relations of education between educator and student by means of student involvement in teaching–learning activities.

Actually, Dewey’s educational philosophy was introduced and practiced in China between the 1920s and 1950s by his Chinese students. One of the successful cases was practiced by Tao Xingzhi, who learned from and followed Dewey at Columbia University (Su, 1996). Tao Xingzhi advocated “life education, a system characterized by reflective acting, merging with the masses of the people, taking the world as a whole, and paying attention to historical connections” (Su, 1996, p. 127). Mr. Tao established a democratic community with democratic pedagogy of the unity of teaching, learning, and reflective acting, although the school did not last long.

Tao was keenly aware of the great differences in the social and educational conditions between China and the United States; therefore his application of Dewey’s educational theories was an analytical, critical, and innovative process. His most notable achievements were his understanding, transformation, and practice of Dewey’s ideas of
education as a means for social reform, school as society, education as life, and progressive, child-centered, experienced-based pedagogy. (Su, 1996, p. 131)

When Dewey visited 11 cities in China between 1919 and 1921, he lectured on philosophy of education and the main trends of modern education in the Western nations and felt surprised by Tao’s practice (Su, 1996). Due to wars and government transition, Tao’s educational pedagogy was not rediscovered and developed until 1980; the mainstream of education in China is different from progressive education. Chinese higher education has its historical and cultural backgrounds, which makes its own characteristics in educating students.

As opposed to Chinese traditional education, U.S. pedagogy has its characters in educating students, which views student engagement as one of the standard criteria of student achievement. Student engagement has been expanded from academic study inside the classroom to learning processes outside the classroom under the supervision of student affairs professionals and student leaders. In practice, the student-centered model of education has been advocated and promoted in a learning community (S. F. Smith & Rodgers, 2005).

**Experiencing Adjustment to U.S. Higher Education**

As members from an Eastern developing country, Chinese students experience specific transitional challenges in linguistics and language, campus culture, and social consciousness (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011). The challenges are manifested in language and expression, culture, performance evaluation in academic study, interaction with instructors and peers, acculturation, and social adjustment (Yan & Berliner, 2009, 2011). Chinese students have limited resources to learn campus culture in the United States. Chinese high schools do not provide guidance counselors (Hathaway, 2011) to help students in pursuing their higher
education even in China. Therefore, these students must adjust themselves at the same time they encounter the relevant challenges on a U.S. campus (Wei et al., 2007).

**Perceived Challenges**

Chinese international students perceive the challenges to range from academic study to personal life when they enter the host culture. These challenges come from major cultural differences. Professors and Chinese international students provide different perspectives on the same themes including class participation and interaction. When they realize the differences, Chinese international students recognize the necessary steps to adjust themselves into the host culture.

**Academic practice.** The student-centered teaching style prevalent in the United States employs U.S. practical pedagogy. The different pedagogy results in different educational practice. Chinese international students are challenged by a wide range of elements, such as U.S. teaching styles and methodologies, classroom engagement and interactions, and power dynamics in the classroom (Zhou et al., 2005). Chinese students who experience these unique requirements in a U.S. university feel lost, especially at the beginning. The challenges impeding their adjustment in the classroom can be discussed in three categories: participation, discussion, and interaction.

**U.S. professors’ perspectives and comments on Chinese international students.** U.S. professors have commented on Chinese international student classroom performance, mainly including participation, interaction, group projects, and presentation. They have described Chinese international students as passive recipients and quiet learners in class who were unwilling to interact actively in class (Zhou et al., 2005). Professors have pointed out Chinese international students encounter challenges in classroom discussion (C. P. Chen, 1999; Cuyjet et
In a U.S. classroom, for instance, these students could not exchange their ideas as local students were doing (Zhou et al., 2005). These students were viewed as unprepared for the dialogic nature of classroom communication and had challenges in listening, comprehension, and interpretation (Zhou et al., 2005). Compared with local students’ natural communication and discussion, Chinese students had to think carefully before they spoke up and sometimes the discussion could not be continued (Zhou et al., 2005). They were described as unwilling to be active in classroom discussion (Zhou et al., 2005).

From the professors’ points of view, Chinese international students have challenges of self-expression (Wei et al., 2007). U.S. professors consider Chinese international students’ “silence or culturally verbal passivity” (Yan & Berliner, 2009, p. 453) as ineffective interaction. U.S. professors have commented that Chinese international students lacked initiative and autonomy based on their passive verbal expression and vague and indirect modes of communication (Yan & Berliner, 2009). They were even viewed as inactive and lacking initiative because they frequently kept silent in group work.

U.S. education emphasizes individual initiative and autonomy, such as self-directedness, self-management and self-discipline in students’ academic and career pursuits (Yan & Berliner, 2009; Wei et al., 2007). For active involvement, U.S. professors encourage students to raise questions (Wei et al., 2007). They believe that raising questions drives thinking. From the questions, the instruction could be moved on to analyze phenomena, evaluate perspectives, and create new ideas based on students’ understanding. Although Chinese students work hard, keep silent, and avoid disagreement with professors, their professors evaluate them as inefficient communicators or uncooperative co-workers (Yan & Berliner, 2009).
Because U.S. educators do not value authoritarian discipline, the relationship between student and professor focuses on independence and autonomy (Wei et al., 2007). U.S. advisors and professors encourage students to take their own initiatives (H. Yang et al., 2006). Instructors have various roles to assist in student engagement and development (Evans et al., 2010). An instructor could have different roles working as a “coach–helper” in the process of gaining concrete experience, a “guide–taskmaker” in reflective observation, a “communicator of information” to abstract conceptualization, and a “role model for how to do something” in active experimentation (Evans et al., 2010, p. 143). An instructor carries out different roles to meet student needs for development at different areas and times.

**Chinese international students’ perspectives.** Due to cultural and pedagogical differences, most Chinese international students do not have prior experience with active class involvement, interaction, group projects, and individual presentations before they study in a U.S. university (Olivas & Li, 2004). When Chinese international students have strong desires to participate in classroom activities and learn to enjoy student-centered teaching, they perceive several challenges in classroom participation, discussion, and interaction based on cultural and pedagogical factors (Zhou et al., 2005).

Language barriers challenge Chinese international students in each classroom activity. During classroom interactions, Chinese students encounter the challenges of second language expression, although they work hard to exchange ideas (Zhou et al., 2005). Lacking English language proficiency also results in the anxiety in the form of a “communication barrier” (Zhou et al., 2005, p. 288) in a presentation.

Influenced by Confucian values, Chinese international students regard quietness and the avoidance of questions as necessary elements to maintain harmonious circumstances in the
classroom (Zhou et al., 2005). They also engage in self-monitoring to maintain harmonious relationships with others and avoid criticizing or disagreeing with their peers (Zhou et al., 2005). They believe that active listening is a more appropriate, respectful method of classroom participation than jumping into a verbal discussion (Zhou et al., 2005). Sometimes Chinese international students will not ask a question because they think that it is their own problem and they do not want to interrupt the flow of the class or lose face if their question is not relevant (Zhou et al., 2005).

Chinese international students have reflected that they do not have a good chance to speak in class even if their English was improved. Often, the lack of cultural background knowledge hinders them from understanding the content of discussion and making responses to it (Zhou et al., 2005). On the other hand, they may have nothing to say because they are struggling with the appropriate time to interject their ideas in the discussion (Zhou et al., 2005). They are not able to react as quickly as needed, and their peers quickly moved on to additional points in the discussion (Zhou et al., 2005). Some Chinese international students have explained that some group members dominate the discussion. The nature of the group dynamics kept them excluded. They also waited to speak without being assertive. They would say more if they were in a cooperative group (Zhou et al., 2005).

Chinese international students have different perspectives on interactive styles. Influenced by Confucian norms of modesty, they prefer brief responses in class to avoid dominating the discussion or being labeled as a “show-off” (Zhou et al., 2005, p. 289). Chinese international students who were accustomed to minimal speaking opportunities at school in China preferred to show their respect to the professor by listening quietly (Zhou et al., 2005). They believed that they took the class seriously, but local students seemed to behave too
casually. These students looked relaxed, cut in the discussions from time to time, and said whatever they wanted, whereas Chinese students thought carefully before they spoke up (Zhou et al., 2005). Chinese international students feel uncomfortable, even experiencing culture shock in a U.S. classroom when they observe the informal nature of communication between professor and students (Cuyjet et al., 2011; Sun & Chen, 1997; Lin & Betz, 2009; Feng, 1991; Oropeza et al., 1991). They have even felt that a professor was not respected when students ate and drank in a classroom or when students called a professor by his or her first name (C. P. Chen, 1999).

U.S. culture reflects that student personal behaviors do not always affect their personal initiative negatively as Chinese international students think. In academic study, the norms of U.S. higher education require students to be responsible for personal initiative. Students are accustomed to performing with self-directness, self-management, and self-discipline inside and outside the classroom. Chinese international students who are unfamiliar with U.S. educational requirements in academic performance and conduct delay in their development at the beginning stages of their international study experience.

**Personal development.** Chinese international students perceive cultural differences in daily life when they pursued their higher education in the United States. The cultural differences can clash with their values and norms as they were formed in China. At the beginning, they easily experienced culture shock, social isolation and alienation, and unintentional prejudice (C. P. Chen, 1999).

Chinese international students recognize the United States as having an “individualistic culture” (Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 6) emphasizing independence and self-realization. Chinese culture emphasizing “collectivistic culture” (Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 6) requires individuals to fit into the group. In China, students are used to establishing mutually helpful communication and
relationships at the beginning, which encourages them to help each other when they need to do so (Sun & Chen, 1997). Chinese culture demands that students take another’s potential response into consideration and work to keep harmony in communication. Therefore, students prefer listening to arguing directly even if they encountered different ideas (Sun & Chen, 1997). Influenced more or less by Confucianism, Chinese students perpetuate indirect communication and implicit expression to reach spiritual harmony (G. M. Chen, 1993). In some cases, direct expression could be viewed as foolish and losing face (G. M. Chen, 1993). However, Chinese international students have found that the interactions with their U.S. classmates outside the classroom were superficial and the socio-cultural unfamiliarity kept them at a distance (Zhou et al., 2005). Without adequate knowledge of U.S. cultural values and norms (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006), Chinese students do not find common topics of conversation with U.S. students or have U.S. friends due to this communication differential (Feng, 1991; Sun & Chen, 1997).

On the other hand, cultural styles of expression are different from each other. In the United States, language expression is the main medium for people to deliver their thoughts (G. M. Chen, 1993). In Chinese culture, indirect communication results in low self-disclosure, which limits effective communication in the host culture (G. M. Chen, 1993). Self-disclosure is regarded as the willingness of individuals to deliver their thoughts to others in multi-dimensions, such as “intent, amount, depth, valence, and honesty” (G. M. Chen, 1993, p. 604).

The differences in culture and expression challenge Chinese international students in social life. L. Chen (1994) described four cases in which Chinese international students experienced culture shock. These cases showed that culture shock could be generated by cultural differences in minute details (L. Chen, 1994). If Chinese international students tried to solve
their current interpersonal problems with their previous social experience formed in China, they would have some unanticipated results (Sun & Chen, 1997). Only when they understand the norms of the host culture could they gain the necessary cultural competence and adjusted themselves into the new environment. Construing and reconstruing those experiences intentionally after repeated episodes, they would acquire intercultural competence in the cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects gradually (J. M. Bennett, 2008; M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). These cases also show that Chinese international students need to learn the rules of civil society in Western culture, such as privacy and effective interaction (Sun & Chen, 1997).

**Overcoming Challenges**

When they come to the United States, Chinese international students usually encounter various levels of culture shock based on cultural differences. These challenges are inevitable, especially at the beginning, which can lead to some depression and frustration. Nevertheless, realizing possible challenges may be helpful for early preparation for adjustment.

**Academic transition.** Chinese international students experience a markedly different academic and educational environment in the United States, which challenges their transition into academic study (C. P. Chen, 1999). For a better transition, they need to adapt to a different language and environment, formal and informal rules of expression, performance expectations, and communication, almost all of which contrasts with their learned values and norms in China.

**Language and expression.** The limited language proficiency for Chinese international students proved to be the major obstacle in their academic pursuit (Huang, 2006; Lin & Betz, 2009; Olivas & Li, 2004; Sun & Chen, 1997; Yan & Berliner, 2009; Zhou et al., 2005). Language insufficiency can make Chinese students confused by classroom instruction in a U.S. university, which has been intended solely for native speakers (Wei et al., 2007). They have
challenges to memorize details for communication, exchanging ideas, and expressing perspectives with creative imagination (C. P. Chen, 1999). These challenges result from the interference of Chinese language, unfamiliarity of contextual knowledge or cultural background, limited language training, and lack of opportunity to practice English (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Insufficient language proficiency contributes to the challenges in other aspects of academic practice, such as academic writing, classroom discussion, presentation, and interaction with professors (Wei et al., 2007). Chinese students can feel unbalanced between their expectations for achieving academic objectives and performances (Wei et al., 2007). Chinese international students realize the necessity to improve American English and understand U.S. culture and educational philosophy and pedagogy when they practice American English.

**Performance expectations.** Different performance expectations manifest different values and norms as well as behavioral benchmarks. Realizing the different performance expectations in the United States facilitates Chinese international student adjustment of their behavior and habits in academic study inside and outside a classroom. Chinese international students can change their attitudes to meet different performance expectations, such as classroom participation, classroom discussion and interaction, and communication with advisor and professor (Zhou et al., 2005).

U.S. educational philosophy drives students to think and to reflect on their own ideas (Yan & Berliner, 2009). When they absorb Western norms of academic behavior, Chinese students perform better in classroom interaction (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). They come to understand that classroom instruction helps student development in expression and the professor facilitates individual student initiatives rather than dispensing established knowledge (Yan & Berliner, 2009). U.S. professors help students learn more and better based on students’ questions
and discussions. Raising questions has been an effective way for Chinese students to get deep instruction from instructors, to show their capability and commitment, to interact effectively in academic study, and to improve their relationships with professors (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Chinese students have acknowledged that professors support students’ engagement and direct students to learn more by discussion (Zhou et al., 2005). Chinese students enhance self-efficacy in academic performance by interactions (Olivas & Li, 2004).

In U.S. education, self-directedness is regarded as an essential element for college students in academic pursuits. To facilitate academic and personal transition, Chinese students should not be afraid of questioning styles but should find the advantages of new questioning styles (Olivas & Li, 2004). Successful students adjust themselves to match U.S. dominant values of “control-over-nature, accomplishment, and achieving goals” (H. Yang et al., 2006, p. 32).

**Acculturation and cultural and social adjustment.** In addition to academic pursuits, the transitional variables include personal development in physical and psychological aspects, involvement in social activities, communication and interaction with local people on- and off-campus, and financial issues (Feng, 1991). Chinese students who have the desire to prove their self-determination and independence practice effectively in self-pursuit. Their involvement in communities helps them understand different cultural values towards life, friendship, the relationships between students and professors, and male and female relationships (Sun & Chen, 1997).

The first priority toward positive adjustment is to increase multicultural awareness and sensitivity by employing thorough adjustment strategies (J. M. Bennett, 2008). These adjustment strategies include understanding themselves and others, building relationships with local people
by learning their culture and worldview, and learning when and how to seek assistance (Olivas & Li, 2004).

Employing these strategies enhances Chinese international students’ acculturation with self-disclosure, i.e. distress disclosure and emotional disclosure (J. C. Chen & Danish, 2010). Distress disclosure means to be open-minded and expressing their unpleasant feelings to others; emotional disclosure means the willingness of interacting with others and discussing specific emotions with others. Emotional disclosure plays a critical role in interpersonal relationships in the United States (J. C. Chen & Danish, 2010). Appropriate self-disclosure in the context of host settings promotes multicultural competence in communication (Sun & Chen, 1997). Self-disclosure encourages involvement in the dominant culture and facilitates adjustment (J. C. Chen & Danish, 2010).

Involvement brings about culture shock; nevertheless, experiencing some culture shock assists Chinese students in making successful socio-cultural transitions (Sun & Chen, 1997). Observing and engaging activities, students’ attitudes change from surprise and shock to realizing and understanding the host culture (L. Chen, 1994). Their values and worldviews are transformed by enhancing their language proficiency, increasing their working knowledge of the host culture, and adapting to the host customs and lifestyle (C. P. Chen, 1999).

Cultural differences in the United States influence Chinese international students in each aspect of their academic study and daily lives. Reviewing and analyzing what affects Chinese international students on these differences are helpful for their adaptation into the host culture. After they compare and appreciate major cultural differences, they not only become confident to make greater progress in study and personality but also acquire intercultural competence. When
Chinese students receive the host culture openly, they review and respect their own culture from a different perspective at the same time (Feng, 1991).

**Theoretical Framework**

This section provides an introduction to the theories of gaining intercultural competence in the theoretical framework of the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS; M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). J. M. Bennett (2008) advocated that intercultural competence could be acquired cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively in practice following the use of five principles. M. J. Bennett (1986, 1993) created the theory of the DMIS with selected strategies of development and effective interventions from the instructor. The sequence of intercultural sensitivity development facilitates effective student intercultural communication and interaction. Several researchers have analyzed the practice of the DMIS, which helps students increase intercultural sensitivity and recognize the qualities of diverse cultures (Cornwell & Stoddard, 1999; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2009; Greenholtz, 2000; Jackson, 2009; J. M. Bennett, 1993; J. M. Bennett, M. Bennett, & Allen, 2003; J. M. Bennett & M. Bennett, 2004; M. Bennett, 2004; Straffon, 2003). Baxter Magolda (2001, 2003, 2008) stressed the importance of student development with the goal of self-authorship to complement intercultural competence.

**Overview of the DMIS Model**

M. J. Bennett (1986, 1993) introduced the DMIS, a developmental approach to acquiring intercultural sensitivity, and illustrated each stage of development with recommended strategies for intervention and support in training and practice. The concept of intercultural sensitivity was defined as personal efficacy in dealing with cultural differences through six stages of personal growth from “ethnocentrism” to “ethnorelativism” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 22). People in the ethnocentrism stages tended to use their own cultural values and norms to examine other
people’s worldview and behavior, while people in the ethnorelativism stages have the ability to recognize, accept, adapt, and integrate a variety of cultural values, norms, and customs (M. J. Bennett, 1993). The DMIS consists of six stages of increasing intercultural sensitivity and accumulating intercultural competence in different cultures. The first three stages are associated with ethnocentrism, represented by denial, defense, and minimization; the second three stages are associated with ethnorelativism, represented by acceptance, adaptation, and integration (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). The model described a clear transition of students’ “subjective experience” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 22) when they encounter cultural differences, which helps students recognize the variety of worldviews and establish their own identity in cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions. Each stage of development represents an increasing level of related intercultural competencies.

Denial. The stage of denial of difference impedes a person to believe cultural diversity because of physical isolation and/or separation created by the “intentional erection of physical or social barriers” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 32). Generally, parochialism was a form of Denial.

Competence. Due to physical and/or social isolation, appreciating cultural differences may be precluded. People have their own worldviews at the central position without challenge. People at the stage of denial treat others as subhuman “with extreme prejudice” (M. J. Bennett, 1986, p. 183), such as early White settlers’ attitudes and behaviors toward American Indians and Nazi attempts at genocide to eliminate the presence of Jewish people as undesirable in their worldview.

Strategies. The denial stage could be challenged by activities aimed at introducing “cultural awareness” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 34). Activities introducing cultural awareness can create the opportunity to become less defensive of cultural differences. As the process of
reducing denial and promoting openness to perceiving differences occurs, students slowly recognize the relative nature of cultural differences, but debating about deeply ingrained cultural differences needs to be avoided at this stage (M. J. Bennett, 1986).

**Defense.** The stage of defense against difference could be the first reaction to threatening cultural differences in a specific and negative way, such as denigration, superiority, and reversal. Overt statements of hostility toward other cultures could be viewed as an indicator of a defense against difference.

**Competence.** At the stage of defense, people counter perceived threats against their own worldviews when they come to realize the existence of difference as threatening. Intercultural sensitivity is generated when differences are no longer perceived as threatening. The common defense strategies include denigration, superiority, and reversal. Denigration is a kind of “negative stereotyping” (M. J. Bennett, 1986, p. 183) toward race, religion, age, gender, and other indicators of difference. Defensive denigration is a core factor of ethnocentrism. If people focus on their own cultures instead of overt denigration toward other cultures, their sense of superiority enables them to tolerate and recognize cultural differences, even though the recognized cultural difference is not viewed as reasonable or viable. Alternatively, when people assume the superiority of the host cultures and denigrate their own cultures, they are in the most beguiling state of defense against cultural difference, a reverse perception of cultural difference.

**Strategies.** Developing cultural-esteem, respecting cultural differences as equal solutions to the same problem, is the primary strategy used to reduce defensive cultural responses. The assumption of cultural superiority implies denigration of cultural differences, i.e., the greater the sense of cultural superiority, the more the denigration of perceived cultural differences. At that point, students need to be educated to affirm their own cultures and honor the parallel but
different attributes of the host cultures. In doing so, educators need to be prudent not to emphasize one culture as superior to the other, at the risk of reversing cultural perceptions. At the stage of defense, increasing cultural self-esteem supports the concept that cultures are diverse but equal in value (M. J. Bennett, 1986).

**Minimization.** The stage of minimization preserves the central position of one’s own worldview of culture but emphasizes the common ground of shared humanity between cultures by ignoring their differences, such as reaching “physical universalism” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 42) and “transcendent universalism” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 43). Despite differences in culture, physical universalism means that similar behavior occurs that is “understandable to any other human being” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 42), and transcendent universalism implies that all people originate from the same overarching set of assumptions about human existence.

**Competence.** People in the stage of minimization recognize and trivialize cultural differences, minimizing difference by stressing those elements of cultural similarity. One form of minimization is physical universalism. People at this stage believe that awareness of basic human patterns of behavior is good enough to have effective communication (M. J. Bennett, 1993). The other form is transcendent universalism, in which all human beings, whether they know it or not, are products of some single transcendent principle, law, or imperative (M. J. Bennett, 1993). For example, this includes the idea that humans are all God’s children, which includes everyone even if he or she does not believe in the same god (M. J. Bennett, 1993). Both forms of minimization recognize and tolerate cultural difference to some degree. However, the stage of minimization itself does not reach the level of full intercultural understanding.

**Strategies.** At the stage of minimization, the idea of cultural relativism could be introduced by interaction with a representative from a target culture, the outcome of which has a
meaningful positive transition to the host culture (M. J. Bennett, 1986). Simulations, reports of personal experiences, and other illustrations of minimizing substantial cultural differences in the interpretation of behavior are effective at this stage. Representatives of other cultures at higher levels of intercultural competence could be employed as resource individuals to facilitate discussion groups and provide credibility in expressing cultural differences in positive terms.

**Acceptance.** At the stage of acceptance, cultural differences are acknowledged, respected, and accepted by means of behavior and values. Cultural differences are respected by means of verbal and nonverbal behavior. Meanwhile, cultural self-awareness is promoted because people view their worldviews equally with those of other diverse cultures.

**Competence.** People in the stage of acceptance acknowledge and respect cultural difference. Cultural difference is viewed as fundamental, necessary, and preferable in human affairs. The acceptance of cultural difference presents two levels. One is the acceptance of behavioral differences, such as language, communication style, and nonverbal patterns. The other is the acceptance of the underlying differences in cultural values and norms.

**Strategies.** Moving to the stage of acceptance, students are encouraged to recognize and respect verbal behavior and communication styles to perceive cultural differences in daily life (M. J. Bennett, 1986). Intercultural communication is encouraged by adding personal “anecdotal treatment of behavioral difference and the theoretical treatment of values” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 51). Communication applications are combined effectively with discussion of values to facilitate development, such as including a discussion of intercultural communication with relevant value differences in home and host families (M. J. Bennett, 1986).

**Adaptation.** Adaptation involves the assimilation of cultural differences into daily behavior. Increasing intercultural sensitivity fosters the capability of processing reality in
intercultural communication and interaction. Students interpret events (reality) in term of their home cultures and their host cultures without cognitive dissonance or confusion (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993).

**Competence.** Two phases are experienced in the process of adaptation: empathy and pluralism. Empathy is to understand others’ statuses by comprehending their perspectives in the context of their cultural positions, in which the differences are considered and one’s own worldview is ready to be adjusted if necessary (M. J. Bennett, 1993). Cultural pluralism provides the ability to shift into two or more cultural worldviews, such as “biculturality” and “multiculturality” (M. J. Bennett, 1986, p. 185). Cultural pluralism is the habituation of a particular empathic shift with “significant overseas (or other-culture) living experience (SOLE)” (M. J. Bennett, 1986, p. 185). This stage of multicultural development might last for several years with expanding knowledge in other cultures, acquiring foreign languages, experiencing communication styles and nonverbal patterns, and promoting sensitivity to situations with alternative cultural values. Pluralism means to understand not only cultural differences within the specific cultural context but also expressed categories of “biculturalism and multiculturalism” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 55). The developmental period of pluralism is about two years, depending on the intensity of the SOLE exposure, actual face-to-face interaction, and real-life communication.

**Strategies.** At the stage of adaptation, new skills are employed for effective interaction in an “additive process” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 52) by maintaining one’s own worldview. In the process of adaptation, students develop their skills not to “threaten the integrity or existence of one’s own cultural identity,” but to increase one’s “repertoire of cultural alternatives” (M. J. Bennett, 1993, p. 52). Students develop by applying their knowledge and skills of cultural
differences to face-to-face, real-life communication and interaction. These outcomes are reached by dyads with partners in other cultures, multicultural group discussion, and interviewing people living in other cultures (M. J. Bennett, 1986).

**Integration.** The sixth and highest stage of the DMIS, ethnocentrism, is the integration of differences into one’s own identity (M. J. Bennett, 1993). People at this stage construe differences as cultural development processes, in which they adapt to the differences and construe themselves in various cultural perspectives rather than a single ethnocentric perspective.

**Competence.** The final stage of integration is separated into two forms: contextual evaluation and constructive marginality. Contextual evaluation provides people with the ability to evaluate events in different perspectives with personal self-awareness (M. J. Bennett, 1993). Moving up to the form of constructive marginality, people have the most powerful capability of performing self-reflectiveness and intercultural sensitivity. They become cultural mediators in international negotiations beyond any reference group by constructing appropriate multiple worldviews.

**Strategies.** The major developmental work at this stage of intercultural sensitivity is absorbing the idea of ethics to guide personal choices and actions. When students step into the stage of integration, instructors might introduce ethical schemes such as those developed by Perry (M. J. Bennett, 1993). Another outcome of this stage is to develop skills in cultural mediation in the context of diverse cultural settings (M. J. Bennett, 1986).

M. J. Bennett’s (1986, 1993) six stages of increasing sensitivity to cultural difference showed that intercultural competence could be intentionally learned. People from various nations have different perspectives in cultural worldviews, with potential conflict in communication and interaction. When they accumulate sufficient knowledge and skill in
handling relevant events, students enhance their intercultural sensitivity and facilitate the effectiveness of their intercultural communication (M. J. Bennett, 1993). Throughout the process of becoming interculturally sensitive, students develop their own sense of identity and ethnicity.

**Research on DMIS**

The DMIS created a framework to analyze the experiences of individuals in intercultural situations. Several researchers have employed the DMIS to inquire about the development process by eliminating potential challenges within diverse cultures. Meanwhile, several instruments assess intercultural sensitivity or competence, of which the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer, 2008) is one tool that has dominated research on intercultural competence.

**Intercultural Development Inventory.** The IDI is an effective and statistically reliable measure of intercultural competence adapted from the DMIS. The measure is valuable to assess training needs, design interventions for targeted student development, and evaluate intercultural training programs (Paige, 2003). The IDI has been used in diverse educational contexts, such as study abroad, intercultural communication workshops, and curriculum design (Lombardi, 2010). The IDI assesses how individuals construe social interactions with people from different cultures. It helps individuals recognize and respond to cultural diversity (Hammer, 2008).

The IDI is a cross-culturally valid assessment of individuals and groups’ orientations toward cultural difference (Hammer, 2008). The IDI is a robust measure of the core orientations of the intercultural development continuum which was across cultures. There are three distinct versions of the IDI. The third version provides a 50-item, theory-based instrument for respondents scoring a 5-point response set ranging from agree to disagree. Individuals’ predominant level of intercultural competence is associated with transitional issues. Therefore, a
process of selecting, designing, and implementing effective intervention was specified. Generally, the IDI provides a “conversational platform” (Hammer, 2008, p. 256) to create conversation on cultural diversity and an orientation to assist individual development toward becoming more capable of adapting and integrating into diverse cultural perspectives and cultural contexts.

The DMIS hypothesized that individuals’ intercultural competence developed when they construed sophisticated cultural events and reconstrued these cultural differences (Greenholtz, 2000). Skills of cognition, identity, and ethnicity gradually developed with the prerequisite of self-awareness. Greenholtz (2000) suggested that the IDI could be employed to objectively measure intercultural sensitivity. The results of the measurements could be used as the foundation to provide training programs, to take pre/post measures, and to assess the effectiveness of training.

Straffon (2003) examined and measured the level of intercultural sensitivity of high school students in an international school by using the IDI. The education and training played a vital role when students were immersed in diverse cultures. The international school provided a unique environment in cultural and linguistic settings for students to experience cross-cultural contact and interaction. The environment of the international school provided these students with the advantages of language acquisition, multicultural contact, and intercultural understanding. These students in the international school were labeled “third cultural kids” (Straffon, 2003, p. 489) who grew up outside their home or host country culture but shared a lifestyle in the community as a third culture between two cultures. The research supported that students who attended international schools had a high level of intercultural sensitivity. The
longer the students spent in international schools, the higher the levels of ethnorelativism and the lower the levels of ethnocentrism they presented.

**Research findings on DMIS.** The DMIS analyzed what, how, and why resistance and challenges existed at each stage of multicultural sensitivity when individuals lived in other cultures (J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Based on the DMIS, assessing the individual’s readiness level increases the effectiveness of diversity initiatives and increasing intercultural sensitivity enhances the ability to recognize cultural differences. Promoting intercultural communication plays a vital role to facilitate respect for and appreciation of diversity and the development of intercultural competence. J. M. Bennett and Bennett (2004) defined intercultural competence as the “ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. 149). To have effective intercultural interaction, subjective culture must be explored because it is the “worldview of a society’s people” (J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 150). Understanding subjective culture, people increase empathy in respect to other cultures as they gain intercultural competence. Recognizing the value of other cultures and creating meaningful interpretative categories for interpersonal communication among other cultures helps people to review their own cultures as well as their own personal identity development.

M. J. Bennett (2004) analyzed the sequence of development of intercultural sensitivity from the ethnocentric orientations of avoiding cultural difference to the ethnorelative worldviews of seeking cultural difference, in which cross-cultural competence was constructed in three dimensions: cognitive constructivism, communicative constructivism, and experiential constructivism. The DMIS assumes that “cognitive complexity” (M. J. Bennett, 2004, p. 73) makes students more sensitive to cultural difference:
So a sophisticated sojourner can observe subtle differences in nonverbal behavior or communication style, while a naïve traveler may only notice differences in the money, the food, or the toilets. As categories for cultural difference become more complex and sophisticated, perception becomes more *interculturally sensitive*. (M. J. Bennett, 2004, p. 73)

In the perspective of communicative constructivism (M. J. Bennett, 2004), intercultural sensitivity is effectively associated with intercultural competence. The complexity of perception describes the process by which intercultural sensitivity develops intercultural competence.

People who are more cognitively complex are also more able to be “person-centered” and “perspective-taking” in their communication (although they may not always exercise the ability). These qualities are associated with more successful interpersonal communication. More successful *intercultural* communication similarly involves being able to see a culturally different person as equally complex to one’s self (person-centered) and being able to take a culturally different perspective. Thus, greater intercultural sensitivity creates the potential for increased intercultural competence. (M. J. Bennett, 2004, p. 73)

The perspective of experiential constructivism (M. J. Bennett, 2004) suggests the experience is created by corporal, linguistic, and emotional interaction with the natural and human environment, which provides the channel for intercultural adaptation. People who have the ability of intercultural adaptation create an alternative cultural experience. This alternative experience more or less matches that of people in another culture (M. J. Bennett, 2004). When they integrate themselves into another culture, people possess an “intercultural worldview” (M. J. Bennett, 2004, p. 74). Therefore, changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes are the
manifestations of changes in the underlying worldview, which is the purpose of developing interventions.

J. M. Bennett (1993) employed Perry’s scheme of intellectual and ethical development to explain the issue of marginality. Individuals who experience shifting frames of reference across cultures move beyond dualism and reach the stage of multiplicity, in which the encapsulated marginal is pulled in at least two directions for each thought, feeling, and behavior without clear authorities. Perry’s scheme described that students recognize the inevitability of ambiguity and their own responsibility to think autonomously with the assessment of the context. When they assess the cultural context, students also take the responsibility of their own identities and move to the stages of “commitment in relativism” (J. M. Bennett, 1993, p. 117). Students respect alternative opinions in the context of others’ standing and perspectives. Persons experiencing the cultural margin at this stage of the DMIS become cognitive constructivists who are able to both construct personal identity and deal with cultural ambiguity.

J. M. Bennett et al. (2003) provided systematic pedagogy for instructors to set up cultural learning in language teaching by introducing intercultural competence, i.e., the ability to “transcend ethnocentrism, appreciate other cultures, and generate appropriate behavior in one or more different cultures” (p. 237). In 1996, the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project published Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century, which integrates the study of culture into the language curriculum:

American students need to develop the awareness of other people’s world views, of their unique way of life, and of the patterns of behavior which order their world, as well as to learn about their contributions to the world at large and the solutions they offer to the
common problems of humankind. Such awareness will help combat the ethnocentrism that often dominates the thinking of our young people. (p. 39)

The research defined culture as the mixture of elements of “Big C (objective culture) and little c (subjective culture)” (J. M. Bennett et al., 2003, p. 238), in which objective culture is product and subjective culture is perspective. In the perspectives of interculturalists, subjective culture presents the individual worldview in a society, such as “cultural values, beliefs, assumption, or style” (J. M. Bennett et al., 2003, p. 243). The elements of subjective culture are defined as language use, nonverbal behavior, communication style, cognitive style, and cultural values. To reach intercultural competence in language teaching, instructors need to assign the context and interaction between “culture-specific and culture-general” (J. M. Bennett et al., 2003, p. 244). Cultural-specific approaches have the goal to gain the worldview and behavior specific to a particular culture, which is a parallel to specific-language learning. Developing intercultural competence requires combining culture-specific approaches with culture-general approaches.

Cultural-general approaches focus on internalizing cognitive frameworks for cultural analysis, overcoming ethnocentrism, developing appreciation and respect for one’s own culture and for cultural difference, understanding and acquiring skills in basic cultural adaptation processes, and dealing with the identity issues that attend to intercultural contact and mobility. (J. M. Bennett et al., 2003, p. 245)

Based on Kelly’s personal construct theory, J. M. Bennett and Salonen (2007) believe if students are exposed to diverse cultures on current U.S. campuses, they have the opportunity of construing events and reconstruing them in transformative ways. Intercultural competence could be gained in the construing and reconstruing process accordingly. Resources were provided to
develop intercultural competence, which aimed at developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes, such as nonverbal communication, interactive style, conflict mediation, value and norms, potential prejudice in different cultures, cultural adaptation, and the development of ethnicity and identity. Therefore, campuses with complicated cultures echo diversified student populations with rich styles in cognition, skills, and affection.

Cornwell and Stoddard (1999) advocated a high-quality education connecting academic disciplines and intercultural experiences and perspectives. They identified important educational goals for U.S. students in the 21st century in four dimensions: (a) understanding diverse cultures and understanding cultures as diverse, (b) developing intercultural skills, (c) understanding global processes, and (d) preparing for both local and global citizenship. Education engages students in critical reflection, in which they increase their self-awareness to discern their views and social positions in relations, transactions, and encounters. Globalization requires that students not only be successful professionals in their industries but also be the individuals having the multicultural competence to successfully influence their world. Intercultural experiential learning with critical reflection and analysis is essential for student development of intercultural sensitivity and skills. In practice, students need to understand diverse cultures and interact with diverse people so that they reflect their perspectives in intercultural relations. College campuses could be used as an intercultural laboratory, a study abroad venue, or a service learning site with conscious strategies for connection with the local and the global cultures. Identifying one’s own national and cultural identities is the most important part for students preparing for cross-cultural experiences. Integrated collaborations between academic affairs and student affairs could “employ their diversity in the service of developing intercultural skills, not just for students; but for all members of campus communities” (Cornwell & Stoddard, 1999, p. 27).
Deardorff’s (2006, 2009) intercultural competence model provides a student developmental process for moving from individual attitudes toward interactive outcomes, indicating that the degree of intercultural competence results from attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills. The intercultural competence model was shown in the shape of a pyramid. The ground is the prerequisite, composed by respect of cultural diversity, openness to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment, tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty, and showing curiosity and discovery. The second level separates into two sections presented by knowledge and comprehension, and interpersonal communication skills. Knowledge and comprehension include cultural self-awareness, culture-specific information, sociolinguistic awareness, and deep understanding and knowledge of culture, such as contexts, role and impact of culture and others’ worldview. Skills include listening, observation, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and relational efficacy. The third level is the desired internal outcome, such as adaptability to different communication styles and behaviors, adjustment to new cultural environments, flexibility in selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviors, and cognitive flexibility, ethnorelative view, and empathy. The top level is the desired external outcome from effective and appropriate behavior and communication based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes to achieve one’s goals.

Jackson (2009) had students in Hong Kong who were learning English as a second language enhance their intercultural communicative competence through intercultural experiences in a short-term sojourn in England after a 14-week training program. Some specific program elements worked effectively to promote deeper levels of critical reflection and increasing intercultural competence. For example, students working in a team appeared to
accept cultural differences naturally. A well-designed, short-term program actively fostered student development of cross-cultural sensitivity by means of pre-sojourn preparation, five-week sojourn in England, and post-sojourn reflective experiences. Before the sojourn, data were collected to understand student background characteristics, English language proficiency and host culture understanding, intercultural reflections, and previous intercultural experience. In a 14-week semester, students were trained by means of seminars and activities emphasizing student involvement and interaction. In England, students recorded their observations and reactions in their diaries and provided deeper levels of critical reflection and analysis. Their interaction with local individuals and experience in the community were helpful for developing their intercultural competence in cognition, behavior, and affection. After the sojourn, these students completed a minimum 30-page paper by using their ethnographic data or exploring a topic in English literature. With intercultural experiences, these students were encouraged to further linguistic study, cultural exploration, and personal development.

**Intercultural competence and study abroad.** J. M. Bennett (2008) supported the idea of study abroad as a practical means of gaining intercultural competence. The students who studied abroad acquired an “intercultural mindset, skillset, and heartset” (J. M. Bennett, 2008, p. 13), in which a set of cognitive, behavioral, and affective skills were developed to support effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural communication. Developing an intercultural mindset requires cognitive competencies, such as “culture-general knowledge, culture-specific knowledge, identity development patterns, cultural adaptation processes, and the first priority: cultural awareness” (J. M. Bennett, 2008, p. 18). The skill set requires behavioral competencies including the capability to “empathize, gather appropriate information, listen, perceive accurately, adapt, initiate and maintain relationships, resolve conflict, and manage social
interactions and anxiety” (J. M. Bennett, 2008, p. 19). The heartset requires affective competencies including attitudes and motivations, such as “first and foremost, curiosity, as well as initiative, risk taking, suspension of judgment, cognitive flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, cultural humility, and resourcefulness” (J. M. Bennett, 2008, p. 20). No behavior existed separately from thoughts and emotions, and attitudes such as curiosity and tolerance of ambiguity were facilitators in experiencing and searching for the values found in diversity (J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2004). The entire intercultural skillset represented the ability to “analyze interaction, predict misunderstanding, and fashion adaptive behavior” (J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 149), which was appropriate to one’s own culture and accommodating to different behaviors expressed within other cultures. Acquiring intercultural competence is the outcome of integrating knowledge, attitude, and behavior across societies and cultures (J. M. Bennett, 2008; J. M. Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

To develop intercultural competence, J. M. Bennett (2008) proposed five principles: (a) cultural competence could be learned in absorbing shared values, beliefs, and behaviors in social interactions; (b) cultural learning should be an important part of language learning; (c) effective cultural learning must embrace overcoming culture shock; (d) cultural competence results from interpreting and re-interpreting the meaning of events in transformative ways; and (e) effective mentoring by supportive persons facilitates the process of gaining intercultural competence. The five principles emphasize reinforcing the process of developing intercultural competence. The overall study abroad experiences uniquely provided students with transformative developments in personality toward the objective of becoming global citizens (J. M. Bennett, 2008). Understanding the underlying culture played a core role in promoting language acquisition skills at different stages of developing an intercultural sensitivity. Due to limited language proficiency
at earlier stages in the study abroad experience, the initial cultural competencies could be reached with classroom instruction; as the learners reach the language proficiency necessary for later stages of intercultural competence, more sophisticated cultural interventions should be introduced (J. M. Bennett, 2008).

**Theory of Self-Authorship**

Baxter Magolda (2001) focused on student development based on achieving self-authorship. Baxter Magolda (2008) defined self-authorship as the “internal capacity to define one’s belief, identity, and social relations” (p. 269). Self-authorship reflects cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Her theory emphasizes several developmental targets, such as value exploration, clarification of possessed information and experience, confirming one’s own pursuit, and making commitments to reach goals (Baxter Magolda, 2001). To meet typical expectations of college life, college students need to develop an internal compass and ability to achieve complex learning, such as critical thinking, respect diverse views, and develop their own informed views (Baxter Magolda, 2003). College life is expected to help students in analyzing multiple options in work and realizing and practicing their own interests.

Contemporary U.S. campuses require students to appreciate diverse cultures and gain intercultural competence (Baxter Magolda, 2003). In detail, students are expected to understand their own cultural heritage, accept other cultures, develop from ethnocentric to ethnorelative perspectives, and work with diverse people. Appreciation of diversity could not be reached without attention to the internal sense of self-development. Therefore, self-authorship connects with intercultural competence, which presents a “mutual, reciprocal dynamic of relations with others” (Baxter Magolda, 2003, p. 234).
J. M. Bennett (1993) introduced the psychologist Hamachek’s perspective to illustrate how to reach marginality. Self has two meanings. The “self-as-object” (Hamachek, 1971, p. 8) conveys a person’s attitude, feelings, and perceptions of oneself as an object. “Self-as-process” (Hamachek, 1971, p. 8) describes a person’s active participation in the process of thinking, remembering, and perceiving. In order to facilitate the movement toward a more constructivist perspective of self-as-process, at the final stage of ethnorelativism, an educator needs to identify and recognize individual attitudes and characteristics to support constructive marginal. This viewpoint connects with the theory of self-authorship. Achieving self-authorship highlights four stages from external influence to internal self-definition (Baxter Magolda, 2003). The essential for students to become authors of their own lives is to bring their internal sense of self to the foreground and move external influences to the background, which requires self-authorship to make meaning of one’s beliefs, knowledge, identity, and relationships to others (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Combining Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship with M. J. Bennett’s DMIS results in an opportunity to facilitate multicultural competence with a series of planned educational interventions. This conception also reflects Dewey’s philosophy of how to build a “progressive education” (Dewey, 1938, p. 2).

**Effective Interventions for Transition**

DMIS and self-authorship theory were very useful to help Chinese student transitions into second cultures such as that of the United States. When Chinese students enter a U.S. university or college, professors and peers’ interest, appreciation, and support were regarded as a primary facilitator to encourage Chinese students toward achieving their own self-authorship (Zhou et al., 2005). Their self-authorship assisted them in knowledge sharing. Some professors were working on creating positive circumstances for interpersonal interactions to reach diversity in
which Chinese international students felt more comfortable in the host culture and host higher education system. Appreciating diversity created an open and equal atmosphere, in which students with different cultural backgrounds enjoyed exchanging their diverse ideas, opinions, comments, and perspectives in a friendly manner. These Chinese students were positively influenced by classroom contexts, which guided them in their perceptions about classroom interaction and enhanced their level of familiarity with the host culture.

Educators played a critical role to help international students in exploring and experiencing cross-cultural student life. To help Chinese international students adjust to the host culture effectively, U.S. educators needed to acquire a full appreciation of Chinese culture. Chinese students’ interpretations about classroom participation and interaction were influenced by their cultural and educational backgrounds (Zhou et al., 2005). The Chinese model of “authoritarian instruction” (Yan & Berliner, 2009, p. 452) prevented these students from participating actively in classroom discussion and interaction. Actually, Chinese students worked hard to follow directions and were ready to improve themselves in accordance with the viewpoint of instructors. Chinese students confirmed that the effective elements facilitating their motives included the nature of a classroom, such as the size of class, the composition of peer students, the content of teaching, the professors’ instructive methodologies, and the instructors’ personality and style (Zhou et al., 2005). Chinese international students learned to develop their initiatives independently (H. Yang et al., 2006). Supportive professors relieved students’ sense of anxiety and isolation, and increased their sense of self-confidence and safety in the host environment (Zhou et al., 2005). Inevitably, the U.S. universities and colleges with open and individualistic oriented atmospheres influenced Chinese students’ belief and values, which
helped them to reach their academic requirements and targets, such as self-orientation and their ability in practice (Sun & Chen, 1997).

The relationship between international students and their advisors was one of the most important factors for their adjustment and success in academic study and personal development in the United States (Rice et al., 2009). In advising relationships, Rice et al. (2009) suggested that the model for ideal international advisors was one familiar with international students’ culture. They understood international students’ challenges and took care of them with cross-cultural empathy. Advisors who understood international students established positive personal relationships with them and provided effective advisement. These advisors helped international students in providing psychological support and emotional encouragement. U.S. advisors and professors encouraged Chinese international students to think independently and let these students believe that their own point of view was valuable, rather than depending only on their professors for the solution to academic issues.

Social self-efficacy reflected people’s confidence to initiate and maintain social interactions when they encountered challenges to their global self-esteem and the ambiguity associated with acculturation (Lin & Betz, 2009). For Chinese students, the quality of their English proficiency, length of residence in the United States, and global self-esteem enhanced their social self-efficacy and resulted in decreased acculturation stress. Lin and Betz (2009) suggested educators play a critical role to help students in exploring and experiencing cross-cultural studies and social lives (?) by reviewing their strengths. Accordingly, some effective interventions were introduced, such as recognizing performance accomplishments, modeling successful cases, introducing anxiety management techniques, and demonstrating encouragement and support for their attempts to interact with native speakers.
Student development was presented in the aspects of academic study, identity, and ethnicity simultaneously (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008). Chinese students needed “socio-cultural adaptation” (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006, p. 423), which helped them behave with culturally appropriate social skills and intercultural competence. Self-disclosure was regarded as the willingness of individuals to deliver their thoughts to others in multi-dimensions, such as “intent, amount, depth, valence, and honesty” (G. M. Chen, 1993, p. 604). Self-disclosure was helpful for Chinese international student cultural transitions into the host culture. In social interactions, Chinese students realized U.S. cultural features, such as direct expression of feelings, emphatic expression of opinions, and willingness to share personal information (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Self-disclosure with conscious, positive, and honest attitudes was more effective in handling many of the social challenges confronted in the host culture (G. M. Chen, 1993). Self-disclosure was effective in establishing personal relationships, while a high degree of self-disclosure facilitated intimate friendships (G. M. Chen, 1993; J. C. Chen & Danish, 2010).

Chinese students experienced acculturative stress, which affected them in physiological, psychological, and social aspects (Poyrazli et al., 2004). To adapt to the dominant culture, Chinese international students usually experienced cognitive, behavioral, and affective developmental stressors because China and the United States have “maximum cultural distance” (Yan & Berliner, 2011, p. 525). Influenced by different cultures, traditions, and family backgrounds, Chinese international students experienced unique factors of personal stress and social coping processes. Individually, motivations, acculturation strategies, coping strategies, and social support played critical roles in adjustment and adaptation. Acculturation was influenced by their various ages, gender, majors, expectations, knowledge, and skills. H. Yang et al. (2006) suggested counselors do “initial assessment” (p. 34) reviewing culturally different
worldviews in order to understand Chinese students’ actual values and their specific cultural identity. Counselors played critical roles in helping these Chinese students establish the “third culture worldview system” (H. Yang et al., 2006, p. 34). Establishing a third cultural worldview system meant to help students develop a symbolic and unique worldview when they lived in multiple cultures.

Host-national support was the single best predicator in adjustment. The host-national interactions and communications assisted Chinese international students directly in receiving knowledge and skills in the host culture (Yan & Berliner, 2011). To reduce acculturative stress, Chinese students were encouraged to seek social support from their peers in the host environment, emotional support from family members, and tangible academic support from the host institutions, such as scholarships and curriculum flexibility (Poyrazli et al., 2004). Individual interests, a willingness to accept the new culture, enthusiasm in learning English, and interactions with local residents were all potential stimulators for better adjustment and transition.

Generally speaking, Chinese international students had limited knowledge and experience with professional counseling in U.S. higher education, which was one example of host-national support, the best predictor of successful adjustment (Yan & Berliner, 2011; Olivas & Li, 2004; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). The recommended counseling methods reinforced students’ psychological strength (C. P. Chen, 1999) by enabling them to gain cultural awareness, openness, respect for different values, tolerance for ambiguity, a willingness to learn, and a genuine concern for people with different values and from different cultural backgrounds.
Recommendations for Adjustment

With different languages and cultures, Chinese students experiencing differences between East and West encountered challenges in their lives and studies in the United States. They universally experienced culture shock and acculturative stress which influenced their academic study and personal development, especially during the first year. These personal and educational challenges could be detected early in the students' overseas study experiences. Studying the causes and effects provide insights and inspiration for educators, trainers, and students to prepare for cultural and social adjustment as early as possible.

Previous research provided the information about the potential challenges affecting international students. However, no research has covered the role of faculty and student affairs professionals to assist Chinese student adjustment in U.S. higher education. This study aims at exploring the educator’s role in assisting Chinese students in an early cultural transition to study in a U.S. institution of higher education.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to explore the ways in which the orientation and transition of Chinese international students were perceived and conceptualized by members of the academic community in order to enable Chinese students to comprehend the philosophy and culture within U.S. higher education. Through constructivist inquiry, using interviews as the main data collection method, valuable elements for Chinese international student orientation and transition could be found by understanding their experiences. The main areas of exploration include: How did the research participants describe the challenges that they had experienced in their transition from their different perspectives? What were the differences they had perceived between Chinese and U.S. higher education that had challenged their transition academically, socially, and personally? How had their former backgrounds in Chinese education influenced adjustment into U.S. higher education institutions? What were positive and effective interventions provided by faculty and staff members? How could Chinese international students seek appropriate assistance on U.S. campuses?

This study was designed to explore the following research questions related to the norms, values, and characteristics of U.S. higher education from the academic affairs and student affairs perspectives as the elements of an orientation.

1. How do Chinese international students describe the challenges they have experienced to fit into U.S. campus culture?
2. What do Chinese international students believe is the essential assistance that they need from U.S. faculty and/or staff members for their successful transition?

3. How do U.S. faculty and student affairs professionals describe adjustment issues as they are perceived by Chinese students?

4. What recommendations do U.S. faculty and student affairs professionals have for assisting Chinese students?

**Qualitative Inquiry**

Qualitative research provides an “understanding the meaning people have constructed” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13) based on their personal observations and experiences. In this study, faculty and student affairs professionals provided information related to the content, norms, and values in higher education, while Chinese international students narrate their experiences and benefits of overseas study in a U.S. university. This reflects the perspective that qualitative research has the potential to uncover “both traditional perspectives and the newer advocacy, participatory, and self-reflective perspectives” (Creswell, 2003, p. 181).

This research employed basic qualitative inquiry with the goal to construct reality by understanding the meaning of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). People live in the world that they have constructed; that is, “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). This research was done with a basic qualitative study to analyze “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). The goal of this study was based on the notion that qualitative research could “improve the quality of practice” (p. 2).

The topic of Chinese international student transition represents a gap in the knowledge base as it needed to be constructed and understood by the individuals participating in the study.
Qualitative research provided detailed information, such as how the Chinese students interpreted their learning, teaching, counseling, or service experiences, how they perceived the differences in the host campus culture, how the Chinese international students experienced adjustment in a U.S. university, how faculty and staff members helped these students in transition, and how the assistance or intervention effectively influenced their adjustment in each area. The personal experiences of the Chinese international students, faculty, staff, and administrators provided detailed information about the Chinese international student experiences of adjustment in a U.S. university and the elements of successful transition and intervention from the community.

**Constructivist Inquiry**

Constructivism means that qualitative researchers construct knowledge from multiple realities or interpretations to analyze a single event (Merriam, 2009). Constructivism suggests “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). People at different positions describe various experiences and perceptions on one theme. Their diverse perspectives reflecting on the same theme are valuable for attention and comprehension (Patton, 2002). I employed the constructivist paradigm in this study for the same reason that Patton (2002) describes researchers having the aim to “interpret and construct reality” (p. 96). The constructivist paradigm enables comparing participants’ perceptions and valuing multiple voices.

In this study, current U.S. educational trends and practices were reviewed including philosophy and objectives, principles, and pedagogy, from which the root of the differences stemmed. The challenges for the Chinese international students' transitions also resulted from the differences covered from recognizing “objective culture” to accepting “subjective culture” (J. M. Bennett et al., 2003, p. 238). During the interviews, the Chinese international students, faculty, and professional staff members expressed their experiences and perspectives of Chinese
international student adjustments in the United States. The interviews constructed a whole picture of the gap of adjustment and elements for Chinese students being aware of and preparing for transition as early as possible.

**Research Design**

This qualitative research was designed to reveal information about Chinese international students’ experiences in a U.S. higher education institution. The research design covered participant selection, location of the study, recruitment of participants, pilot interview, snowball sampling, target members from each category, instruments and research materials, interview protocol, procedures, and my role in the research.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were chosen by using purposeful selection from this university who met at least one of the following criteria: were Chinese international students who were studying a degree program for a minimum of one year and had experienced challenges in transition; were faculty members who had experience teaching Chinese international students and helping their adjustment as advisors; or were student affairs professionals who provided assistance to Chinese international students for overcoming social and life challenges. Three groups of participants interpreted their experience from different perspectives. They provided multiple factors of cultural awareness that would be helpful for making meaning of Chinese international students’ transition.

The selection criteria were determined for specific reasons. Chinese international students in their first year in a university were still struggling with adjustment issues and challenges. Once they stepped out of the process in the second year, they became more comfortable to review their experience and reflect on their puzzles and confusion, such as what
effective and useful interventions could be from a faculty member or administrator, and how to seek assistance effectively. Therefore, the Chinese international students in their first year were excluded to avoid their frustration and panic. For the groups of faculty and professional staff members, I did not set a specific time limit because the length of their instruction and service was arbitrary. Faculty and staff members who did not have experience assisting Chinese international student adjustment were definitely excluded.

**Location of Study**

Recently a number of medium sized public institutions have been hosting more and more Chinese international students in diverse degree programs and in various ages. Performing the research at the present medium-sized public institution should provide valuable information since this and similar institutions provide comprehensive degree programs to international students. The intention of this study was to explore the elements for successful Chinese international student orientation and transition into a medium-sized public institution. These results could not be generalized to other types of institutions. I chose a medium-sized public institution located in the Midwest, whose enrollment reached approximately 12,000 students. This regional doctoral-granting institution accepts students to study diverse programs from bachelor’s to doctoral degrees. According to Institutional Research, I found one medium-sized public university had a total headcount of 11,528 students, including 9,449 undergraduate and 2,079 graduate students. The university had 576 international students, equal to 5.0% of the total student body. A total of 55 Chinese international students were studying in the university from Mainland China in the academic year 2011.
Pilot Interview

To test the interview protocol for my dissertation research, I conducted a pilot interview. I asked one Chinese student to check the time, feasibility of the questions, and the effectiveness of the conversation. This interview was conducted using the same criteria for the participants and following the same procedures. Finally, the pilot interview provided evidence that the formal interview could be conducted in the same way. The information gathered from the pilot interview was not used in the analysis of this research. This pilot interview was not recorded or transcribed.

Instruments and Research Materials

The participants were interviewed in three categories covering the Chinese international students, faculty members, and student affairs professionals. These interviews were recorded for further analysis. I asked questions and presented scenarios for the purpose of gathering information about the transitional challenges of Chinese international students, and assistance and interventions which were provided by the faculty and professional staff members. The questions and scenarios were developed in accordance with the information accumulated in the literature review. Three themes were created in three areas. First, the Chinese international students experienced challenges of adjustment in academic study and personal development. Second, the Chinese international students experienced acculturation and adjustment. Third, the effective interventions could be implemented by the faculty and professional staff members. These themes were the foundation to develop the interview questionnaires.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the listed categories did not cover all the experiences that Chinese international students had encountered. Therefore, listening and collecting all sources of report by interview were critical before interpreting the reality. This
process was the basis for a credible study with a constructivist approach (Merriam, 2009). Interviews with these groups of participants, observations, and documentation of artifacts related to Chinese international student transition took place at the same time.

**Interview Protocol**

From the literature review, the topic of Chinese international student transition was developed into three topic areas. First, Chinese international students experienced challenges of adjustment in academic study and personal development. Second, Chinese international students experienced acculturation and adjustment. Third, effective intervention was facilitated by faculty and staff members. These themes were the foundation to develop the interview protocols. The questions in three topic areas that needed to be raised to three groups of participants and their perspectives were interpreted and analyzed to provide a complete story. I designed the interview protocol for three groups of participants as shown in Appendix E.

**Procedures**

I categorized my participants into three groups: Chinese international students, faculty members, and student affairs professionals. These three groups of participants voiced their own experiences to reveal the factors challenging Chinese international students’ adaptations and elements of what happens for their effective adjustment, what effective interventions were provided from faculty and staff members to help Chinese international students to transition, and how Chinese international students sought assistance when they needed it.

I employed snowball sampling to identify and recruit prospective participants from Chinese international students and faculty and professional staff members (Merriam, 2009). I asked all the Chinese international students I could reach by emails and interviews to recommend a faculty or staff member who helped them in their development. The snowball got bigger with
the information about who could be the potential participants. I identified Chinese international students as the first group for interview. I found their names and email addresses indicating who were admitted in 2011, 2010, and 2009 from International Programs and Services. Since these students had more than one year of study experiences, they were the potential candidates who could participate in the interviews. I sent each of them the first email pointing out the purpose and content of the research and interview (Appendix A). I also asked for their major and the year of admission as well as their interests of research. After I received the feedback from them, I had their information and their interest in participating. This helped me select the first four students to participate. I kept the rest of the candidates in the participant pool. In case the initial respondents had to stop the interview or the information was not enough, I would select to interview more participants until the information became saturated. The remaining candidates in the pool were not contacted since the first four participants provided enough information. The second email assigned them as the participants with the interview protocol attached (Appendices B & F). The rest of the Chinese international student candidates who responded to the invitation got another email with my appreciation and expression that I would contact them for a later interview if needed (Appendix C). To have an effective interview, I provided the options of the location of interview for a participant, such as a group room in the library, a conference room, or a place that the participant selected.

After completing the Chinese international student interviews, I recruited faculty and professional staff members. When I sent the first email to Chinese international students asking their willingness of interview, I asked them to nominate an advisor or professor as well as a professional staff member who helped them effectively in adapting to the host culture for interviewing. They did recommend some professors. I also referred to the faculty/staff directory.
I asked them for their interests and willingness to be interviewed by sending one of the emails to a faculty/staff member. I expressed the purpose of my research, asking interest and permission of interview, and confirming their willingness to participate (Appendices D & E). If individuals were interested in the study, they were then encouraged to contact me to set up a time to interview. Many faculty and staff members replied to my email expressing their interest and willingness to participate in the interview. Based on information provided from their feedback, four faculty members were selected for the participants of the interview based on their experiences teaching Chinese students and/or working in a Chinese institution of higher education. I kept the rest of the candidates in the participant pool. In case they had to stop the interview or the information was not enough, I would select to interview more participants until the information became saturated. Four professional staff members were selected in the same way. Their experiences of educating Chinese students and/or working in China were the basis of my selection. The remaining candidates in the pool were not contacted since the first four participants of faculty/professional staff members provided enough information.

I conducted interviews until the criterion of sufficiency of information was met, and the point of saturation of information was reached. The criteria of sufficiency and the point of saturation of information were reached when I began to hear the same information from two participants, I could not learn anything new (Seidman, 2006). Fundamentally, I placed the number of interviews at 12, which meant four for each group. Even if I had the same information from the first two participants, I continued interviewing up to four participants in each group. If all of four participants provided the same information, I stopped the interview because I had redundant responses from different participants. However, if all of four
participants could not answer all the questions, I sought additional participants for that group to guarantee that information sufficiency was reached.

Each participant had experiences in expressing their challenges and adjustment. During the interviews, the participants in three categories provided me with significant information of interpreting different performances and behaviors. Many of them recognized the reasons and factors behind challenges and acculturation stress and provided their suggestions and advice for improvement.

The scope of this study focused on the orientation of Chinese international student transition and effective intervention from the community to promote successful adjustment. During an interview, I asked a series of semi-structured questions from a protocol (Appendix F). Interviewing the Chinese students, I noticed and listened to the factors of the challenges and transitional process. Based on their experience, I understood these factors might be controversial. I collected them and raised them in the conversation with the faculty and/or professional staff members for further analysis and verification. Based on their information, I interpreted and constructed details by establishing the themes.

To get accurate meaning, I talked with the Chinese students in Chinese language. The interviews were recorded by a digital audio-recorder. All the interviews were recorded, dictated, and preserved in my computer.

I analyzed the data by employing cross comparative methods of analysis (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2009). I was the only person who accessed and transcribed the data. To protect their confidentiality, the contents of interviews were stored in a word file kept with a password in my laptop to prevent unauthorized persons from accessing the contents. No personal or institutional information related to any cases was disclosed. At the same time, I took field notes
by observing participants’ emotional expressions for reference. These field notes were recorded
my observation of the reactions of my participants, signal the important part of what was said,
and pace the interview (Merriam, 2009). I was the only person who had access to the field notes.
To protect confidentiality, the field notes were kept in an envelope and locked up in my cabinet.

My Role

My research is to explore the elements which are valuable for Chinese international
student orientation and transition into a U.S. college or university. Based on my own experience,
it is very important for Chinese international students to learn U.S. culture when they prepare for
study in the United States. Before I came to the United States, I had worked with a European
company and visited Britain. I contacted and communicated with co-workers in Europe
frequently. These experiences helped me become familiar with Western culture. After I reached
the university, my advisor understood the potential challenges I would encounter. He led me
step by step to become familiar with the environment and instructed me carefully in academic
study. Other professors understood me and provided support when I needed it. My professors
created friendly and mutually friendly circumstances where my peers and I established
relationships and supported each other in academic and social situations.

Peer help was vital in self-development because it helped me understand my situation
and develop confidence to deal with challenges. Outside the classroom, our student affairs
professionals assisted me in international student affairs, residence hall, library, computer
technology, career counseling, health, and financial assistance. The Chinese international
student council and professors from China organized meetings and parties, which made me feel
comfortable in the host environment.
After I began my doctoral program, I heard several times from newcomers that they needed to learn and handle challenges. Talking with them, I understood there was a cultural gap they had to overcome. I reflected that I almost forgot these challenging episodes because I was no longer challenged in the same way challenged, but enjoyed the process of acculturation. I realized that I received help and assistance from my advisor, professors, student affairs professionals, peers, and other Chinese international students. Their encouragement and support were important for my successful transition. I supposed that more Chinese international students would enjoy the transitional process if they were aware of the necessary experiences.

As a qualitative researcher, I collected information about Chinese international student transition through interviews by employing constructivist inquiry. The relationship between the researcher and the participants was interactive. The interaction gained an understanding of the transitional experiences, from which I developed my dissertation research.

My research employed constructivist inquiry to construct knowledge of gaining intercultural competence through adjustment. To avoid bias, I absorbed the information from three groups, which accumulated “rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). Therefore, information was collected from multiple perspectives including Chinese international students, advisors and/or professors, and student affairs professionals. The relevant documents were also collected and employed into the study to reduce the potential for bias.

Data Analysis

This research study was a qualitative study to explore the ways in which the elements for Chinese international student orientation and transition were perceived and conceptualized by the members of one academic community. I purposefully selected three groups of participants from whom to collect data in order to illustrate the topic including Chinese international students and
faculty and professional staff members. I started data collection and did rudimentary analysis simultaneously during and between data collection processes.

As the interview protocol for the purposes of the present study reflected, I narrowed the study by focusing on Chinese international student experiences in cultural transition and gaining intercultural competence. The questionnaires for three groups overlapped to verify their description. The questions were developed to induce the themes of the challenges they encountered, the effective intervention from a faculty and/or professional staff member, and to conclude with the critical elements for Chinese international student transition.

To construct knowledge, the details were reliable and valid from multiple realities or interpretation of a single event (Merriam, 2009). The data resulting from interviewing three groups of participants presented a full picture of the Chinese international students’ lives in the host campus culture. Talking with participants in various categories and analyzing their data, I brainstormed how they were challenged in the beginning of entering a university and what elements were critical to assist Chinese international students’ adjustment in the learning community.

To analyze data, I created an inventory to hold all the collected data and organize and label them with categories and subcategories (Merriam, 2009). I executed data analysis by making meaning and constituting the findings of my study which were developed into the themes to answer my research questions. I finished data analysis “in conjunction with data collection” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178) using the constant comparative method. After each interview, the transcription was reviewed and approved by that participant. The Chinese international students reviewed and approved the translated transcriptions. I read over the transcription and added
notes in the margins to be used as further data. These data answered the research questions that were posed at the beginning of this research study.

After the transcriptions were organized with noting ideas, the intensive analysis could be generated when “tentative findings were substantiated, revised, and reconfigured” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). To sort out the findings, I assigned “open coding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178) to construct categories because open codes interpret meaning. As the coding took place, categories were created. One category reflected one theme, in which several subcategories were generated (Merriam, 2009). The categories were grouped into themes within the research. This process was continued until the data were completely analyzed and could not be analyzed any further (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009).

The categories were created using several criteria. The categories were related to the purpose of the research study. Secondly, the categories encompassed all the applicable and significant data, while all pieces of data were only used in one constructed category. The categories had labels that were easily and clearly recognized (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009).

**Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

My research design was based on an assumption about what was to be inquired and investigated for the purpose of answering research questions (Merriam, 2009). My research was to find the elements helpful for Chinese international student orientation and transition. I designed this study to investigate Chinese international students’ experiences in cultural adaptation and personal adjustment. To have a trustworthy study, I carefully designed three categories of participants. They were Chinese international students who had at least one year of transitional experiences of living and learning in the United States, professors who had
experiences advising Chinese international students for their academic development, and student affairs professionals who had assisted Chinese international students in accepting cultural differences, adapting into the host environment, and adjusting themselves to have personal development.

These three groups of participants provided trustworthy information and perspectives from diverse angles to enrich the theme of the critical parts for Chinese international students’ transition on campus in the United States. This “holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing” (Merriam, 2009, p. 213) sampling enhanced the validity and reliability of the study. The collected data promoted the credibility of the findings.

To increase the credibility of my findings, I applied triangulation into my study (Merriam, 2009). In data collection, multiple methods were practiced. The main method was interview. To reveal the deeper meaning in the conversation, I made careful observations and asked for more information to get a complete picture of an event. To analyze a phenomenon, I read relevant documents. When I employed three groups of participants, multiple sources of data were collected from these participants in different backgrounds and with different perspectives. As I had Chinese international students as my participants, I interviewed them in Chinese and translated the transcripts into English. To verify my findings, I sent an English version of each interview to each of my participants for checking and supplementing the details.

**Limitation**

When an event which happened in the past is recounted, participants might not narrate it by truly reflecting the original experiences. It could occur because the time changed and/or they were in different situations. For example, the same event could be described as different stories in different times. A challenge from the past could be viewed differently because the participant
had a better transition and the advantage of time to reflect. Meanwhile, a situation could be viewed negatively because the participant still encountered similar challenges and it may be difficult to overcome these challenges. Therefore, the limitation manifested as the inaccurate reflection of an event that happened before.
CHAPTER 4  
ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

The purpose of the present research study was to explore the cross-cultural experiences of mainland Chinese students as they adjusted to U.S. higher education to understand the manner in which they developed, both academically and personally, after one year of study in a U.S. institution of higher education. Specifically, what was their personal journey from the time they entered a U.S. university to the end of their first academic year? The following chapter presents the results of a qualitative study of three groups of participants; four Chinese international students after their first year of U.S. higher education, four U.S. faculty members with experience instructing Chinese students, and four U.S. student affairs professional staff members. The findings identify the themes emerging from their interviews. The actions will be emphasized and taken to assist future Chinese students in making a better transition from the Chinese educational system into the U.S. higher educational system.

**Description of the Participants**

The university setting for this study was a medium-sized U.S. higher education institution with a student population of 11,528 in fall 2011 located in the Midwest in a small city with a population of 60,785. A total of 575 international students were enrolled, and comprised five percent of the total student enrollment. Among these were 55 students from mainland China, four of whom were selected for interviewing purposes.
The participants were composed by people in three categories: (a) Chinese international students admitted no later than 2011, (b) faculty members who had the experience of teaching Chinese students, and (c) student affairs professionals having the experience of assisting Chinese students in the transition. Each category had four participants. The selection of these participants was based on their experiences which served the themes.

**Students**

The first four Chinese students who replied to an email solicitation were selected for personal interviews, and after the purpose of the study was explained and informed consent was given, I interviewed each using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix F). They described their academic and personal experiences from the beginning of their programs—challenges, puzzles, confusion, conflicts, and surprises in the host culture. A description of each of the participants follows, with pseudonyms assigned to each participant to protect confidentiality.

Studying a bachelor’s program in geography, David came to the United States six months after he graduated from a Chinese high school. While he waited for his admissions application to be approved, he attended an English language class in China to study for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) proficiency examination. At the time of the interview, David had been studying at the host university for two years. He believed that mainland Chinese students could prepare for U.S. classroom teaching methods by watching free open classes via the Internet. He encouraged students not to be afraid of language barriers, but to be brave, to ask questions, and to communicate with professors and peers. He recommended students become involved in out-of-class activities, and encouraged them to learn good time management skills.
An undergraduate English major in China, Carol has studied the master’s program in Human Resource Development for one and one-half years. She believed that English language proficiency was critical to a successful transition. When students acquired language proficiency, they also became more familiar with the host culture. She stressed the importance of positive personal attitudes, motivation, and self-confidence. She encouraged being open-minded and being willing to communicate with professors and peers. She wanted students to understand that some things could not be fully understood without having personal, hands-on experience in the host country.

Amy came to the United States in December 2007. She finished a nine-month language program in October 2008. She graduated with an MBA in 2011, and is currently a doctoral student in education. She advocated that incoming Chinese students develop a wider range of interests, to learn more, and to communicate successfully with their U.S. peers. She suggested that students work to make friends with U.S. students. Students needed to overcome their fear of expressing themselves in English, since the more they practiced speaking English with native English speakers, the easier it was to become proficient in the language. They must also overcome their hesitation to speak in English with a professor or a student affairs staff member when they encountered academic or personal issues and did not know what to do on their own.

Brian finished his master’s program in computer science at the host institution in 2008, and is now pursuing a doctoral program in media technology. With his six and one-half years’ experience in U.S. higher education, he refused to accept many U.S. activities and interests at first, preferring instead to maintain his native Chinese lifestyle. His communication skills improved, however, as he held more responsible graduate assistantship roles. What makes a student successful in Chinese education is not the same as what makes a student successful in
U.S. higher education. Students need to work on being more open to new experiences and become involved in a wider range of student activities. Finally, students needed to take advantage of the assistance to be found in the many student service agencies present on U.S. campuses.

**Faculty**

All four faculty participants were male. Since depth of experience in teaching Chinese students was most important, gender was not treated as a variable in the present research. As they gained experience teaching Chinese students, they also gained familiarity with Chinese culture. Each of them emphasized the value of student learning experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. They made a great effort to educate all students in terms of the whole student, both academic and personal development. Ethan had 27 years of experience teaching Chinese students about management information systems, and at the time of the interview he showed me a traditional Chinese way of greeting. His interview reflected his great patience in teaching foreign students, often placing him in their shoes as a means of understanding. He found that high quality English skills were important for student success, particularly with class presentations and discussions that included critical thinking. He said that students must learn to talk with professors outside of the classroom, and work to interact with other people from the United States in order to enrich their understanding of their culture. Finally, he recognized that an important way to learn culture was to fail at something first, then learn from the failure and work to find a new way to deal with the issue.

Working on some exchange programs in economics with two Chinese universities for more than 14 years, Frank has worked in two Chinese universities and was familiar with the Chinese educational system and teaching methods. He specifically used U.S. educational
philosophy and teaching methods as a means of helping Chinese students transition into the U.S. university. His approach to instruction helped several Chinese students who enrolled at the host university to participate in classroom discussions and group projects much more successfully when they came to study in the United States. They already expected to use critical thinking in group projects prior to arriving in the United States.

George taught hundreds of college students in human resource development in Ukraine and China across his 40-year career. He taught both undergraduate and graduate Chinese students and set boundaries for his work with them depending on their academic level. He studied the process of teaching and learning in each country while he worked as a professor. He believed that teachers and students must provide feedback to each other so that each could benefit from their teaching and learning activities. He knew the rules of Chinese traditional culture in terms of humility toward authority, and his energetic and enthusiastic way of teaching definitely influenced Chinese students to change their mindset.

Harry taught scores of Chinese students in management in the past 20 years. Understanding of cultural differences, Harry showed great patience in illustrating how to make good progress in English language learning with Chinese students. He believed that language proficiency is critical for a successful transition into the host environment. He felt sad when one of his Chinese students did not follow his instruction to improve his English proficiency and as a result, was not successful in a job interview. He also taught his students the basics of teamwork and leadership skills.

**Professional Staff**

Four professional student support staff members had a great deal of experience assisting Chinese international students across many years. They not only pointed out the challenges that
Chinese students encountered, but also analyzed the cultural factors reflected in their performance. They spoke about the transition from changing mindsets to accepting cultural differences. They encouraged student involvement in the community to develop intercultural competence.

Jason was familiar with Chinese high school students and Chinese college students since he worked in the International Office for almost 17 years. He understood that Chinese students had challenges because of the differences in educational system, culture, and law. He encouraged Chinese students to not be afraid of communication failures, but to be persistent in trying unfamiliar activities, such as being a volunteer in a community project to learn new ways of interacting with local people. He addressed the importance of learning from failure and of being reflective about their experiences.

Kathy had five years of direct experience advising Chinese students in her cross-cultural work with the Study Abroad office? (find the official name of the office) Study Abroad. She noticed that Chinese students had challenges when interacting with professors and with general language expression. She encouraged students to approach professors and participate in student activities in the community. She observed that students returning from studying abroad experiences were more independent and mature than they were prior to their overseas experiences. She asserted that students needed to be open to recognize, respect, adapt, and appreciate cultural differences.

While assisting Chinese international students in career services for 19 years, Lily noticed that Chinese international students had difficulty adapting to the host university environment because of cultural differences. She said that Chinese students should become more sensitive to the ways in which U.S. students and faculty members interact with each other.
Participation in the host country’s social life is important to understanding cultural norms. Conscious immersion into U.S. culture inside and outside the classroom helps to achieve multicultural competence.

After 14 years of experience teaching English as a second language (ESL) and counseling Chinese international students, Michelle noticed that Chinese students had language barriers that impeded their academic study and their daily lives. In the ESL program, she encouraged students to interact freely, use critical thinking, learn to manage failure, and appreciate diverse cultures. She felt satisfied with progress when she heard students expressing themselves with a more open mind about controversial topics.

**Findings**

The themes emerging from the qualitative interview analysis were organized into two broad areas, initial challenges and subsequent adaptations. The challenges mainly present Chinese students’ experiences when they first interact with the norms and values of the host culture. Since these student respondents had lived in the United States from one and one-half years to up to more than six years, their perspectives varied by their backgrounds, experiences, and length of exposure to the new environment. In the following discussion, professors and student affairs professionals also provide their perspectives based on their observations of Chinese international student performances. Some faculty and staff had the experience of working in China, and even in other countries, which helped them understand the challenges incoming Chinese students had in each area. Considering the differences in educational system and culture, these professionals suggested specific interventions to cultivate intercultural sensitivity. Aspects of motivation, attitude, and ability were described by both educators and Chinese students. The Chinese students realized the importance of preparing for a successful
intercultural transition and hoped to learn the host culture as early as possible during their study abroad experience.

Challenges

Cultural differences between the United States and Chinese societies mean when Chinese students reach a U.S. university, they immediately encounter confusing expectations and norms of behavior. More than any other single issue, the language barrier impedes their ability to communicate clearly and to comfortably interact with the host culture community. Depending only on Chinese norms and values to respond to what seem like similar situations in the host culture will often result in unexpected and embarrassing outcomes. Students feel lost and frustrated when they have no idea how to go about seeking assistance, either in terms of academic study or interactions in daily life with professors and/or peers. Adjusting to a new country and a new environment requires that students make sense of unanticipated events and develop new ways of thinking and doing in order to cope successfully.

Language barriers. Initially, the Chinese students felt that their language barriers slowed their learning process in several different ways. Language barriers existed from oral and aural classroom participation to written work, from talking with a professor to informal communications with local people. Each student participant pointed out language barriers.

I remember the initial period when I was in the MBA program. . . . I was lost from time to time because I could not understand them or I did not know when and how to “interrupt.” . . . The most challenging thing was writing . . . I wrote it much more slowly. (Amy)

I graduated from English program in China. . . . I still had challenges. I remember it was the first time that I visited my advisor. It was the third day after I arrived in the United
States. I still had jet lag. I felt I could not understand his words and asked him for more explanation. . . . When I had my internship, I still felt challenges in communication with my colleagues when they talked something about their families with some jokes. (Carol)

David was lost when he first heard something from U.S. popular culture that was unfamiliar to him:

When an instructor mentioned some topics about fashion, I was lost. . . . when I heard the word “Facebook” for the first time here, I supposed it was a textbook that I forgot to purchase. When they talked more about Facebook, I could not understand it at all.

The professors thought that entering Chinese students had linguistic challenges because they were not familiar with English idioms, accents, and expressions. Since the spoken Chinese language employs different speech intonations and is from a different family of languages, difficulty in reproducing English consonants and vowels with a clear intonation is difficult. With a different sound system, they could have barriers in pronunciation. In addition, grammar and idiomatic phrases common in one language, but not in another, might challenge them, too.

Sometimes I think students who don’t do very well are having those problems because of their difficulties with their English. . . . If I say like six of one or half a dozen of another, all my American students are going to know what I am talking about, but Chinese students might just kind of scratch their heads and say, “What in the world does that mean?” (Ethan)

Many Chinese students have been trained in English by people who speak Chinese natively and who don’t speak English with a proper accent. . . . They are often unwilling to participate in a class discussion or to answer questions because they are embarrassed about their ability to speak English. Most are able to express themselves, but they don’t
use perfect grammar. Sometimes they are very hard to be understood, especially their first semester here. . . . The biggest problem with Chinese students is their unwillingness to speak loudly. . . . They face a lot of problems and say to themselves that “I don’t speak English well enough to participate.” . . . so they speak very softly and very quietly. In a classroom, it doesn’t work because no one can hear you. (Harry)

The professional staff members supported the faculty point of view:
The speaking comprehension and the speaking itself can be the problem. A lot of Chinese language programs maybe learn with a British system. Accents are different. . . . Professors and students all know of punctuation and slang. . . . Indiana people have an accent. Sometimes the professors speak very quickly. Chinese students generally do not feel comfortable to raise their hand and ask the professor to repeat that [last sentence]. (Jason)

The first thing they face is linguistic challenges. Linguistically, Asians tend to be a little more resistant to speak in class. . . . They are often shy . . . They are afraid to make mistakes. It’s kind of saving face. . . . They have typically pronunciation problems. They seem to have a real difficulty in transitioning from Chinese to English. Sound systems are very different, so they often have difficulty in speaking clearly. . . . even when they order something . . . There are certain sounds they are struggling with. Sometimes, grammatically their writing might have the problems, and when speaking, they do not use past tense because Chinese doesn’t have it. . . . they have a lot of verb issue . . . word forms . . . It is difficult because they write so differently. (Michelle)

**Academic study.** Chinese students are trained to follow and obey a teacher’s instruction in a Chinese classroom. They do not have the experience of participation and interaction by
expressing their perspectives “different” from that which is found in a textbook or what a teacher says. They feel shocked when they have to express their ideas. They are taught to work independently instead of working together. They feel challenges how to work with others and communicate with team members. The Chinese students have challenges in classroom participation and interaction, adapting to teaching methods, and being involved in group projects.

**Classroom participation and interaction.** At least two Chinese students addressed their challenges of expressing themselves in classroom interaction. They did not know when and how to “interrupt” (Amy) into the natural flow of discussion. Although they wanted to express their ideas, they missed the chances because they could not emerge in the conversation. Brian felt frustrated in this situation:

> In China, discussions in class were very limited. We did not need to participate in a discussion, but just listened. . . . When I wanted to reply to it, I found that someone had already said so. Then I thought the next question, organized our ideas, and prepare for the expression. Before I wanted to say it, others mentioned it again. . . . For the third question, I felt frustrated because I could not find the opportunity. . . . Chinese students did not have the habit to express our ideas freely, so until now I still have this issue.

The Chinese students realized that their challenges in classroom participation resulted from the different educational systems in China and the United States. Unfamiliar with U.S. educational requirement and accustomed to Chinese culture, Chinese students choose to keep silent and focus on listening to keep their identity of diligent students.

The most challenging thing when I reached here was that I was unable to ask questions because in China we were accustomed to listening to a professor instead of putting
forward our questions. Even if we had questions, we would not ask for it. We were afraid that the professor would be annoyed, so the only task for us was listening. (Amy) We did not have this habit . . . We generally watched and listened to others and thought silently, but were not willing to respond as the first one because a nail that sticks out is struck. On the other hand, in China to answer a question quickly could be viewed as lack of intelligence or not well-educated. People could say that person desired to prevail over others, so it was not good. (Brian)

Unfamiliar with expectations for classroom interaction within U.S. higher education, Chinese students felt lost about how to enter into classroom participation. They were shocked by the informal dialogue that occurred between a professor and students during the proceedings of the lecture, and they doubted whether students were treating their professor politely. What the Chinese students were taught was inappropriate to do in China was now acceptable, and even required.

In my first class, I found that when a student raised his hand, the instructor had to stop and respond to the question, even repeating what he had mentioned. I felt that the instructor was not treated politely because such an interruption was impossible in China. (Brian)

Whereas the Chinese students kept silent out of their sense of respect for the professor, two professional staff members familiar with Chinese and U.S. cultural differences suggested these students needed to overcome their hesitation to speak out by recognizing the different manner in which U.S. classroom protocol values in-class dialogue between students and their instructors.
The Chinese education system is very different. It takes some time for Chinese students to understand how it works. . . . students in this country at this university and my previous university are expected to provide their own opinion . . . Not simply they can approve they can memorize the material and they give the same answer back. (Jason)

The professors who had teaching experience in different countries with different cultural expectations for classroom interaction remarked that student classroom participation was valued across cultures. George found that students from countries outside the United States were not familiar with classroom interaction as a style of teacher-student dialogue.

They want word for word. I also notice something when I taught in Ukraine, Russia, and China. . . . Most the time, most the students, and most the places are expected to listen only, never addressed a question to their professor. We go and start teaching back and forth dialogue. They said to us that we never have this. No one talks to us like this. Generally, a professor who was not familiar with Chinese culture could question the polite silence as an unwillingness to participate in a teaching-learning activity. Although the Chinese students wanted to show their respect to the professor by keeping silent and listening to a professor, their behavior was not valued in the host U.S. higher education environment, which placed greater value on teacher-student classroom dialogue.

Ethan worried about these students.

I think that students don’t succeed over here maybe because they have trouble in a classroom. . . . Many Chinese students are kind of reluctant to talk in class. I think maybe that is a difference between American culture and Chinese culture? (Ethan)

**Teaching method.** The Chinese students’ experiences in U.S. classroom participation and interaction reflected their adaptation into U.S. teaching methods. As the Chinese students
were taught in China to follow instructions from a teacher or professor without question, they felt uncomfortable expressing their ideas or opinions without direct instructions from their professors. They were frightened to express a “wrong” idea or conclusion.

I felt scary with this teaching method of role play because I felt lack of professional experiences and unconfident with my language expression at that time. . . . We were accustomed to instruction with a teacher-centered mode, by which an instructor gave a lecture and students just needed to listen and take notes. In the United States, a class is full of interaction between an instructor and students. They pay attention to the experience you have obtained in the practice. . . . Just taking notes and listening are not enough. I was shocked by this instruction. . . . As I talked with my Chinese friends, they did not feel comfortable with the class full of interaction. This instructional mode is really a challenge to our Chinese students from language to culture. (Carol)

Educated to memorize a complete standard answer, the Chinese students supposed that they just got incomplete and shallow knowledge from such informal classroom discussion. Brian doubted the value of this teaching method based on his prior experience in China.

Chinese students were accustomed to accepting knowledge passively. U.S. professors did not understand our learning habit. . . . I could not say this was a good teaching method. I am used to Chinese methods . . . each question has a standard answer and a perfect result. I felt that U.S. professors did not think so . . . when I got encouragement from my U.S. professors because I answered a question, I could feel I really reached the standard answer, but I could not feel that I mastered the whole thing . . . even if your expression was not so good or complete, professors might suppose that you understood the topic and the recitation scores would not be deducted.
On the other hand, the U.S. professors regarded Chinese students’ classroom performance as just passive acceptance and memorization. A professor familiar with Chinese education realized the Chinese students’ “trepidation” (Frank) to U.S. instructional methods. At the college level, U.S. professors emphasized critical thinking ability well beyond that of content memorization. Critical thinking about a specific topic inferred a level of understanding far beyond that of memorizing definitions alone.

If I talk about a definition of a work, I won’t give them the definition from the textbook on an exam, I will change it. The meaning will be pretty much the same, but the words are different. Sometimes that is troublesome for Chinese students. (Ethan)

Insert an introductory sentence separating the two quotes. That goes counter to their culture. They are taught to be quieter, to be more respectful to elderly people, whereas I am expecting debate. What I did is different, “Oh, yes, Sir, you are right. This is perfectly right.” That is not what you are here for. You are here to learn, especially at the graduate level, I expect my students to push back. If I am arguing with them, it is because I want them to learn, but if they won’t argue with me, we don’t go as far as we could. (George)

With the requirement of critical thinking, Chinese students had to express themselves with logical reasoning, which could be yet another challenge. Although they had the advantage of memorizing theory, without any practical experience they were disadvantaged in applying theory into practice to solve a problem.

Most of the time our students come here are rich in theory and poor in practice. . . . They have more trouble in understanding the logic than they do in math . . . for my
international students the toughness is on understanding protocols of research, the whole business of consent. (George)

**Teamwork.** Without prior group work experiences, the Chinese students were unable to conceive of how to go about sharing assignments with their partners on an equal basis. While they tried to be agreeable, they remained silent and waited for others to give them a task. Breaking a group assignment into its separate parts was a brand new experience for them. They could not decide what to do step by step even if they understood the topic, so they waited passively to be assigned their task by the other members of the group.

At the beginning, I did not have any clue how to start a project. I was incapable of cooperating with other persons in the same group. We did not have the habit of cooperation. I was not active because of the culture differences. If my classmate asked me whether I could do the part of the project, I would say, ‘Yes,’ even though I was not good at it. The situation was that they were choosing what they loved, but I just accepted what was given to me passively. (Brian)

They wanted to contribute, but they had no idea of what specifically they should do to support their partners.

In the first semester, I was assigned to collaborate with a U.S. student to make a poster. I was just responsible for looking for the pictures. . . . At that time, I was puzzled about everything. When he talked with me, I could just say, ‘Yes.’ When he showed me what he had done, I could just agree with him by saying, ‘Yes.’ Although I got a good score, I did not think I contributed as much as I could have done. (David)

From a professor’s perspective, Harry advised that silence could be viewed as not being interested in the project, not caring, and unwilling to contribute to the teamwork.
This is where Chinese students have trouble because they are afraid to communicate. It looks like they are not contributing . . . they don’t express them, so their teammates think they are not interested. Here silence is not interpreted as thoughtful. Silence is interpreted as indifference. . . . That is not acceptable. They will not want to be on another team with you. . . . You want to be the student who is always contributing because people will be a little suspicious of anyone just because you are not familiar. . . . Otherwise, you are assumed to be not caring and not contributing.

A good team can be established when team members work together. Cultural differences kept Chinese students at a distance from their U.S. counterparts because they could not understand each other’s motivations. Without understanding, how could they cooperate together? Brian thought these cultural differences prevented them from engaging in deeper discussions.

We have different sports. Soccer, basketball, and ping-pong are the favorites for Chinese male students, while football and baseball are popular here. These are not popular in China. When they talked about the sports, I could not understand them and was not involved. We had no more interest to talk more with them.

The Chinese students found many challenges when they worked with people from different backgrounds. Carol addressed the issue of cultural differences and the conflict between different values and norms.

I asked my group to finish the entire project two weeks ahead of the due date. . . . Some students did not pay any more attention to the score. They sent the PowerPoint to me several minutes before the presentation. Another student delayed his part of the project by saying that he was occupied by something else urgent.
Each step of a group project was stressful. The Chinese students also experienced some difficult episodes in independent work. David felt challenged in doing a presentation.

During the presentation, when I read my notes, I neglected to interact with the audience.

When I took care of the audience, I forgot the words I had recited.

**Daily life.** Moving into a new environment, Chinese students may find that everything once familiar is changed into a different unfamiliar form. Some Chinese students loved to try American cuisine, but they missed Chinese food. Unfamiliar with campus culture and the function of each department, the Chinese students were not aware how to ask for assistance. They did not have any idea of the concept of student involvement outside the classroom, but just focused solely on academic study. Not actively being involved in student activities, these students had less opportunity to interact with U.S. students, which in turn made it harder for them to make friends. Even if they were repeatedly exposed to a social interaction in the context of a different culture, they still needed more repeat experiences to adapt to a different norm or different characteristic in that particular culture.

**Food.** Chinese students accustomed to the Chinese way of life were shocked with typical American foods. Fried, cold, and informal foods were so different from Chinese foods, and often resulted in students being not only uncomfortable, but homesick.

Food is always a challenge to me. I don’t like fried food. . . . Some girls complain about the food, but they are unable to do cooking. (Carol)

The faculty and staff members realized the Chinese students’ situations. Jason worried if they could not find a place to eat serving familiar food for long time, the students would be physically unhealthy.
A lot of Chinese students miss their traditional Chinese food. . . . Sometimes those physical kinds of needs cause problems. Students become depressed. . . . I know a couple of cases, the Chinese graduate students, actually become withdrawn. . . . They can’t find the foods. They are physically not eating. They are not strong and healthy.

**Seeking resources.** Due to cultural differences, the Chinese students were not familiar with the functions of each department, even the International Office, on campus. Even if they were given a lot of group instructions and fliers, they struggled with when and how to seek assistance in a relevant department/office. In the new environment, Chinese students unavoidably experienced situations when the stereotypical response based on their prior experiences in China did not serve them well in the U.S. They even neglected or refused to accept some information or services as Brian described:

I did not feel seeking assistance was vital for a new student because I did not have any consciousness or custom for it. . . . I experienced a lot of frustrating events because I did not seek any help from Chinese student council or institutional departments. . . . This is the issue of custom and the issue of realization.

Chinese institutions did not provide professional counseling service and Chinese students were advised by their family members. In the new environment, parents’ experiences were not sufficient or effective. Until they asked for assistance in a department, they did not find a solution to their problems. Once students recognized the value of student service departments, they felt comfortable seeing a professional staff member for assistance.

My friend complained sometimes that his neighbor was noisy. He just complained it to me, but did not complain it to the office. Until one day he learned from a staff member that he did need to tell it to the office. (Brian)
Working with Chinese students, some staff members realized the cultural differences involved in dealing with this situation.

I think a Chinese person sees it as a form of weakness. I am letting the officials on campus know; I am letting the university know I cannot handle it. That’s a horrible thing to do with the Chinese. It will be better that I figure it out on my own and use my own resources, my own family and my friends to give me the answer. (Jason)

Taken together, small challenges can accumulate into a big problem. When some students want to prove their ability to solve their own problems as they used to do in China, they might even go to extreme measures. However, the law and legal issues are defined and explained in different ways in different countries.

A student was good in study, but he did not adapt to the new environment. He was lonely and did not have a good friend because he could not accept other points of view. He even felt that others suppressed him . . . he quarreled with his roommate . . . he threatened his roommate by showing a knife. His roommate called the police and he was arrested for the whole night and had to be present in court the next day. (Brian)

Given cultural differences, some actions are explained differently in the host culture compared to the home culture. Jason provided several examples.

Sometimes international students get drunk and they drive an automobile. We don’t provide legal advice, but we help them go through such a situation. Some young Chinese students, some men, don’t fully understand about physical interaction, especially with Chinese women. . . . A Chinese boy and a Chinese girl have an argument and the Chinese boy strikes the Chinese girl. That will get the boy arrested. He will be arrested and sent
to the jail. . . . That’s just because they did not quite understand the law here, the cultural value, and the way we interact with others.

**Interacting with local students and students from other nations.** Given the range of cultural differences, Chinese students felt it was hard to make friends with U.S. students. They preferred instead to interact with other Chinese students. Different ways of interaction made a distance between Chinese students and U.S. students. Even if they got assistance from local students, Chinese students could not say that they had American friends. Three staff members mentioned the reason it was so difficult for them to have American friends.

I think another challenge is to make friends with non-Asian students. . . . I notice that students go together and they always go together. They are speaking Chinese. That makes it very hard for American students to approach them. It isn’t usual just in terms of what you are trying to do and coming up with some suggestions. (Kathy)

Just because American students ask their Chinese friends how they are doing, they do not necessarily really care how their Chinese students are doing. . . . That causes some problems, the emotional problems, because some of the Chinese students have certain expectations about when you are nice to me, you have taken me to the store, you became friendly to me, and you greet to me, but you then don’t call me back and we don’t eat meals together. When I asked you to come to my home for me to cook with you, you tell me no, you are too busy or you never return my phone calls. . . . Emotional kinds of issues, cultural kinds of issues . . . that limit how Chinese students interact. (Jason)

Immersing themselves into the host culture, Chinese students also felt puzzled with the different social behavior of students from other nations. Even when they understood the norms
of the specific culture, they still needed repeated experiences to arouse their recognition of that cultural difference. Brian was confused by his Indian friends’ expressions.

Sometimes you still had to experience the puzzles and challenges even if you had the knowledge. Based on knowledge, you could really learn something from your own experiences or lessons. You had to have the process of learning. To Indian students shaking heads mean agreeing with you, but nodding means against. Even though I knew that, I felt puzzled for a long time when they were nodding and arguing something.

**Adaptation**

To have a successful transition, all study participants believed that Chinese students needed to adapt into the host culture. Based on their unique experiences, the participants in all three categories emphasized the importance of the willingness and preparation for accepting something new and something different from that which was typical in Chinese traditional culture. The students who studied in the United States needed to have the ability of exploring, analyzing, and reflecting on cultural differences, from which they could select the best of the host culture for their personal benefit and development. In academic study, they needed to understand U.S. higher education philosophy, from which they could adjust their methods of academic study to arrive at better learning outcomes. The transitions involved preparing for a changing mindset, English language improvement, academic study, and habits of daily life.

**Self-preparation.** In order to have a successful transition from Chinese educational practices to U.S. educational practices, Chinese students planning to study in the United States must work to develop English language proficiency, to acquire personal time-management habits, to be alert to cultural differences and ways to respond to those differences, and to keep a positive attitude toward their response to changing cultural and environmental situations. As
these students-in-transition develop their own sense of identity, they will be able to set up specific goals and objectives on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

**Self-awareness.** Chinese students planning to study abroad should be very aware of their purposes for studying abroad, and develop a specific plan for what they expect to learn while they are studying in the host country. Their plan of overseas study needs to include both short term goals and long term goals. In order to do so, they must take into account both their strengths and weaknesses in their own culture, and ways they can maintain their strengths and improve their weaknesses in the host culture. As students become more aware of their personal sense of self, they will learn to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and find ways to make culturally appropriate adjustments.

There is a different perspective of life. What you are going to do with your life is a different question for different people. They may be ambitious . . . their expectation of their culture and what life means for them. (George)

Based on his teaching experience in China, Frank believed that when students studied abroad outside China, they would become more flexible in adapting to new environments.

They are going to be more like American students, a greater sense of entitlement . . . Because they grew up with two parents and four grandparents doting on them as only child who did everything for them because they want the only job was study. . . . Chinese students grow up with the awareness of the understanding of the things outside China. That makes an easier adjustment to seek higher education process when they leave China.

**Self-management.** Acknowledging differences in U.S. higher education from those of China, the Chinese student respondents believed that they needed to adjust their life styles,
leaning habits, time management, and methods of study. Each respondent was able to state a set of rules that would result in a better overseas experience.

Until the second semester . . . I was aware of improving my habits in daily life. . . . I feel better to expand my capability of study and improve my learning methods and habits. . . . I believe the important part was to plan and manage my schedule including the time for study, work, activity, and sleep . . . They need to learn how to plan and manage their own life. They need to have the capabilities of handling daily life. (David)

Carol believed that Chinese international students needed to adjust themselves in many aspects.

Students need to have good attitude and work hard . . . be proactive in study . . . make plans and work out a schedule early in a semester . . . have the ability of self-management. . . . If some students are not capable of taking care of themselves, they need to adjust quite a lot in daily life. (Carol)

Ethan suggested that students make a plan of how to reach objectives and manage their schedule as early in their overseas experience as possible.

Time management is one of the important issues because some of those syllabi will give an idea when you are going to be doing what. . . . It should help students manage their time better. It should get students an idea of the kinds of things they need to know too.

(Ethan)

**Attitude.** Understanding the values and norms of the host culture facilitates acculturation. Students need to work toward understanding cultural differences in all areas of their daily lives as well as their academic work. Willingness to be open-minded, being flexible in new situations, and working to be comfortable interacting with other people in those new situations, enable
students to make a smoother transition into U.S. educational life. The Chinese students pointed out the importance of a positive attitude in adjusting to the host culture:

Personal attitudes are vital. . . . Students need to have good attitude and work hard. . . . I saw that some Chinese students isolated themselves in their apartments and played games when they were free. They just hung out with Chinese students. In this case, nobody can help them. (Carol)

As a professor, Frank analyzed how the process of study abroad helped individual student development and how Chinese students benefitted from it.

The very nature, the very potential value of studying abroad is to immerse yourself into that culture. When you select that you isolate yourself with your country men, you lose that. You lose that advantage. It is why a lot of countries don’t allow their international students to take distance courses. Going overseas and study and getting into the culture are not the same to study in front of a computer. . . . They need to integrate themselves into the events. They need to get the perspectives of the students not just from one country, but all over. Very difficult, but very essential.

Working as a professional staff member, Michelle suggested that realizing cultural differences and accommodating them were important for students’ personal adjustment.

You really need to have the willingness to accept that things are different and not judge it, not be upset about it, but just know it is different because its difference doesn’t make it bad, so just having an open mind too, and it doesn’t mean you have to love it. . . . When you go somewhere, it could be different. Food is different. Climate is different. People are different, but it can be very exciting and just knowing that you can learn something from that.
Different cultures embrace different values and norms, which in turn generates different social behaviors. The same behavior could be explained differently by people with different cultural backgrounds. Learning how to understand people’s behavior in the host country was vital for the Chinese student transition. In the new environment, the Chinese students could easily feel culture shock with some situations. Almost all the participants stressed how useful it was to be open-minded. The professional staff members and professors encouraged students to be alert to cultural differences and learn to accept them.

Learn to be open-minded, to accept new ways of learning, maybe different ways of learning from what they are used to doing in China. Being willing to interact with different people . . . Being self-sufficient and independent . . . Things are normal there, but suddenly there are different ways, so it is kind of think about it . . . If you see somebody with tattoos everywhere, it doesn’t mean they are mad. Asians tend to think that they are terrible people because it is not usual in your culture. Maybe the food isn’t what you like because it is not the same . . . I think just being willing to accept new things. (Michelle)

George advocated the attitude toward the differences. Preparing for the differences helped Chinese international students deal with the challenges actively and confidently.

Come in and sort of keep their eyes open to say-how are things different? To assume they are going to the same would be a mistake . . . because the expectations are different . . . students can have a much more success quicker if they come in expecting and looking for how things are different. (George)

Personal behavior is the result of each person’s interpretation of the meaning of new and different experiences based on their own values and norms. A healthy curiosity is important to
maintain personal interest and work to understand the cultural differences associated with a new and novel situation. The professors and staff members believed that Chinese students who maintained a healthy curiosity would be more willing to interact with people not of their own culture.

If they stay in the United States, if they go to Western Europe, again there is a set of rules about what people should do, can do in a community, but they should always be curious, should always continue to learn, even after they leave. (Jason)

Harry confirmed that curiosity was regarded as the motivation of learning more.

Curiosity is the best quality. If you are curious, you will love your time here and people will love you. They will love your curiosity. It is how you show your interest, how you show you care. If you don’t care, you will not be curious.

Adapting to the norms and values of a different culture can be uncomfortable because students must learn to question and change their habits to make a successful adjustment. Frank believed that a positive attitude was critical for them to accommodate, accept, and appreciate cultural differences.

The awareness, the acceptance they are going to be doing a lot of things that they have not done before. The new and kind of outside of the comfort zone, so to expect that and to decide ahead of time, that is the challenges you are going to deal with. Despite the fact you can be uncomfortable doing this, it is benefit for you in long run. . . . It is almost an attitude and decision as it is to that extension that you can meet students, teachers, and anybody else from the other countries and do that.

With a positive attitude, the Chinese students needed to be open to questioning themselves about how to understand a different perspective and how to develop a response.
George believed that changing attitudes and asking a question would be a good start toward a better adjustment.

As soon as I give them an example, I find them to push back. “Oh, no, no, no, no.” . . . They are simply thinking my way is the right way; all the other way is wrong. . . . You are holding on to your thinking, and you are not willing to question . . . and try to understand . . . you are never going to be flexible; you are never going be able to be successful in novel situations with that kind of attitude. You are always going to be fighting . . . you have to hold things lightly; you have to be willing to question . . . Why am I finding this so uncomfortable? How can I learn from this? How can I grow as a person because I may not apply what I know there, but who I am is going to allow me to adjust to any situation? The more competent I become, the more confident I become, the more flexible I can be regardless what come to me.

Asking a question is a good way of being open-minded and working to develop critical thinking. Frank encouraged students to ask questions and reflect on the response with their own understandings.

With the events open to interpretation, American students in general are more skeptical; they are more not automatic acceptance of what a professor says. Their emphasis is on more thinking through a critical thinking process, which is more important than the result of that process. I called it as a western attitude. . . . There is a greater awareness of the reality. . . . Because of that, there is a great openness to different ideas. There is a greater awareness that just as professor says something, it does not mean . . . it requires interpretation, not just accept it as truth.
Failure is an unavoidable and important part of the learning process, particularly in the early stages of learning a subject. The professors understood that all students have obstacles to overcome in their learning process. They hoped that students would learn from their failures and develop new skills. These professors actively worked to help students grasp new ideas and methods of learning in order to arrive at their own original solutions to a problem.

Let’s hope your first presentation is your worst, and hope every one after that is a little bit better, and often times they will be . . . if a student fails early in a semester . . . ask a professor for suggestions . . . Don’t be afraid of failure. Expect failures sometimes, but expect to learn from your failures and come back and figure out how to do it right.

(Ethan)

You have to have the courage to be wrong. . . . Here, being wrong and correcting your mistake is very noble. . . . We are in a university and we are learning. We look at it as a developmental process. It’s not all about knowing the exact right answer. It’s about being able to get to the right answer. . . . Often as professors what we want to do is to understand how you got to the answer that you chose, and then we help you understand how you could have got to a better answer or where you went wrong in the process.

(Harry)

The professional staff members viewed failure as a normal part of student learning, so the student’s attitude toward dealing with failure was critical for further student development.

Certainly in a classroom, everybody makes mistakes. . . . We are people. We do that. . . . No problem. Or sometimes we make a joke and laugh. That laughter is a good thing because everybody relaxes then. . . . They are okay. They recover pretty quickly.

(Michelle)
The best thing a Chinese student can do is to observe. . . Second one is be persistent . . . even though you fail. . . Try to make friends. Try to participate. Try to do more outside a classroom. And then be reflective, thinking about what worked . . . why it worked and why it did not work, and use that in future to be successful. . . In American culture . . . it is a good way to fail because you learn from that . . . as long as you don’t do things horrendous to break the law. (Jason)

**Language.** English language proficiency is critical for Chinese students to prepare for their academic study and life both on and off campus. The Chinese students suggested that language learning be connected with the real world. To adapt into the host culture successfully, David recommended that students in China could link to free open classes on the Internet taught in the United States, which would provide them with a window to view typical classroom operations in U.S. institutions of higher education:

I believe this (watching some open classes via Internet) should be valuable for Chinese students. They can not only improve their language proficiency, but also experience the circumstances in a U.S. classroom.

As students worked on improving English language skills, they also came to understand more about the host culture. The professional staff members appreciated the challenges that Chinese students encountered. They encouraged more hands-on practice via the Internet or with English-speaking friends on promoting English proficiency.

Trying to work on pronunciation . . . academic listening note taking . . . learning presentation skills . . . how to organize and write essays . . . how to do research papers . . . speak with native speakers . . . American culture, especially with college culture . . . maybe not just Facebook, but sports, American football. (Michelle)
When Chinese students get here obviously there is huge improvement in their language skills . . . it is just about practicing . . . to verbally express themselves both in the way that people can understand them and they are expressing real confidence in their abilities . . . and their articulating and their speaking the language as clearly as possible. (Lily)

Practice makes progress. Harry described the ways in which English language proficiency could be promoted through interaction and communication.

Chinese students could improve their assimilation is to properly pronounce words . . . It means practicing with a recording device, listening to how things are said by native speakers and repeating them back making your voice sound like a native speaker’s voice . . . another thing . . . is imagine what a typical conversation will be when someone meets you or when someone asks you a question, and how you respond, and practicing your response to sound very clear. . . . Speak a little more slowly than you might normally, and a little more loudly than you might normally. . . . The more you are willing to try, the more you show you don’t feel bad, the more they will try to speak with you, and then you learn faster. . . . If you continue to practice, if you continue to train, train yourself to say things properly, you will pick it up much faster. . . . Then you will get to be fluent. Once you are fluent, it is really hard to lose it.

**Academic study.** Different educational systems and philosophies of higher education shape different educational modes and procedures. The Chinese students who want to excel academically need to acknowledge U.S. educational philosophies and adapt to U.S. educational procedures. Expectations for students from their instructors, the requirements for classroom participation and interaction, the features of teaching methods, approaching professors outside a
classroom, and the social negotiations needed for group projects are all part of the culture of U.S. higher education.

*What professors expect from students.* All students, not just Chinese students, need to understand course requirements and follow the professor’s course syllabus in order to do well academically. Accordingly, U.S. instructors have increasing performance expectations for students as they advance from undergraduate to master’s and then doctoral study. First-year undergraduate students are expected to learn time management and study skills that promote academic success, upper-class students are expected to expand those skills to become more independent learners, and graduate students are expected to be advanced scholars who can find information about the topic of study well beyond the material assigned for the course in the professor’s syllabus.

The teacher’s expectations were a little bit lower for freshmen than for sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students. We do expect our seniors to be much more polished than our freshmen. One reason we expect that is because by the time you get to be a senior, you have quite a bit of experience. . . . There is supposed to be a learning curve in all those levels. Expectations are higher for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, higher expectations for second semester MBA students comparing to first semester . . . Expectations are going to be raised all the way through. (Ethan)

We look on learning as a process, not as an event. You don’t just learn one time. You learn over time. It is more like a flowing river. It is getting larger as you go along. You start out with a little knowledge, but then you gain, and gain, and gain. The river gets wider and wider. We are not interested in just throwing a bucket of water in the river.
We are interested in maybe you being able to have a whole rainstorm of information and ideas and thoughts. That causes the river to grow a lot. (Harry)

Chinese international students encountered challenges in their academic study because of Chinese difference educational system and philosophy. Their performances also reflected cultural differences in personal expectation.

I think China is considered to be more group centered, particularly the family than America. America is more individually centered. Consequently, I find that the expectation of “me” is different in the way students go about behaving. I find myself thinking that if students are going to be successful, they are going to become more assertive, more confident of themselves. . . . We are placing these rules on ourselves, so there are different expectations. (George)

Expectations for student learning outcomes vary according to academic level. Students studying a bachelor’s program are trained to be practitioners, while advanced graduate students are expected to have the capacity to do independent original research. Doctoral students are expected to have a solid foundation in their field of study, with the associated scholarly habits necessary to be an independent learner working under the guidance of a senior scholar, the professor.

To learn independently, to have critical thinking, to ask a question and figure out the way to solve this question, or to have the ability to do some research—all these things are extremely important for the Ph.D. level. They are important for MBAs. (Ethan)

When I see a person comes here to get a bachelor’s degree, that’s all about to become a practitioner. . . . By the time a person is working on a doctorate, I don’t expect that they have any grammar problems. I don’t expect them to have any spelling problems. Your
vocabulary should be huge. Your ability to do things should be rather large . . . just like we have a policy here, if you are an undergrad, you can re-take the course and the new grade will stand and the “F” will disappear, but this doesn’t happen in graduate school. If you get an “F” in graduate school, it will stay and you have to overcome it. Different expectation, and they go higher and higher when you get through. (George)

Increasing performance expectations by academic level are reflected in the manner of student evaluations of learning. Each discipline has different criteria for what is considered good performance, and these criteria change from discipline to discipline, institution to institution, and country to country. As a consequence, Chinese students need to adapt their ideas of progress into the norms and values of the U.S. educational system.

I will suggest that concept differs in some disciplines. . . . An excellent economic student is one who understands the institutional arrangements in the society that they are analyzing . . . the understanding of behavior and choice so that they can kind of predict to understand how individuals will behave in those institutional constraints. . . . You have to have enough understandings of that culture to be able to follow the impact of the economy. (Frank)

Excellent students are students who are willing to engage in discussion, who have opinions formed and based on facts, and reasonable application of theories, so they thought their answers out and they have got ideas and are willing to express them. I think excellent students are up to date. They do the readings. They are current what the courses are going over. They don’t get behind. They are able to participate in a daily discussion in a course. Also if you are working on a long-term project, you consult the professor periodically about what you are learning, what you have discovered so far, and
where you think it is going, and you let the professor have some input into what you have
done so far. That is an excellent student. (Harry)

**Requirements for classroom participation and interaction.** When Chinese students
learned to adapt into the U.S. classroom environment, the Chinese students interviewed for this
study felt that a professor’s encouragement was an inspiration for their participation. When they
learned to actively express their points of view, they could feel their progress through feedback
from their interaction with the professor and other students. The professors actively supported
Chinese students to participate and interact with the other members of their student cohort. Amy
realized the importance of expressing her ideas and described her personal growth in the learning
process.

Our professor provided us with a lot of participation and expression. . . I did my best to
express. Then I found I could understand more. . . When I asked some questions and
put forward my ideas, my professor was not annoyed, but liked them. The circumstances
made me feel comfortable to speak up my idea or opinion and ask a question. . . Some
students did not dare to speak up. Professors at best did not push them to speak up. If a
professor could create good circumstances in a classroom, many students would
participate in discussions, which would inspire and facilitate all students, especially for
those who did not dare to speak up and participate.

These Chinese students realized that the professors encourage students to ask questions.
Their descriptions of classroom activities confirmed that it was not necessary to worry about
making a mistake, but that students should be brave to speak and express their ideas. As they
learned how to ask questions, they also began to think more in depth and sensed they were
learning more about the subject.
In a class, when you expressed your own idea that was not same to the textbook, the professor would encourage you doing so. . . . Even my professor denied some opinions in the textbook and expressed his own idea and inspired students. . . . My professors taught me to be brave in asking questions. As long as I asked them, they would like to answer my questions and give me a satisfied response. (David)

The Chinese students believed that professors who had prior experience teaching Asian students or who were familiar with Asian cultures could understand Chinese students’ performance. Brian remembered that his professor even created an opportunity for him to speak up in class and share his knowledge.

I found that some professors who had the experience could find some Asian students were quiet, so they gave us the opportunity to say something. . . . Our professor wanted me to introduce the cultural features in China and asked a Korean student to introduce Korean features.

The faculty and staff members confirmed that asking questions in class was a way of showing interest instead of challenging authority. The professors believed that the class discussion could be led to a deeper level of critical thinking by asking questions. Asking questions of students was also a way that professors could verify student understanding of the topics under study.

You have to be willing to ask the question. . . . If you are not going to ask questions, you are never going to learn. I think it does take a mindset and a way to prepare people for advanced instruction. . . . I think that it is a part of having a higher education is that more and more you are willing to ask questions. (George)
Asking professors questions is a very good thing. It shows your interest in the subject. It shows strength. . . . Most of the time you raise your hand first, and your professor recognizes you, and you ask a question. It’s better to ask a question while you have the question in your mind than to wait on it until the end of class and everybody has left, and then you ask a question because usually if you have a question, other students have that same question, and they may just not want to ask. (Harry)

Chinese students should be proactive by sitting in the front and introducing themselves to the students sitting around them. Initiating interaction with other students was a start to participate in and enrich each others’ culture. The professors and a professional staff member believed that to facilitate better interaction.

Chinese students should sit in the front. As you come in, say hello and introduce yourself to other students. . . . In fact, usually native students will be very excited about that because they like to meet people from other countries. . . . The university is one of a few places that they meet people from other countries in this part of our country. It can actually be a real icebreaker. If a Chinese student shows a willingness to engage, a willingness to talk, a willingness to be friendly, students usually will reciprocate very well. (Harry)

If you talk in a class, the teachers know you and you get extra points for that. The Chinese need to be pushed to share. . . . Most professors like that . . . a lot of classes require you to do that . . . It is the important part of your grade, so they need to know and they need to do that. Be a part of the discussion board. (Michelle)

Part of the reality was the perception that a classroom is not a one-way communication between a professor and students. There is much to be learn, not all about the course
content necessarily, but much to be learned from the interaction between students as well as between students and professor. (Frank)

Chinese students can really enrich their culture by interacting more. . . . Chinese students need to know that many American professors expect their students to make contributions in class. That can be very important in some classes. For a lot of professors, part of the grade will depend on the classroom participation. (Ethan)

Frank believed that the Chinese students he encountered usually worked hard to behave appropriately in terms of classroom participation and interaction.

They are more open to, in some cases are aware of American and West education and culture than the beginning . . . they were surprisingly . . . they were adapted quite easily . . . They were clearly more outgoing, not outgoing personally, but were open in a classroom setting . . . they had different personality and different willingness to speak out.

**U.S. teaching methods.** The Chinese students understood that U.S. higher education emphasized the process of critical thinking even though each of them may not have clearly understood what critical thinking really was. With increasing critical thinking skills, students created their own diverse perspectives by doing research and doing analysis using many different resources. Depending on the different disciplines, the Chinese student respondents confirmed that U.S. classroom teaching methods inspired students to not only learn standard answers presented in textbooks, but also cultivated their ability to carry out independent research activities.

I feel that students are not just limited in textbook learning and following an instructor’s instruction in the United States because a standard answer can be used as a reference.
Your diverse and unique points of view are appraised . . . On some degree, this teaching method is helpful for student development in study . . . The teaching methods here are full of democracy and freedom. (Brian)

Maintaining a good relationship between professors and students helps to facilitate positive interaction. The professors’ equal attitudes toward their students reduced students’ unease, which made students more willing to contact professors when they had questions. The Chinese students found that the professors’ positive attitude toward student mistakes helped students learn effectively. These Chinese students appreciated their professors as role models in teaching and educating students. Brian hoped to integrate the advantages of U.S. education into his educational practice after he returned to China.

The relationship between professors and students in the United States is like friends in cooperation. . . . I felt relaxed to ask a professor. . . . I needed to pay more attention to my expression. I did not have to worry about the correctness of my ideas or whether my ideas could be accepted or whether professors would be happy with my opinion. I just needed to express my ideas. . . . I believe when I teach my students in China, I will allow my students to challenge me. I will take measures to maintain the parent style in my class, but not limit the standard answers. I will create free circumstances for my students and accommodate their diverse ideas and viewpoints. I will say as my professors, “Are you expressing this idea” followed by an answer.

Problem solving skills and logical reasoning were critical for students to apply to both theory and practice. Harry described how to employ logical reasoning into solving a problem supported by theoretical knowledge.
You have to memorize things (in the memorization stage) to have something to work with. . . . As they get into the junior year and senior year, when they are confronting how to use the things they have learned and apply them into situations, they need to remember that there isn’t always a set rule on what to do. . . . This is especially true in classes that rely on conceptual knowledge. . . . what we want you to do is to think more creatively and more originally. . . . Keep an open mind to solutions and to be willing to apply the tools they have learned to solve the problem. . . . Often what you want is the answer well supported by the logic that you see will lead to a solution. . . . That might involve more nuance to answer and that’s more what I am saying have good reasoning, good thinking, but don’t expect there to be only one answer.

The professor’s instructional role can be adjusted from that of a coach to guide students in practice, as a communicator delivering knowledge, as a guide-taskmaster to observe student reflection, or as a role model to show how to do something. The professors believed that the establishment of this teaching-learning relationship was necessary to organize classroom activities effectively. One of their educational goals was to teach students to learn how to learn.

The relationship between professor and instructor depends on both the size of the course, the nature of students in the course (general education, undergraduate major, graduate major). Instructors in an introductory course teach students in a fairly broad base and with less student/professor interaction. The goal is to provide the scaffolding for more detailed work in later, more advanced courses. As students gain a better base knowledge of a discipline, they begin to work more closely with their professors to gain deeper level understanding. Through an educational career a student’s relationship with faculty
evolves from the faculty being an instructor to a trainer to a mentor to a partner in learning. (Frank)

The professors expected students to learn actively and independently. Students were expected to have the ability of learning from a textbook independently. Based on what they have learned from a textbook and their own experience, students need to combine the textbook knowledge with their experience and offer their own ideas confidently. A professor will verify the students’ perspectives in the discussion, which leads to a higher level of study. Frank described these teaching-learning procedures.

An American college classroom is more open to discussion and dialogue and philosophy . . . . You need to get the information from the textbook, but the instruction in the classroom and the textbook are complimentary. They are not substitutes. Professors do not usually repeat much information from a textbook. They suppose that students in a classroom have read the textbook and they should have their own perspectives based on their knowledge and experiences. These perspectives are expected to be shared and discussed in a class. In a class, a professor has the responsibility of mediating discussions from that information, and an instructor serves as a kind of moderator for a discussion, leading and perhaps correcting missing information, but not just solely dispensing knowledge.

The Chinese students did not fully understand the concept of critical thinking. What is critical thinking? Why is critical thinking emphasized by professors? Frank described the process of critical thinking on the social, political, and geographic implications of constructing the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River.
Critically thinking is taking all of those pieces of information, putting together, and analyzing them, and trying to create your own perception . . . Kind of viewing the pieces before you put them together to get a kind of community perspective rather than simply ignoring each of pieces and looking in some kind of aspect as the whole. . . . They were more open to and engaged more in a thinking process that may or may not have led them to different conclusions about. . . . They were by the end much more prone to get into the different literature to read and to consider both sides of the social implications of the mass transformation.

**Approaching a professor.** As the student participants gained personal and academic experience in the U.S. host culture, they not only learned improved methods of study, but also the importance of office visits with their professors. This was particularly true for graduate students. They learned the value to them of asking questions in class, and found that professors were interested in their ideas during office visits. As the students became more comfortable with the U.S. learning process in the classroom and in the professor’s office, they expressed greater confidence in their abilities as an international student.

I do not depend on learning everything in a class or expecting a professor to deliver knowledge in a class. Most knowledge can be learned by reading. The most helpful part from a professor is that he gives me an orientation. I know where I should go in that field. We need to understand the topics and express our own ideas and opinion. An advisor or a professor is the guidance to students. They let me know how to do research with a topic. (Carol)

I think it is important to communicate with advisor so that he can understand you. When you graduate, advisor will do good recommendation for you because he understands your
strength in academic study and your goals in career. . . . Besides, advisor will recommend the opportunities of intern or volunteer for you even though they are limited and competitive. (Amy)

When they approached their professors, the Chinese students realized that their professors not only answered their questions, but also provided them with additional academic and personal resources. The Chinese students found they were encouraged to think independently, and treated with equal status as a fellow learner. As a result, they not only had responses to their questions, but also gained English-as-a-second language confidence through the process of individual practice in communication. David was impressed by his professor’s offer of media from his office library during an office visit.

I did ask my professor about a project of geography. I needed to investigate the layout of the restaurants . . . My professor gave me a hard disc, in which had the latest atlas of the city. It was a fantastic resource for me to finish my project. If I did not ask, I would not get this critical resource. (David)

The professors evaluated students highly who had sincere interest in their studies. A student’s expression of personal interest is the foundation to establish good relationships between the student and the professor. When professors thought that the students were willing to work hard and learn more, the professors usually worked to provide them with additional assistance.

I find that most advisors wait for the students to approach them. It’s partly efficiency . . . You’ll have to take the initiative to set up an appointment, come in, and see me. Often, to help a professor prepare when you communicate with them, tell them what the issues are that you want to discuss, so they can allow the right amount of time and right kind of setting. Most advisors are very willing to help, but they want to be student driven. . . .
It’s part of how you demonstrate you are caring about what you do. Don’t expect people come and drag it out of you. It doesn’t happen. We are too busy and we’ll spend time with the students who ask for help. (Harry)

If I see someone who doesn’t care . . . If they are super quiet, they don’t ever contribute; they don’t ever interact, it is hard for me to give, but when they are, even though I don’t understand, I am going to ask questions and participate, I am going to be involved into my professors. . . . The professors will respond to them. . . . They should approach to their professors, particularly their advisor. They should have conversation with their advisors, but that takes a mindset. . . . I think that it needs the advisors and professors actually to point something out at the students. . . . “Because you are willing to try, I see how hard you are working, so I am willing to help you. . . . You keep learning and lean on my help less and less while you are getting better and better.” . . . good students make them known quickly. They try hard and their efforts, I make sure I respond to their efforts. . . . Not just me, but all the professors will. (George)

Harry encouraged graduate students to talk with professors early in the semester about their subject of study.

What graduate students often want to do is especially in a research capacity, you definitely want to meet with your professors and talk with them what they are working on and what you could be working on. That becomes a very customized discussion. I highly recommend they do that as early as they can. It is not necessary to have it at the beginning of the semester, but certainly within the first week or two weeks, they should meet with the professor and get very clear advice how to handle the class.
The professors encouraged students to share their ideas and opinions, even outside the classroom. Chinese students need to realize that approaching a professor was an essential part of academic study. They could learn more when they had good contact with their professors. Ethan recommended that Chinese students need to learn how to approach a professor in a positive manner:

Every time you get the syllabus from every class, your professor says what the office hours are. When I think about office hours, I don’t think about students coming in with big problems. I think about students smart enough to ask help if they need it. Lots of times when students come in to my office, there is a good resolution and problems get solved. . . . I think to Chinese students there is a certain courtesy and a certain level of politeness that’s expected. . . . I think it is usually a good idea to (make an appointment) . . . give the professor a general idea about what it is about.

In order to help the Chinese students adapt into U.S. culture, Frank talked with them and encouraged them by sharing his understanding of their situation. He instructed the Chinese students to learn about a professor’s preferred role in teaching-learning activities.

Just encouragement – show them that I understand their educational experience. Model the behavior with American students. Talk to them outside of class about Chinese and Chinese education to make them more comfortable . . . Just let them know that what American teachers want from them is to practice thinking through issues. The analysis used to think through a problem/issue is more important than “learning the correct answer.” You need to spend time talking with them so they know you as a person, not just an authority figure.
In the United States, the social position a professor holds in comparison to a student is not as formally structured as it is in China. Particularly in one-on-one, dyadic situations, the relationship is much more equal. Using good manners is always encouraged, and across time helps to build a personal relationship with the professor. Whether with professors, advisors, or other students, one-on-one conversations are one of the most efficient ways to ask questions and learn about the norms and values practiced in the U.S. culture. Jason described the difference between Chinese and U.S. values and norms in working with people holding different social positions.

We try to do in our office, what I try to do is to encourage the Chinese international students to reach out to their professors. I have tried to tell them that not only are they allowed to ask questions and challenge their professors; they are actually expected to do that here. . . . My relationship with somebody in the level that is higher than me gives me power. That’s probably true in China. Here it is not. What brings value is what you can do with the people you know. So I may be the very good friend with the president, but it is not because he is my friend that I am powerful. It is because he and I work together to do things together, to actually “do things” that bring us value. Remember that it is not just the personal relationship, but it is the good things you do because of the personal relationship, working together that as people we value in this country. . . . If I know the local party chief of the city, I am powerful because he is my friend and I can punish you or I can get the things done. It’s not true here. Just because I know the mayor, that’s not necessarily the reason I can get the things done because I work very closely with the mayor and I do things with the mayor. It doesn’t make sense here.
Participating in group projects. Many U.S. instructors assign students to work together in groups to solve a practical problem that involves critical thinking and includes the course subject matter as well as related content and process issues. Several steps need to be taken into consideration to complete a group project. First, students need to understand the academic requirements and the associated tasks. Second, students need to create a shared timeline to finish each section of the project on schedule. Third, students need to keep in close contact with each member of the group in regular meetings. In the meetings, students need to share what they know about the subject of the group problem, decide on individual tasks that are to be completed away from the group setting, and then bring their work together in order to complete the group project. Among the outcomes of group work, students learn the subject matter content, and perhaps more importantly, learn about the communication process needed to work together with other students. To communicate well with U.S. students, the Chinese students needed to learn more about American culture.

Before the group project, you need to quite understand the requirement and tasks of the project. In addition, you need to develop your own interests, learn more, and communicate with them actively so as to find some topics interested by both of you. This is helpful for you to understand deeply and develop friendship. . . . we were asked to create a training project using WebQuest. . . . I focused more on creating website and videos, and other American students focused more on discussing the instructional theories. . . . When I communicated with them, I could feel the progress in language. . . . I felt that I made progress in writing by reading what and how they wrote. (Amy)

Finishing a group project requires the students learn how to work as a team. Developing a shared understanding of who will complete what specific tasks and patient cooperation are vital
for students to build a good team atmosphere. Brian believed that teamwork could enrich his multicultural competence and also establish friendships with other students.

I believe that group members need to reach a consensus to finish a project. Consensus means that the group members should understand, empathize, and cooperate with each other. In this case, if a Chinese student was a green hand and had no idea of the process of communication, the group would be in big trouble when another person in the group only thought of themselves and let others do the tasks without making a contribution.

A team includes people with different backgrounds. People holding different values can behave differently in dealing with the assigned work. When a group member does not work on their task in a timely fashion, what can a group leader do to change the situation? How can the member be helped to improve the situation? When should a group leader or a group member have to complain about a lack of cooperation to the professor?

My former female classmate from Arabia did not do anything for the group project. The U.S. student complained about it to the professor immediately, but I considered saving face and finished her part instead of complaining to a professor. (Brian)

To some students . . . I worked to finish their part of the project. . . . At first, I did not talk to the professor or complain to them. . . . I usually sent him an email and followed up in the class. If it was not effective . . . I would do my best to finish the missing part so that the score of my group would not be affected. In the presentation, I would make a speech for the part that I did. I would report it to my professor and tell the professor who did not join in the group project totally. The professor would not give that student a score, but the rest of us must be scored. This is fair. (Carol)
The professors believed that group projects provided students with the opportunity to practice working together as a team. Communication and negotiation are important to maintain a team. Coordination, contribution, and evaluation can make team work better.

In a team project, the main thing that students need to learn is to discuss with the team the direction that the project will go, what they are trying to accomplish, set some goals and communicate frequently with team members . . . by “listening” . . . actively contributing . . . do your work . . . If you respect your teammates, you will always be on time, you will always show up to meetings, you always bring new information that you have worked on to move the project forward. . . . This is for all students. (Harry)

The professors believed that most students wanted to work well in a team. Sometimes complaints can be avoided and teamwork can be improved when the issues are discussed in a timely fashion. The professors suggested that a group could include in their project timeline a meeting to review whether everything was going on as originally scheduled. This mid-project evaluation was very important to hold group members accountable to the group for not completing their work on time. A group leader has the responsibility to do a mid-project evaluation to promote overall teamwork and encourage the team members to work hard.

A lot of professors prefer the students manage their own teams because they have to do that in the real world. . . . What needs to happen with your teamwork is that the team needs to agree on some milestones and deadlines and due dates. The professor will probably give certain due dates, like something might be due February 20th. The team should say if we are going to have this to the professor by February 20th, then we need by February 10th to accomplish these things, by February 5th the team needs to accomplish
these things, so if folks are falling behind schedules or having problems, and the problems become apparent before the whole thing is due. (Ethan)

Part of the role of a group leader is to draw out how the group members are feeling about the process, how they see the contributions going. . . . We do one (evaluate your performances) in the middle, so we can help people correct their behavior and be contributing members in the team to improve their performance. I think a good team leader understands who is contributing and helps those who are not contributing to feel like they could. (Harry)

Even though they had to work with students from different backgrounds and from different nations, the Chinese students, especially working as the team leaders, needed to evaluate team members’ performances, improve the part that needs to be changed, and advocate doing better. Harry provided a clear picture of teamwork. He emphasized that each member had responsibility to contribute to the project’s outcome.

Part of your learning, especially in business, is to be a manager, a decision maker. That means you have to judge. “It is hard for me to judge if I don’t know what you are contributing.” You have to be willing to step up and say this is what I have been doing, this is how I have been contributing, this is what is not working, this is who’s not working. It will be better if they were doing their jobs, so we can do our jobs. . . . I think it is important for Chinese students to step up and say what they believe is happening . . . it’s important for the team. You have to submit yourself to the team’s best interest. . . . If the issue reaches an extreme point, or looks like it is not going to get better, if the leader has talked with each individual student, but they refused to change their performance, then you go to the professor. . . . The key thing is to perform. (Harry)
Pointing out an issue holding the project from progress is the beginning of improvement because people may not be conscious of what is going on. Cultural differences can be a factor. Harry provided an example of Chinese students who did not yet develop the habit of “interrupting a conversation”:

I have the Chinese students whose situations were that they weren’t contributing because they were embarrassed to say something or they just didn’t feel it important to speak up. They also had good ideas, but they never gave it to them. Their teammates thought they didn’t care until someone said, “Hey, you don’t care because you don’t talk and you don’t speak up in class.” Oh, then it was like a light went on in the Chinese student’s head. They spoke up so much they became the team’s most famous member.

**Life in the community.** The Chinese students needed to understand several cultural differences when they learned to seek assistance. They needed to make a conscious effort to be involved in campus student activities, particularly in order to learn about the diverse cultures present in the campus and the local community. Sharing common activities with U.S. students outside the classroom, the Chinese students could learn to accept and appreciate many differences in the host environment.

**Seeking resources.** When they arrived at the university, most of the incoming Chinese students attended the orientation for international students. From the orientation, the Chinese students were provided with a variety of campus and local resources. The resources included information about specific campus student services and department, and introduced several professional staff members who coordinated the services. All of the students who were interviewed recognized that the international student orientation represented their first exposure to local campus culture.
I felt it (international student orientation) was very helpful in some matters, like how to ask for a specific assistance in a department, who you can talk with for an issue, and how to apply for scholarship and financial aid. . . . I can say that in the United States you will realize that these departments will work for you when you need them . . . such as how to keep an effective visa. (Brian)

Students can access student services on campus whenever they choose to do so. All student participants appreciated the value to them of the services offered, and they encouraged other new students from China to learn about the services, and in particular, to learn when it was important for them to do take full advantage of the services offered to them as a result of their university student status.

I think that students who have challenges need to consult a professional department. Graduate School, International Office, Counseling Center, and Career Services are great to provide professional service, very effective. International office often organizes some activities to involve international students together and sometimes provides opportunities for international students to access local people. Career Center can help students revise their resume and prepare for interviews. International students may have no experience of looking for a job in America. The Career Center can help them get familiar with American culture and things they need to know when looking for jobs. (Amy)

I asked assistance from the Office of Residential Life almost every semester, for I had to change my apartment. They really helped me a lot. I just went to their office and found a manager, then illustrated to them what my problems were. After I did that, I can always find some way out because they were really helpful and effective. (David)
Living in a new environment, dealing with cultural shock, overcoming a sense of isolation, and adjusting to different norms can create a lot of personal anxiety for international students. Among other departments, the Counseling Center provides psychological services for students to overcome challenges. Even though many Chinese students do not visit the Counseling Center, Brian suggested that Chinese students learn to appreciate the value of that department for their own cross-cultural adjustment.

New students should seek for assistance in the Counseling Center . . . if they feel depressed, frustrated, or self-closing. . . . We could meet and talk with many people in China, but everybody here is very busy with study and life. Hardly could we find a friend who had time to accompany you to get out of troubles and even listen to you. In China, when you visit a clinic for psychology treatment, you might be viewed as an abnormal person. Now I realize that the practice is the same to you as seeing a doctor for curing a common cold.

As a professional staff member, Jason recognized that many Chinese students were reluctant to seek assistance in some situations. He described the function of the Counseling Center to help them understand the value of its services to them. He wanted them to change their mindset from one of sickness to a supportive service agency.

In this country, the focus is on the individual. If the individual is not successful, we need to help the individual be successful. . . . I think the stigma connected with going to an official organization and asking for help is different. It is just taking advantage of the resources here . . . we need to do is to encourage Chinese students to know that number one, if they go to the Counseling Center, nobody else has to know if the student doesn’t
say anything to anybody. Counseling Center, it’s private. They are helping students be successful.

If they understood the role of each student service department, the Chinese students could effectively consult a relevant campus official when they needed assistance. The professional staff members introduced their philosophy of service on campus at the international student orientation. They encouraged Chinese students keep from withdrawing into their room and isolating themselves to understanding the details of the services and learning to communicate with them when they need personal support. Jason pointed out that the student services helped students solve some of their adjustment problems.

Generally, the students are served here. When they use those campus resources, the Counseling Center, the Writing Lab, International Office, we can help. . . . We constantly try to tell the students rules change, immigration especially. . . . If you got a question of immigration status, we want you to come because we know the most recent information. It is our job to help students understand that. . . . If you have trouble with your roommate, talk to your RA (resident assistant). Those people live on the floor and help you out.

Some departments hold workshops to deliver the latest information to students. They also provided regular training programs and workshops at convenient times. Lily described the career services offered in her department.

We have workshops throughout the year. All of the training we do can either happen in groups in workshops or can happen individually, so a student can decide whether they want to go to a workshop or they want to come to an individual one-on-one session or multiple one-on-one sessions. . . . We want students to come in right away when they get
here. . . In an ideal world, we would like to see a student at least once a year. . . That is an on-going relationship, an on-going process.

**Involvement.** Higher education in the United States views learning from student involvement in the campus community as important as student learning in a classroom. Campus involvement provides students the opportunity to practice actions that they will use in the real world after graduation. The on-campus out-of-class practice is a learning process to gain skills used in solving problems. Learning from practice, the Chinese students can also develop with the experience of interacting with American students and students from other nations. Student involvement outside the classroom will help international students to acquire personal accomplishments that are valuable for their learning and living in the host culture. David was impressed with his opportunity to participate in a student election in a residence hall.

I took part in the election of a resident assistant. I was the only international student. They were curious and asked my name, the pronunciation of my name, where I came from. The election included the speech of candidates. They introduced themselves and their perspectives of what to do and how to be responsible as a resident assistant. They took it very seriously. Then we wrote the name of the student who we trusted on a ballot. At last, the new resident assistant was generated and issued accordingly. It was interesting.

The professional staff members viewed student involvement as a second education outside the classroom. They described how the university approved student organizations and clubs for student engagement.

The biggest thing . . . is participating outside a classroom . . . as the goals on inside a classroom . . . the most valuable thing that Chinese students can learn is how to interact
with Americans. Try to make many friends with all students from China, from other countries, and from the United States. Get involved in those activities that you are interested in. . . . We encourage them to do that because while they go rock climbing, while they go water skiing, they practice their English, they learn how to solve problems together, the real life problems, like the water skiing club has raised one thousand dollars for them to go. How can we raise money in this country? What things can we do to earn money? (Jason)

The staff members advocated that Chinese students learn to interact with U.S. people when they are involved with campus events. The events provided Chinese students with a good opportunity to observe and interact with local people. They need to ask questions and to try new activities. When they became involved in out-of-class activities, the informal practice in communication with other students enabled them to learn English language skills much easier than in the formal classroom. If they found somebody having the same interests, it was also easier for them to become friends.

If students try and go, not go with their Chinese friends, go by yourself to an event, so you are forced to meet somebody else and make more friends. . . . For example, here we have the Recreation Center . . . last semester I used to Zumba [participate in dance exercises with Latin and International Music to develop physical fitness] on Saturday. Anybody can come . . . I found it is easier to make friends if you have some common interest outside studying. (Kathy)

One of the most important things for a successful transition in a college is . . . to find a social network . . . to emerge themselves into the American culture . . . The other thing is that they need to join clubs and organizations . . . and become active members . . . take an
advantage of university activities, so go to homecoming, go to the football games, go to the basketball games, go to the dances . . . just embrace that kind of culture . . . students just have to be brave and to try new things . . . and they just have to be ready to learn, make mistakes, and take advice about what to wear, what is acceptable, but I haven’t seen that many students make terrible mistakes. They just need to ask questions. . . . They will learn pretty quickly if they ask the question, if they observe, if they watch when other people are doing. . . . It is very interesting time in a student's life because it is very social, but you are learning in-depth information. (Lily)

Working as a volunteer for the Office of Community Engagement could provide some Chinese students with the opportunity to understand values and norms in the host culture outside of the institution. They could broaden their horizon and promote intercultural involvement, understanding and practice at the same time. Jason believed that the process of volunteering could help students to learn about U.S. culture in depth.

Volunteering is not very popular in China. People say why I would volunteer to serve community, but it’s a very big deal here. We try to encourage our students to participate in these activities, and then they can sort of understand what Americans think. Volunteering is important . . . You also learn how to navigate very different cultures . . . the student activities, the community, that’s where Chinese students can really get a second education, not just in a classroom.

The faculty members also believed that it was important for student success to be achieved outside the classroom. They hoped that the Chinese students could understand U.S. people and U.S. culture through their own observations, interactions, and reflections.
Look with an eye of trying to understand what Americans are really all about, not just the stereotypes that we present . . . not necessarily who we are in movies and on TV . . . but really try to understand who we really are as people . . . Learn what is good here. It is okay not to like everything that is here . . . The way to do that is to make friends. Get to visit people’s families. Try to go on Christmas break, or spring break. Try to get invited to somewhere with Americans to go and see how they really live. . . . You came here to learn about how it is here, so you have to accept the reality and appreciate it. You don’t have to do it. You don’t have to agree with it. You don’t have to make it part of your life. . . . it is universal any time you go to a different country. (Harry)

If students are going to succeed in a classroom, those out of class activities are important too; getting to know other people, getting to know other Chinese students, and then expanding your circle so that you get to know more and more people. . . . I also think it is important to have American friends, Indian friends, and French friends, and so on. . . . All Chinese students and all those things are important preparations for succeeding in the first semesters whether it is a freshman, master, or Ph.D. (Ethan)

**Appreciating diverse culture.** Campus culture is diverse in a university. Each university has its unique culture based on its philosophy, size, geographic area, population, race, and other elements. Chinese students can adapt into the host culture through participating in activities and interacting with other students on campus.

*Understanding the host culture in activities.* Playing or watching sports are important activities in the leisure time of U.S. students. The Chinese students who had the experience of exercising in a gym were attracted by the facilities and pleasant circumstances. David’s experiences in the gym made him observe U.S. student performance in the activities and the
order in the public area. He appreciated interpersonal politeness and behaviors in the exercises among U.S. students. He also came to understand the norms and rules of a game when he interacted with U.S. students.

I like the gym . . . I love to play basketball there. I felt my personal space was respected because other students did not touch my ball even if it was dropped. When the ball rolled far, it would be thrown back if it was close to other students. They were polite.

Sometimes, I was invited to join for a group activity. I noticed that U.S. students had good behavior and habits in the activity. Towels and cleaning spray were put beside the equipment. They cleaned the equipment and balls after they used them. I watched the other students and learned to do so. The swimming pool was great, too. . . . The regulations for distance swimming were definite and noticeable, so the students in this area wouldn’t be bothered.

U.S. higher education encourages students to take part in sports, which is vital in a community. A university provides athletic facilities for student involvement. Students could not only do exercises and play sport games, but also organize sporting events. The staff members encouraged the Chinese students to interact with U.S. students in an event.

We have the athletic teams. We want students to go to basketball games, to go to football games. . . . Students can organize some events by using the Recreation Center. We encourage that. . . . In fact, students can have flag dancing class in the morning and they can have a club. If Chinese students want to organize some events . . . seven or eight Chinese students . . . can create a club and invite everybody from the community. The university actually would give them money to start their club. . . . We have a person who works with students. Our office can do that. (Jason)
Supervised by several academic and student services departments, student organizations initiate and organize many activities in the university community. The Chinese students can take part in some activities if they are interested. Jason believed that students would enrich their experiences and have good personal development by joining one or two of the clubs.

We have student activity office. . . . There are hundreds of organizations from a fencing club to learn how to fence, to swimming clubs, to jogging clubs, to bicycle clubs, to cooking clubs. Students got together and started all kinds of activities . . . having them go and find something available and joining those clubs. If they do not see something and they want to create it, they can organize a club. Find the process to do that. Get their friends together and get start a club.

The professors agreed that Chinese students should take advantage and be involved in the on-campus activities. Frank encouraged the Chinese students to decide as early as possible to learn the host culture, promote English language proficiency, and take the risks outside their comfort zone by joining in a club or activity.

You need to join that organization and participate in these things, take full advantage of the opportunity that you face, not just always being comfortable with your classmates who speak your language and know your culture . . . it is just awareness and decision-it is not necessary being easier; it is not necessary being comfortable to allow you doing so to make the most experience, to experience the most things as you can.

*Appreciating the host culture via interaction.* Learning how to communicate and interact with U.S. students was important for the Chinese students living on campus. Always behaving in a typical Chinese fashion with only other Chinese students could be misunderstood by the U.S. students. Brian recognized the concept of “bottom line” by interacting with U.S. students.
Generally speaking, Chinese people consider other’s feeling before speaking out gently. Sometimes, Chinese students talk with U.S. students in this way and it could be regarded as not acceptable. . . . The U.S. students had the concept of bottom line. That meant you touched my bottom line, so I had to complain about it . . . I experienced this and then learned to speak out more directly.

The Chinese students expressed their difficulty in finding and maintaining an American friend. The professional staff members believed that interpersonal relationships were different in the United States than in China. Jason introduced the idea of informal relationships, about which a Chinese student might be confused.

Americans are more informal in their relationships. . . . Americans tend to have much smaller groups of friends and much larger groups of acquaintances, the people they see and talk to. Just because an American student is asking a Chinese student how they are doing, it doesn’t mean they are friends, just because an American is “friendly” doesn’t mean that they believe their Chinese person is a friend.

To be familiar with a new environment and host culture, the Chinese students needed to reach out and interact with students with diverse backgrounds. Sharing their own experience with U.S. people was a way to help understand each other. The Chinese students had more confidence when they appreciated diverse cultures in the world by learning more from other cultures and sharing their own culture with other people. Kathy believed that informal communication was very useful.

Having conversation and knowing people whom you feel comfortable talking to . . . the more you talk about what you think, the more you have the opportunity to hear from someone else . . . this really makes a big difference . . . that is essential and making easier
to feel comfortable is getting good positive feelings back from somebody that you trust and somebody you respect.

Summary
A total of 12 participants, four Chinese international students, four faculty members, and four staff members with a variety of backgrounds, were interviewed. The Chinese students have had more than one year living in the United States, while faculty and staff members have had abundant experience educating Chinese students. Their narration of experiences identified challenges Chinese international students may encounter when they reach campus and how to prepare for the transition from Chinese culture to U.S. culture.

The Challenges That the Chinese International Students Encountered

The challenges came from the language barrier, academic study inside and outside a classroom, and life in the community. The Chinese students had challenges in language expression and understanding specific cultural topics. They were not accustomed to classroom participation and discussions. Interaction, critical thinking, and debate were new concepts for them. They tried to perform as they had been taught to do in China, but they received poor evaluations, which created confusion. Lacking the experience of teamwork, they were even misunderstood as indifferent because of keeping silent when others expected them to speak. They did not know when and how to seek assistance in an academic or student services department. They tried to be diligent in study and they did not want to waste time in student activities, but as a consequence they lost the opportunity for student involvement. They felt isolated from the host culture because they had no clear idea how to interact with local students.

The Transition from Chinese Culture to U.S. Culture
To cope with the cross-cultural challenges, the transition can be made smoother based on self-preparation, academic study, and life in the community. The Chinese students and faculty and staff members provided similar points of view that Chinese students need to have intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity can promote the progress of acculturation.

Self-preparation is done with self-awareness of their identity and expectations of study abroad in the United States. Students need to have the ability to self-manage, which requires them to adjust their habits and have good time management skills. To understand cultural differences, they need to have the attitude of finding, acknowledging, and facing the differences in a more direct fashion. Useful attitudes include curiosity, being open-minded, being willing to interact with people, being willing to practice, and caring about others.

With self-awareness and positive attitudes toward the host culture, Chinese students can promote language proficiency with cross-cultural learning. To have better success in academic study, they have to understand the requirements and expectations of an academic program and their professor’s instructional methodology. To reach academic requirements and expectations, students need to learn to approach their professors, participate and interact with instructors and peers in a class, and adapt to the processes of critical thinking and logical reasoning, and to express themselves more directly with confidence. They also need to learn teamwork and make active contributions in group projects.

Study in the United States accompanies diverse life in the community. Chinese students need to understand how and when to seek the resources and assistance available in a department. They need to be involved in student activities and appreciate diverse cultures. Through the activities and interaction with U.S. students, the Chinese students can experience the host culture and adapt to it much more successfully.
The Chinese students who would have a successful transition need to have cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills to interact effectively and appropriately in the host cultural contexts. The participants pointed out the importance of preparation for awareness of learning methods, the willingness of accepting the host cultural characteristics, the ability of engagement, and the braveness of risk taking in everyday practice. They needed to understand the philosophy and objectives of higher education and the professor’s expectations. They also needed to respect and appreciate the diverse cultures on and off campus. The process of academic study and acculturation would help them have valuable experiences of gaining intercultural competence and developing as whole people to become leaders in a global society.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this present study was to explore elements helping Chinese international students’ successful transition into American higher education. The focus was to identify challenges presented in university study and campus life. What do Chinese students need to know about differences in academic requirements and social expectations? The goal was to help future Chinese international students to have a more successful international student experience by understanding and communicating ways to overcome challenges originating from cultural differences between Chinese and U.S. educational and social practices?

To understand these educational and social issues, I interviewed 12 participants in three categories. They were Chinese international students who were studying in a U.S. university more than one academic year, experienced professors who taught Chinese students, and professional student affairs staff members who assisted Chinese students in their educational and personal development. The participants who provided their perspectives confirmed that Chinese international students needed a process of transition from Chinese culture into U.S. culture to have more successful experiences in their host country.

The following research questions guided the collection and analysis of data resulting from the interviews:

1. How do Chinese international students describe the challenges they have experienced to fit into U.S. campus culture?
2. What do Chinese international students believe is the essential assistance that they need from U.S. faculty and/or staff members for their successful transition?

3. How do U.S. faculty and student affairs professionals describe adjustment issues they perceive are encountered by Chinese students?

4. What recommendations do U.S. faculty and student affairs professionals have for assisting Chinese students?

This chapter deals with the research findings in Chapter 4 related to these questions. Then I will explore the relationship of the findings with the literature of intercultural competence and student development in U.S. higher education institutions. The limitations of the study will be discussed. Implications will be suggested for Chinese international students, faculty members, and staff members working with Chinese international students. This chapter will conclude with suggestions for continuing inquiry into methods of promoting successful cultural and educational transitions for Chinese international students.

The Perspectives of Challenges and Adaptation

Culture is described as having two sets of components, the elements of “subjective culture (perspectives) and elements of objective culture (products)” (J. Bennett et al., 2003, p. 243). Subjective culture, the perspectives, are represented by one’s personal worldview in a society, such as language use, nonverbal behavior, communication style, cognitive style, and cultural values (J. Bennett et al., 2003). The challenges stemming from this invisible subjective culture are difficult for persons outside the culture to perceive.

The Chinese student respondents reflected that they accessed the information via the Internet, books, magazines, and TV programs where subjective information was available. On the other hand, even if they learned the knowledge before they came to the United States, they
felt confused when they lived in the host environment. They were unable to interpret the nuances of subjective culture until they experienced it in their daily lives. These Chinese students were challenged to recognize and adapt to the behavioral patterns that local citizens regarded as necessary and appropriate in public. From academic study to daily life, Chinese students believed that they needed to make adjustments in classroom participation and discussion, expressing their ideas, asking questions, adapting to student-centered instructional procedures, approaching professors outside the classroom, seeking assistance, being involved in student activities, appreciating diverse campus cultures, and understanding educational legal issues and responsibilities.

Chinese international students were frustrated if they could not figure out what and how they should adjust their responses to the host culture. They were puzzled about what was going on in a class if they could not understand the intent of instructional activities. They argued and even denied the value of unfamiliar methods of instruction used by professors in the United States. They doubted the effectiveness of these strange classroom procedures. They ignored student involvement and development in student affairs programs, and exclusively emphasized academic study.

The professors and professional staff members carefully observed their Chinese international students and noted their hesitancy in classroom behaviors and interpersonal comfort, as well as in their comfort with cognitive styles. They could only interpret these students’ behavior in the context of Chinese culture, and recognized these students needed to make some special adjustments to achieve success in the new, international educational environment. They stressed the importance of student roles in student development, the relationships between professors and students, and the values and norms. Among these
adjustments were the importance of finding ways to interact with U.S. students outside the classroom, generating a new sense of the relationship between students and professors, and learning to act confidently on a very divergent set of cultural values and norms compared to their Chinese foundation.

Based on their differing cultural exposure to life experiences, the faculty and staff participants provided competing explanations for Chinese student “silence” in the classroom. Ethan regarded Chinese students as reluctant to participate in the discussion and said that students needed to contribute in a class. George believed that cultural differences explained what made these students keep silent because he found that students were taught in this way in China, Ukraine, and Britain. Harry thought that Chinese students had to recognize the importance of participation for their personal benefit because it was the standard U.S. classroom procedure. Frank instructed his Chinese students to learn how to participate in the teaching-learning activities and concluded that these students could adapt to becoming comfortable in participation and discussion if they were consciously prepared to do so.

These Chinese students appeared to not be aware of the importance of out-of-class student involvement and the value of student accomplishments as a value-added aspect of higher education. The professional staff members worked to encourage students to become active in non-academic, social, and service activities that promoted intercultural understanding. Lily advised Chinese students to enjoy social life as other college students did, and learn more about the host culture by interacting with local people. Kathy recommended Chinese students learn to appreciate diverse cultures by being involved in non-class activities and having conversations with people in the host culture. Michelle believed that Chinese students needed to prepare themselves during their international study experience to acquire skills to interact with people,
solve problems, and appreciate diverse cultures. Jason stated that education outside the classroom was as important as that which occurred inside a classroom. He encouraged the use of campus recreational facilities for student involvement, and promoted students to gain practical work experiences in their academic discipline via service-learning activities. He pointed out that students needed to develop as a whole person.

Many of the hurdles to overcome in a successful transition to international study occur during the first year. With the support of academic professors and student affairs professionals, most of these cultural and social adjustments can be managed with confidence. As Frank pointed out, the purpose of international study was to learn the foreign culture, and Chinese students needed to understand and adjust to the host culture. Adjusting to the host culture not only meant respecting and appreciating objective culture presented in the host environment, but also understanding and accepting subjective culture, the perspectives which were critical for healthy adjustment into their academic study and daily life. Successful adjustment to the host culture will not occur immediately, but will take some time, effort, and exposure. The transition could be made more efficient when the professors introduced the goals, requirements, expectations, and procedures of U.S. higher education to these students, while the student affairs professionals introduced and educated these students with the philosophy, objectives, and procedures of civic and campus life outside the classroom.

**The Transition Process**

Chinese international students’ transitions include four areas: self-awareness and attitude, English language proficiency with cultural learning, academic study, and daily life. Self-awareness and attitude are the foundations for readiness and acceptance of the host cultural differences. English language proficiency can be promoted with cultural learning, which is
helpful in understanding the host culture, especially the subjective culture, and behave appropriately in the host cultural contexts. In academic study, the transition focuses on understanding the expectations of programs, distinguishing student roles and professor roles, and cooperating with professors and peers in academic activities. Living on campus, being familiar with campus culture, and being involved in student activities are as important as study in an academic program. Intercultural competence is accumulated by student involvement in diverse campus cultures.

**The Importance of Awareness and Attitude**

Chinese students studying in a U.S. university would accumulate intercultural competence when they mastered an intercultural “mindset, skillset, and heartset” (J. Bennett, 2008, p. 13). To have a successful transition, they needed to be aware of the potential cultural differences that they could encounter in the host environment. In addition, they needed to have the flexibility to accept the differences and to adapt into the different culture. To adapt into the host environment, Chinese students needed to keep in mind that the U.S. culture is different from their own Chinese culture. They needed to be open-minded to explore the differences. The attitude of being open-minded or being closed-minded could affect the ability to adjust to U.S. society.

All the faculty and staff participants stressed the importance of being open-minded when the Chinese students became involved in the community. Frank mentioned that an online program completed in China could not replace the experiences of study abroad because the students were still embedded in their own culture. The Chinese students who plan to study in a U.S. university need to have the courage of leaving their comfort zone and taking risks to acquire new intercultural skills. Jason advocated that the Chinese students needed to be willing to take
risks and use their higher order thinking skills, such as being observant, being persistent, and being reflective. If something does not work at first, “try, try again,” and learn to identify which actions worked and which did not. Reflect and compare success with failure in order to learn from failure and to not repeat the mistakes later on, but embrace more and more success. These coping skills are higher order thinking skills, in which the higher level of thinking will be impeded if the lower level of thinking cannot be reached.

The process of transition covers each aspect of life and study, even in minute details. Something as simple as learning how to order food at a restaurant or finding a grocery stocking Chinese food is very important to the Chinese students’ adjustment to their daily lives. In their academic studies, they also need to be aware of many unstated academic differences. For instance, Ethan demonstrated that the Chinese students needed to understand how to make a plan for their studies after they got a syllabus. When they received a syllabus from the professor at the first class of each course, they may wonder why the students are provided with it since they did not receive such a document from their Chinese professors. After they read through it, they can find the content for sessions with the timeline of each reading assignment, paper work, project, presentation, fieldwork, and examination. With this syllabus, they should have a picture of what will be going on in each course for each class day in a whole semester. They need to consider how to allocate their time and prepare for their study before a class. When they have all the syllabi for each course in a semester, they have to compare these syllabi together for efficient time management.

They also have to realize that the highly competitive nature of primary and secondary schools in China results in strong mental, emotional, and social conditioning; a “mindset” (J. Bennett, 2008, p. 13). The coping skills associated with that competitive environment in order to
be successful are more a hindrance than a help when Chinese students enter a university in the United States since students in the U.S. are expected to behave more cooperatively and collaboratively.

As a result, Chinese students motivated to study in the United States need to prepare for their transition into the international educational environment with curiosity for exploring the host culture, actively adapting into the host environment, being open-minded, taking risks with a positive attitude toward failure, and withholding cultural judgments. A healthy curiosity facilitates Chinese students to figure out cultural differences and ways to achieve a successful transition.

**Language and Culture**

Many Chinese students have more difficulty hearing and speaking English, than in reading and writing English. Studying in a U.S. university, Chinese students improve their comprehension of spoken English and clearly expressing their ideas by interacting with native speakers. As Harry stated in his interview most U.S. students, faculty, and staff members understood that international students struggled with spoken English. Some professors gave special consideration for their students' language difficulties, particularly early in a program of study. Chinese students need to learn to speak clearly and distinctly, particularly for communicating with U.S. students even though they are talented in all other areas of scholarship. Language fluency occurs with continuing practice, especially when one is surrounded by people speaking the language one wishes to learn.

Learning language should be combined with learning the culture. J. Bennett (2008) described that without cultural learning, those who learn only the language may “insult people at ever-higher levels of sophistication” and the rudeness in their articulation can be an
“unrecoverable error” (p. 17). Chinese students need to grasp the opportunity of practicing English language. Inside a classroom, they need to express their perspectives through individual participation and discussion. They also need to have the courage to ask a question. Through language expression and questioning, their ideas can be analyzed and reframed. Expressing themselves helps develop skills in critical thinking and logical reasoning. The interaction facilitates the whole group’s understanding of the topics, which promotes Chinese students to realize, understand, and appreciate their professors and peers. The details will be pointed out in a latter part of the present chapter under the heading of academic study.

Chinese students need to realize that as much or more cultural learning goes on outside a classroom as subject matter learning goes on inside a classroom. Outside a classroom, Chinese students can practice their English expression by being involved in student activities. Recommended by Kathy and Jason, taking part in these out-of-class events provides them with more opportunity of meeting people and interacting with those who have the same interests as they do. They can share their interests freely, learn to solve a problem, seek out resources, work to cooperate and coordinate, and grasp the skills of negotiation and compromise. The details will be pointed out later in the present chapter under the heading Daily Life.

Learning about the host culture is critical for a successful transition (Chen, 1999; Chen, 1994; Sun & Chen, 1997). Combining cultural learning with language learning is the beginning for Chinese students to review their own culture, which arouses cultural self-awareness. Kathy mentioned that the Chinese students needed to talk with local people. Through conversation, people could understand each other and the cultural differences could be clarified and accommodated. The interaction with local people is an effective way to promote their cultural self-awareness. Cultural self-awareness is the first priority to have in order to gain intercultural
sensitivity and to change their mindsets. Learning culture, Chinese students will have the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and behave appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts. Learning language in the real world provides Chinese international students with opportunities to observe interpersonal communications, to understand an individual’s worldview, to learn to interact with people effectively, and to gain the values and norms underlying the host environment. Students not only improve their English language proficiency, but also increase cognitive flexibility, understand cultural humility, as well as become tolerant to ambiguity. Cultural learning helps Chinese students to increase their mastery of intercultural competence.

**Academic Study**

Before Chinese students’ departures, almost every Chinese family has developed a blueprint for their child’s study in the United States. Chinese students usually set higher standards for themselves than they would have done in China for their academic pursuits. After they study in a U.S. classroom, the students experience myriad cultural and educational differences and come to feel that the study skills that were formerly successful in Chinese education are now much less effective (C. Chen, 1999; Cuyjet et al., 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2009; Zhou et al., 2005). The resulting dissonant situation questions their ability and confidence, especially in the first semester. Puzzlement, frustration, and depression are common. On the other hand, their professors sense the conflict between different academic performance and behavioral expectations these international students do not clearly understand. When the professors communicate with Chinese students, the professors mentored their Chinese international students had to change their mindset to understand U.S. philosophy of higher education and adapt to U.S. educational procedures and methods. Changing their mindset
requires that Chinese students shift their cultural perspectives. They have to understand and accept the goals and objectives of U.S. higher education. When they master the educational procedures and methods, they come to appreciate the underlying educational philosophy. They can review their own culture and reconcile it with the host culture, which supports their post-graduate multicultural competence.

The U.S. educational system is focused on a student-centered instructional mode (Dewey, 1938). The roles of student and professor in this system are different from that of Chinese education. Understanding the roles of student and professor in the context of the U.S. system helps Chinese students to make a successful transition by understanding and accepting the professor’s educational expectations, the methods of classroom participation and interaction, adapting successfully to U.S. teaching methods, and working on group projects.

**Expectations.** Based on Dewey’s progressive education, educational practices should meet the needs of student development to promote their interests. The theory of progressive education highlights the students’ roles in the educational enterprise, while the roles of an educator are to arouse curiosity, promote initiative, and facilitate desires and purposes with individualized attention given to each learner.

From the beginning, Chinese students have to realize the differences between the students’ roles and the professors’ roles in educational procedures (Kolb, 1981, 1984, 1985). Professors regard the college students as mature adults, which means that Chinese students need to take personal initiative and plan their academic study. The professors’ expectations do increase with advancing levels of education as the college students grow from first semester freshmen to doctoral-level students. Professors expect that students will gradually increase their level of complex thinking and relative understanding of societal issues. In doing so, they will
become more confident and assertive in the teaching-learning process. Achieving these advanced role expectations can be carried out within the academic discipline from introductory to upper-level courses. The academic norms and protocols change with different academic disciplines, depending on what the ultimate goal of the discipline is, such as advancing knowledge of theory, research, or practice. Different rules of evaluation are generated from the norms and protocols. The criteria of excellence vary for students across different disciplines and institutions. To achieve a successful academic outcome, Chinese international students must adjust to U.S. standards of academic excellence and learning outcomes.

**Classroom participation and interaction.** Within the student-centered educational mode, students are not just passive learners. They are viewed as independent actors in terms of active reasoning and thinking, and self-pursuit of educational objectives (Dewey, 1938). Each of them absorbs valuable knowledge with increasing independent thinking and interprets that knowledge for their own self-pursuits. Teaching methods thus emphasize student input and cooperative participation in the overall learning process.

Chinese students need to realize the differences between Chinese and U.S. educational procedures, which in turn helps them to be involved actively in teaching-learning activities. Sitting in the front of the classroom and introducing themselves to their U.S. classmates are good starts for developing further participation. They also need to observe classroom situations carefully, watching what is the same or different from their prior classroom experiences in China. Then, noticing the differences, they must learn the protocols to cope with the differences.

One valued aspect of U.S. education is to develop openness to new ideas and new ways of thinking about an issue. Conversation or dialogue is an effective way to clarify perspectives and to create new ideas. Ethan stated that students are expected to contribute in a classroom.
Talking in class is a major coping skill that Chinese students need to develop. It is not only a means of measuring their mastery of content subject matter, but also provides rich opportunities to create new perspectives.

The process of participating in class does indeed create cognitive dissonance in the minds of many students, whether or not they were born in the United States. Many faculty members view such cognitive dissonance as part of the process of developing critical thinking. With critical thinking, students are encouraged to learn by asking questions. Asking a question shows interest and strength in learning. U.S. professors believe that being willing to ask a question makes higher education more meaningful. Chinese students need to take interpersonal and intrapersonal risks to speak in class and ask questions or participate in discussions.

To better participate in class, Ethan suggested that Chinese students need to learn some American history. References to events in American history are common points of communication in many classrooms even though history may not be the topic studied in the course.

In the past 30 years, more and more Chinese students came to study in the United States, which helped them understand U.S. campus culture. Frank witnessed Chinese student changes in learning across that time. When his Chinese students were instructed about the student roles for the first time, they were shocked. The class was permeated by trepidation or fear, which was the reason Frank communicated with students outside the classroom. The students eventually learned the skills of critical thinking and the requirements of individual interpretation of a professor’s perspectives. These students performed very well by showing interest, openness, and quality in participation.
Chinese students need to practice formal and informal speaking, such as coping skills in a classroom and for general conversation afterwards. Faculty members need to realize that Chinese students need special support to make the transition from passive learning in China to active participation in U.S. classroom discussions. They can create the circumstances for Chinese students to find their own personal level of comfort in classroom participation.

**Teaching methods.** In the United States, students are placed at the center of the educational enterprise (Dewey, 1938). Their experiences are viewed as the foundation from which new knowledge and skills will be generated. Chinese students need to understand that the learning process includes approving or arguing perspectives, demonstrating them by putting them into practice, and creating new perspectives based on classroom interaction. This process brings about the concept of critical thinking, with which most Chinese students are not familiar. They doubt the value of teaching methods of critical thinking and even refuse to adapt to it, but instead wait for a standard answer which is confirmed by a professor. For a long time, they realize that they have benefitted from that method in their home country and expect to do so equally in the United States. At first Brian was quite comfortable with standard Chinese instructional methods, but when he finally changed his mind, he went so far as to advocate changing teaching methods in China.

The professors interviewed for the purposes of the present study believed that students needed to absorb perspectives from textbooks, peers, professors, as well as through individual thinking and interpreting of the information. They advised that students be open-minded, think critically, and express their ideas with logical reasoning. They stressed the value of solving a problem with critical and creative thinking.
To support active teaching-learning procedures, the role of a professor can be shifted from that of a coach to a communicator, from a guide-taskmaster to a role model (Kolb, 1981, 1984, 1985). Generally, they coach students in thinking and arguing, rather than just giving a “right” answer. That is the reason for the professors to encourage students being brave, even having the courage to be wrong, and then working to seek out a better solution. Chinese students need to change their mindset and work to accommodate diverse perspectives.

In the United States, instructors require students to think together with them. Through critical thinking and analytical reasoning, the students, particularly the graduate students, are expected to push back, to examine and reflect with the professors about concepts and perspectives. The deeper the student-instructor involvement, the more advanced the level of education.

The U.S. philosophy of education advocates that professors and students are learners together (Freire, 1970; Kolb, 1981). Out-of-class communication is an expectation in U.S. higher education. The Chinese students need to learn to communicate with professors about class work outside a classroom. They can easily find the office hours which are posted in a syllabus on the first day of class. Professors may expect that students will visit them during these hours when they have questions.

Asking questions is an important part of active learning (Wei et al., 2007). Professors encourage students taking risks to ask a question. They believe that with greater interaction, they can figure out the degree of students’ subject-matter mastery and provide more assistance for their development. They respond to students who show curiosity, willingness to learn and question, and demonstrate sincere effort. David was rewarded with an important resource
because he stepped out to ask a question. He realized that his personal risk to ask a question was a critical difference compared to other students.

Chinese students were learning how to learn. They need to avoid cultural misperceptions of how to behave politely toward a professor. In the United States, it is not so much that you know a powerful person, but that you can work with this person to achieve a valuable shared goal.

**Group projects.** Working on group projects prepares students for interpersonal activities and communication in the professional world after graduation. In teamwork, students need to work with others who have different backgrounds, abilities, visions, and philosophies. The team leader must understand each member and motivate them to improve their performances. Each of them should work for the team’s best interest, while a team leader should hold the team accountable for the promised tasks. Both formal and informal interactions are of the same importance.

The process of working on a project is often more important than the final product to some degree. Learning to work effectively is critical. A whole project needs to be broken down into small pieces and be finished with several steps in the timeline approved by each member. To work well with other members, Chinese students need to work on the task, be good listeners and good contributors to conversation. Silence is not good for being a team member. Chinese students must learn how to behave in interpersonal interactions with other members.

In case a team member does not contribute, other members and the leader have the responsibility to finish the project. More importantly, a team leader needs to stress the practice of how individuals work together to reach the outcome. The behavior of that team member
should be changed with an interpersonal confrontation. When a team leader works to improve the situation, the methods of interaction and communication should be considered.

When they successfully adapt to the new academic environment, Chinese students understand the expectations and requirements, learn to participate in class, approach a professor to learn better, and work with a team. They can measure their progress little by little, which helps them gradually revise the value of traditional Chinese pedagogy during their international study experience. Some professors who are involved with students may participate in conversations and activities help Chinese students develop new cultural and academic coping skills. This period of reflection and revision is critical for Chinese students to realize how they can change their mind and performance.

**Daily Life**

Many parents pay more attention to their children’s academic scores in China. The Chinese students believed that they needed to focus on academic study first. They did not have the idea of student involvement outside the classroom. If they had to choose between study and activity, their values and norms made them feel conflicted in the host culture. On one hand, they learned the idea of being involved in activities; on the other hand, they felt that they had to “sacrifice” their leisure time for academic study. Most of them chose to give up the time being involved in student activities.

The faculty and staff participants advocated that the Chinese students needed to take part in student activities. The professional staff members stressed the importance of student involvement for student development and accomplishments. They introduced the organizations and facilities on campus for student involvement. They described how the Chinese students
could participate in these events and how they could communicate with and interact with U.S. students.

In the host culture, Chinese students need to learn to accept cultural norms and appreciate them even though they do not have to like them, or to practice them. To accept cultural norms, they need to expand their circle of acquaintances well beyond spending time with just other Chinese-speaking students. They should find the best attributes of a people and culture by taking the necessary risks to gain sufficient immersion into the culture. David provided an example when describing situations that occurred in the gym. He appreciated the students’ behavior in sports and maintaining the facilities. The Chinese students need to be open-minded and keep a healthy curiosity to understand cultural norms and appreciate the people practicing those norms.

Cultural immersion is an important learning activity outside a classroom, bringing about cultural adjustments toward adaptation. For most Chinese students who study a bachelor’s program, they can get involved in residence hall life as a means of out-of-class educational and cultural development. They can also join in the activities in a student club or start a club if they take the initiative. In a university, there is a strong social learning component to undergraduate education for all students. The Chinese students need to take the risks to ask about developing cultural understandings from the very beginning of the university experience.

**Related to Recent Literature**

Several authors recently reflected on the value of Chinese international students’ cross-cultural experiences in English language-oriented countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and Australia. Some issues that were examined in Chinese students’ adjustment included language barriers, lack of coping skills, and not understanding the host culture (Crose, 2011; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lusting,
Asians were viewed as less likely to seek counseling services because of language barriers and lack of cultural commonality with mental service providers (Hyun et al., 2007).

Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) suggested that the conceptions of cultural identity played a critical role in the formation of international social networks. International students’ acculturation connected their communicative social, cultural, and emotional adjustment with perceptions of American culture, while confidence and appreciation increased their competencies. Adaptation and transformation, which were regarded as two critical perspectives for international student transition, resulted from motivation and engagement (Volet & Jones, 2012). By engaging in self-directed activities, Chinese students can achieve successful learning outcomes (Johnson & Luo, 2012). These students’ self-awareness and reflections were effective connections to their leadership development. They had the awareness of self and others, understanding situations and contexts, and application of internal models and theories to external opportunities for learning and development.

Successful transition not only requires Chinese students’ hard work in achieving adaptation, but also needs understanding and accommodating from those within the host culture. Based on the different educational systems and teaching methods, Crose (2011) suggested faculty members assist international students in adapting to the teaching–learning procedures by using varying teaching methods. He proposed that educators needed to understand the challenges from international learners. Academically, Chinese international students needed to adjust to educational expectations and pedagogies. Professors needed to introduce and guide their learning in an inviting classroom environment and to encourage students to dialogue and question in the classroom. Faculty needed to be proactive in balancing equal engagement of all students in a classroom. Informal interactions were proposed to develop intercultural awareness.
and relationships with U.S. students. The relationships between Chinese students and professors were vital to student success. Faculty’s availability and caring supported Chinese students both socially and academically.

For a better transition, Smith, Nayda, and Rankin (2011) provided strategies assisting international students’ adjustment in daily life, including accessing appropriate accommodations, finding culturally appropriate food, using transportation, making friends, engaging in social activities, and accessing healthcare. Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) also suggested either U.S. students or international students needed to take full advantage of the institutional resources and opportunities, such as the international student orientation available in a host university. On the other hand, if student affairs professionals understood the situations of Chinese international students, they would better serve their adjustment and meet their needs (Fischer, 2013).

Support programs were proposed in place to meet the Chinese student needs (Fischer, 2013). U.S. students needed to be encouraged to participate in the initial meeting with international students (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). Student affairs professionals should make a greater effort to organize activities to facilitate social connections for international students, while ensuring that U.S. students would be involved in every stage of the process.

**Reflective Theories**

Chinese students who study in the United States fit student development theories. Their sojourners’ experience of transition can be explained by the DMIS (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). Chinese international students also encounter similar challenges as U.S. college students in the pursuit of academic excellence and personal development. The model of epistemological
reflection and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992) illustrates their developing patterns. The international students can be helped with intervention to improve their underlying worldview.

The Developmental of Intercultural Sensitivity

DMIS reflects the model of the transition in underlying worldview from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism (M. J. Bennett, 2004). An individual’s worldview can be promoted with the experiences of accumulating knowledge, increasing skills, and changing attitude. The more the communication and experience, the greater the intercultural sensitivity Chinese students acquire. The greater the intercultural sensitivity, the better the intercultural competence they harvest.

M. J. Bennett (1986, 1993) described the individual’s development of intercultural sensitivity at six stages. Educators need to diagnose their students’ status and provide intervention to help students develop cognitively, skillfully, and reflectively. Students will gain intercultural competence in learning and practice. Based on diverse personal backgrounds and the length of dwelling in the United States, the Chinese student participants’ experiences reflected on some stages of DMIS.

Ethnocentrism presents with three stages: Denial, Defense, and Minimization. None of the Chinese student participants behaved at the stage of Denial (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). When they came to the university, they understood the differences in U.S. educational system and society. They could not ignore or avoid these cultural differences in academic study and daily life.

However, more than ten years’ education in China made them form regular thinking—a fixed mindset, which is a characteristic of the Defense stage. Some of them felt uncomfortable with the differences because they were unfamiliar with the philosophy and objectives of higher education in the United States. Brian confirmed definitely different teaching methods in a U.S.
classroom. When a student asked even a very simple question, the instructor immediately answered it. He was shocked and thought the professor was not treated politely because it was impossible to act in that way in China. He believed that a professor was the person of authority in a class. The discussions in a classroom without the confirmation from a professor made him feel uneasy. “I could not say this was a good teaching method.” He preferred Chinese methods in which “each question has a standard answer and a perfect result.” Brian viewed Chinese methods as superior to American methods at that time. Brian’s perspective demonstrates an ethnocentric view.

The Chinese student participants did not talk about cultural similarities between China and the United States. That could be the result of the interview conversation focusing on cultural differences. In this research study, no evidence showed that the Chinese student participants behaved at the stage of Minimization, which is to ignore any apparent cultural differences.

Ethnorelativism presents with three stages: Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). The Chinese student participants demonstrated some evidence of the stages at ethnorelativism. They expressed their curiosity and passion to study in the United States. They wanted to learn new knowledge and skills. In daily life, they recognized the differences in verbal behavior and communication style. David felt interested in the election of a Resident Assistant for the first time because the students were very serious in the procedures without any supervision from a staff member. He mentioned that he felt comfortable with talking to U.S. students. “They took it very seriously. . . . It was interesting.” That shows his experience of approaching U.S. campus culture.

More interaction and engagement gave the Chinese students more opportunity to learn the patterns of the behaviors, which facilitated acceptance. Brian understood U.S. students’
concept of “bottom line” and learned to express it directly as a U.S. student would do. In the gym, David played basketball with U.S. students. He observed U.S. students’ behaviors in the activities. He appreciated that U.S. students observed the regulations and put everything in order in the public area after they used the equipment. David did the same as the U.S. students did. All the Chinese student participants stressed the importance of being involved in the activities organized by Chinese Student Council as well. The Chinese students’ performance shows their evidence of Adaptation.

All the Chinese student participants emphasized the importance of improving English language proficiency and increasing knowledge of U.S. culture by interacting with local citizens. They understood the importance of developing effective and alternative communication skills in the host cultural contexts. Amy and her peers tried to ask her professor to join an activity with them. David realized how well his professor helped him when he asked questions about a project and got valuable resources from his professor. This experience facilitated his understanding of how to learn from his professor, which facilitated his adaptation.

The longer Chinese students stayed in the United States, the more they recognized the patterns rooted in the host culture. The accumulation of intercultural sensitivity assists the maturity of distinguishing different values in different cultural contexts. Brian realized U.S. teaching methods were different from the Chinese methods and argued against U.S. methods first. After several years’ study, he recognized the value of the procedures and expressed that he would like to combine this method in Chinese education in the future. This is a statement illustrating the mediation toward two different teaching methods. These observations render the evidence demonstrating the movement toward the ethnorelativist view.
The Development of Epistemological Reflection

Baxter Magolda’s (1992) model of epistemological reflection explores the trend of U.S. college student cognitive development from absolute knowing to transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing. At the stage of Absolute Knowing, students believe knowledge is certain and they obtain knowledge from the instructor. At the beginning, Brian’s argument against U.S. teaching methods illustrated he was at the stage of Absolute Knowing. He was accustomed to the standard answer confirmed by his instructors in China. In a U.S. classroom, he worried about missing something important in discussion if his instructor did not confirm each knowledge point. He believed that a professor was an authoritarian who delivered knowledge and ensured that students mastered the knowledge. Brian was not the only such case. George mentioned his Chinese students did not argue with him, but accepted his words immediately without any question. These cases demonstrate an absolute knowing view.

Baxter Magolda (2004) assumed that cognitive development was established with constructivist foundation. Student epistemological development reflects “socially constructed and context-bounded” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 31) combinations. When Chinese students enter a U.S. university, they figure out what is going on in a class, make measurements to what they learn, and come to a conclusion whether they are satisfied with their study. Some Chinese students felt the gap and doubted their capability to overcome the challenges. Carol had to drop out of a class because she felt that she could not handle the details in class, such as role playing, putting forward a couple of questions to the speaker in a presentation, attending a conference, and providing the report of the conference with comments and suggestions.

Obviously, the Chinese student participants had a cultural gap in following U.S. teaching methods of accepting knowledge. As some of them mentioned, their Chinese professors
definitely wanted students to complete independent work instead of group work. After all, the students would be given complete standard answers to all the questions from a professor. The standard answers included a complete possible solution to some specific question. A professor would also give students a complete answer with reasonable assumptions and logical reasoning. In the Chinese educational system, a professor usually leads students to reach the epistemological level of contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Carol finished her four-year bachelor’s program in China before she came to the United States. U.S. graduate education set her into the level of logical reasoning and practice in the real world. Students needed to work out solutions by themselves. They needed to figure out the problems of a topic and trace the clues of the assumptions. To solve the problem, students needed to provide logical reasoning which could lead to rational answers. Carol had to drop out of the class because she was shocked and could not deal with the differences between her assumptions of the procedures in U.S. higher education and her experiences in her classes.

The Development of Self-Authorship

Self-authorship (Baxter-Magolda, 2001) verifies four phases of movement on self-definition associated with cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Self-authorship provides student transformation from reliance on authority to standing alone on self beliefs. Cognitively, self-authorship connects with epistemological reflection. U.S. higher education implements more student discovery than faculty instruction. Student-driven methodology challenges these Chinese students who are accustomed to totally following instruction. However, these students who have the goal of pursuing academic excellence work had to “make sense of marginalizing experiences” (Pizzolato, 2004, p. 426). They finally adapt to the requirement. David demonstrated self-authorship development in a cognitive aspect. As a
freshman, David mentioned that he made progress from the second semester because he understood being proactive and how to manage his life and study. He figured out what and how he could learn better gradually. His autonomy in academic study was established, which effectively helped his development. He expressed that he felt good when he got an A for the course.

With self-authorship, students feel unsatisfied and need a sense of self to construct internal foundations. Their internal foundations make up internal beliefs which guide their action to cope with the new environment. Self-authorship helps Chinese student self-promotion by setting up their goals, recognizing their abilities, knowing appropriate behavior in different cultural contexts, seeking available assistance, and implementing coping skills (Pizzolato, 2004, 2005). This is the integration with DMIS (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993). The Chinese students demonstrated the self-authorship in the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects. Carol suggested that graduate students talk with their advisors as early as possible for the information of academic plans. David and Brian encouraged more involvement in student activities. Amy stressed communication with one’s advisor and to let the advisor understand the student's goals. She believed that the establishment of good relationships with an advisor would be a facilitator to academic development and career pursuits.

**Limitations**

My study was a qualitative research to determine the challenges Chinese international students encountered and the elements for their successful transition from Chinese culture to U.S. culture. I selected my interview participants from Chinese students, faculty, and staff members to get multidimensional perspectives. The Chinese students had more than one year of
experience in the United States, while the faculty and staff members educated Chinese international students for several years or more.

The methods of interview had limitations. First, the participants’ lives were ever-changing. For their past challenges, some of them narrated with a light touch to avoid a negative mood. Some of them felt relieved when I shifted the topic from their challenges to the advice to the new Chinese students. Second, as some faculty and professional staff members had limited student population and/or limited information about Chinese culture, it was difficult for them to provide a complete analysis.

After I talked with Chinese student participants in Chinese, I translated the transcripts into English and asked them to review. I believed that not all of my translations reflected everything precisely and exactly about their ideas. My Chinese students were eager to be supportive to me and approved my translation without any question. They thought I got what I wanted to learn from them.

Talking with my participants from faculty and professional staff members, I found that I needed more detailed information about the backgrounds in the specific fields. Different academic programs have different requirements, methods, and evaluations. Different departments provide students with different resources and involvement. More specific and detailed information could be revealed.

**Implications**

The present research study examined the challenges for Chinese students in their initial experiences and explored the quality of their cultural transition. The student participants provided personal perspectives that matched the advice from faculty and professional staff members. The polarized cultural differences between two nations generated the gap that must be
closed for successful Chinese international student transition into U.S. higher education. The challenges have manifestations in language and culture, educational expectations, procedures, methods, and evaluation. The Chinese students’ experiences and the suggestions from faculty and professional staff members focused on self-awareness, attitude, learning new culture through engagement, reflecting on experience, and accumulating competence. To help Chinese students’ transition, educators need to develop programs with the following elements: (a) understanding U.S. campus culture through language acquisition, (b) being familiar with U.S. educational system and instructional procedures, and (c) recognizing the importance of learning outside a classroom.

**Culture Learning in English Language Programs**

International students can sense discrimination based on the barriers of English language proficiency (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Helping international students in language promotion should be considered a major support to their personal dignity (Schein, 1999). A better way is to make them feel that they can improve their language proficiency by themselves through practice. Educators can create a supportive environment for international students to engage in language practice and intercultural interaction with U.S. students.

Promoting cultural learning through English language programs is a way to fill the gap of misunderstanding in cultural differences. The information can cover the characteristics of the campus culture specifically geared towards international student populations. The classroom environment can be created for students developing their own beliefs and increasing intercultural sensitivity, which helps Chinese students to understand cultural differences, appreciate U.S. cultural values and norms, and respect both U.S. culture and Chinese culture. The programs can
increase student interaction to help them understand the patterns of communication, non-verbal behavior, and interpersonal relationships in the host culture.

**Academic Excellence Programs**

When Chinese students learn to adapt to U.S. educational environments, professors and advisors need to make academic adjustments to accommodate changing student populations (Volet & Jones, 2012). They need to create the opportunity for Chinese students to understand the U.S. educational system and instructional procedures. Some disciplines can expand an “adapting course” (Volet & Jones, 2012, p. 257) for international student adjustment to cross the academic gap. An adapting course can provide these students with the opportunity to mentally shift from a traditional Chinese classroom environment to a classroom featuring active discussion and teaching procedures. Professors can provide appraisals of learning to examine the factors that international and U.S. students believe affect the formation of a group to better finish a group project.

To help international student transition, the relationship between a professor and his/her students needs to be established. A professor needs to be proactive and let students know the expectations and requirements for college students at different levels. Informal interactions need to be established between professors and students. Chinese international students need to change their mindset towards U.S. educational mode. They need to understand the unstated roles of interaction between instructors and students. In order to help student succeeded, professors need to create supportive classroom environments and encourage students to actively engage in their study (Crose, 2011). A faculty member’s cultural awareness is critical for accommodating cultural differences and balancing equal engagement of all students in a classroom.
Learning Outside the Classroom

More and more Chinese students come to the United States to pursue their bachelor’s programs (Fischer, 2011; McMurtrie, 2011). As their parents live on the other side of the world, the psychological effects of homesickness include depression, which results in anxiety (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). The anxiety can be reflected as physical complaints and low self-esteem. On the other hand, cultural differences create a gap in background information not related to academic work that is hard to overcome quickly.

Educators need to help Chinese students understand the value of a vibrant campus learning community and the importance of student involvement. Chinese students can acknowledge that faculty and professional staff members work together to promote student learning inside and outside the classroom. Educators can develop the training programs to get students involved to understand U.S. educational philosophy. As the undergraduate issues can be different from the graduate student issues, the educators need to develop programs for Chinese international students connecting with their counterparts in different levels. When international students and home students engage with each other in group learning activities, their learning outcomes in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional dimensions can be assessed. Assistance and intervention can be improved. Chinese students and international students from other nations can have a highly successful cultural transition. U.S. students can also benefit from the diverse cultures in the community. Ultimately, the future of the entire world order depends on the multicultural competence of its most educated citizens.

Further Research

The present study described key cultural elements for a successful Chinese student transition from traditional Chinese education to overseas study at a university in the United
States. This is helpful to further research on creating a curriculum for Chinese students to prepare for being familiar with U.S. campus cultures before their overseas departures. Further research should also focus on changing student mindset, skillset, and heart set to increase intercultural sensitivity in dealing with cultural differences. My future plans includes applying experimental research to study factors influencing Chinese student adjustment in U.S. institutions of higher education and applying effective interventions to facilitate their transitions. The longitudinal research will be followed up to examine what types of intervention are workable to increase cultural awareness, which develops cultural competence.

Different methods can be used to assess student learning outcomes in an experimental cultural orientation course. One-to-one conversations, seminars, and workshops can serve to meet student needs. With higher Chinese student populations, a flipped classroom can be introduced to satisfy individual learning space with the help of technology (Millard, 2012; Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight, & Arfstrom, 2013). In a flipped classroom, students can increase their engagement. The team-based skills can be promoted. Students can have more discussions. Video and Internet can be employed in long-distance education to connect students in China with students, faculty, and student affairs professionals in the United States.

**Conclusion**

Studying abroad at a U.S. college or university provides Chinese international students with the opportunity to experience the diverse cultures present in the United States. The different cultures to be experienced in the United States bring about and culture shock. At the initial period, cultural surprises and culture shock can result in challenges for Chinese students in academic study and daily life. To have a better experience in the United States, Chinese international students need a period of guided transition from Chinese culture to U.S. culture.
The Chinese students interviewed for the present study realized that the challenges came from the language barrier, academic study inside and outside a classroom, and life in the community. Chinese students had challenges in language expression and understanding cultural topics. Stepping into a classroom, they were not accustomed to class participation and discussions. Different teaching methods, such as interaction, critical thinking, and debate made them feel uncomfortable. Lacking the experience of teamwork, they were regarded as being indifferent about the subject of the group project. Unfamiliar with U.S. campus culture, they did not know when and how to seek assistance in a department. They even regarded student involvement in activities as wasting time from study. They had no idea about diverse cultures in an institution and how to interact with local students.

To cope with the challenges, the guided transition can be based upon self-preparation to meet the requirements of academic study and daily life in the community. Self-preparation needs to be supported with self-awareness of their identity and expectations for study abroad in the United States. A positive attitude is critical for the adjustment involved in facing the differences, including having curiosity, being open-minded, being willing to interact with people, being willing to practice without fear of making a mistake, and caring. Positive student attitudes promote the ability of student self-management. Successful students are able to allocate their time in academic study and be involved in the community.

With culture learning in practice, Chinese international students enhance their English language proficiency. They understand how to appropriately behave in approaching their professors, learning the program requirements and expectations from their professors, participating and interacting with the instructors and peers in classes. They can adapt to critical thinking, logical reasoning, and expressing themselves confidently.
Students are teachers; teachers are students (Freire, 1970). When more and more Chinese undergraduate students enter U.S. colleges and universities, how to better educate and serve these students becomes a new research project. Educating Chinese international students opens a channel for two-way understandings and acculturation between Chinese international students and their faculty and student affairs professionals in institutions of higher education in the United States. It also brings about new research projects for U.S. higher education development.

U.S. educational philosophy and objectives have made faculty and student affairs professionals work together to develop more vibrant educational communities. Some programs can be developed or created to facilitate successful Chinese student transition into U.S. higher education. U.S. students are invited to take part in such programs to benefit from cross-cultural interactions. These programs can help educators to learn student development and help Chinese students change their mindset, skillset, and heart set to accept and adapt to diverse cultures in the United States. The study abroad experience can lead them to review their personal understanding of their own Chinese culture and have the ability to integrate different cultures as they become global citizens.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: LETTER OF RECRUITING A CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

From: Yi Lin
Department of Educational Leadership
Indiana State University
200 North Seventh Street
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989
U.S.A.

Date: 2/25/2012

Dear Chinese Student,

This letter is a request for your approval to interview you on site for the purposes of my research. My request to you fulfills a requirement by the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research prior to interviewing for the purposes of helping Chinese international students to have a successful transition in a U.S. university or college.

I respectfully request your permission to participate in this study that I am conducting for my dissertation research for the Doctoral degree of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. My advisor is Dr. Denise Collins. Attached please kindly find the questionnaire for a participant who will be interviewed. Please consider my request and give the permission for me to arrange an interview.

My dissertation is to develop the elements of an orientation for Chinese students to be familiar with U.S. campus culture so that they will adapt and adjust themselves to study in a college or university in the United States. The process of interview will help me learn more about the topic area and develop skills in research design, collection and analysis of information, writing a research paper, and developing the orientation elements.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 30 minutes in length to take place at a mutually agreed time on site. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded by a digital recorder to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. The name of a participant or any other personal and institutional identifying information will not appear in the research paper resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Notes and/or data collected during this study will be
retained for three years in a secure location and then destroyed. Only the members of my dissertation committee and I will have access to the data. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me by email at ylin20@sycamores.indstate.com. You can also contact my advisor at (812) 237-2918 or E-mail at denise.collins@indstate.edu.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at the Indiana State University. If you have any concerns in this study, please contact this Research Office at ISU-IRB@indstate.edu.

I very much look forward to contact with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Yi Lin
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership
Indiana State University
200 North Seventh Street
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989
U.S.A.

N.B.: I will also interview faculty and staff members who have the experiences of assisting Chinese international student in academic study and personal transition. Could you recommend a candidate who can be your advisor, a professor, and/or a student affairs professional working in the International Programs and Services, Counseling Center, Residence Hall, or other departments for this research?
APPENDIX B: THE SECOND LETTER FOR AN ACCEPTED CHINESE INTERNATION STUDENT

From: Yi Lin
Department of Educational Leadership
Indiana State University
200 North Seventh Street
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989
U.S.A.

Date: 8/25/2012

Dear XXX,

Thank you so much for your kind response. You have been selected as a participant for the interview. I attached the interview protocol here for your review. Please feel free to let me know if you have any questions about it.

For the interview, we need to choose a place on campus. To protect your privacy and the confidentiality of the interview, we have several options. We can find a group room in the library. We may reserve a conference room in our department. Also, you can pick up a place that is better for you and the interview.

I will be available at … (date and week) between … a.m./p.m. and … a.m./p.m. If you are not available at that time, please give me the earliest possible date and time that we can have for the interview.

I am looking forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Yi Lin
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership
Indiana State University
200 North Seventh Street
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989
U.S.A.
APPENDIX C: THE SECOND LETTER FOR A RESERVED CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

From: Yi Lin  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Indiana State University  
200 North Seventh Street  
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989  
U.S.A.  

Date: 8/25/2012  

Dear XXX,  

Thank you so much for your kind response. Your support to this interview is much appreciated! Our participants have been selected. Although you will not be interviewed for the time being, you will be reserved as a candidate that I will contact for a later interview if needed. I will keep you informed.  

Yours sincerely,  

Yi Lin  
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership  
Indiana State University  
200 North Seventh Street  
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989  
U.S.A.
APPENDIX D: LETTER OF RECRUITING AN ADVISOR/PROFESSOR

From: Yi Lin  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Indiana State University  
200 North Seventh Street  
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989  
U.S.A.

Date: 2/25/2012

Dear Professor,

This letter is a request for your approval to interview you on site for the purposes of my research. My request to you fulfills a requirement by the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research prior to interviewing for the purposes of helping Chinese international students to have a successful transition in a U.S. university or college.

I respectfully request your permission to participate in this study that I am conducting for my dissertation research for the Doctoral degree of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. My advisor is Dr. Denise Collins. Attached please kindly find the questionnaire for a participant who will be interviewed. Please consider my request and give the permission for me to arrange an interview.

*My dissertation is to develop the elements of an orientation for Chinese students to be familiar with U.S. campus culture so that they will adapt and adjust themselves to study in a college or university in the United States. The process of interview will help me learn more about the topic area and develop skills in research design, collection and analysis of information, writing a research paper, and developing the orientation elements.*

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 30-45 minutes in length to take place at a mutually agreed time on site. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded by a digital recorder to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. The name of a participant or any other personal and institutional identifying information will not appear in the research paper resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Notes and/or data collected during this study will be
retained for three year in a secure location and then destroyed. Only the members of my dissertation committee and I will have access to the data. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me by email at ylin20@sycamores.indstate.edu. You can also contact my advisor at (812) 237-2918 or E-mail at denise.collins@indstate.edu.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at the Indiana State University. If you have any concerns in this study, please contact this Research Office at ISU-IRB@indstate.edu.

I very much look forward to contact with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Yi Lin
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership
Indiana State University
200 North Seventh Street
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989
U.S.A.
APPENDIX E: LETTER OF RECRUITING A STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL

From: Yi Lin  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Indiana State University  
200 North Seventh Street  
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989  
U.S.A.  

Date: 2/25/2012  

Dear Administrator,  

This letter is a request for your approval to interview you on site for the purposes of my research. My request to you fulfills a requirement by the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research prior to interviewing for the purposes of helping Chinese international students to have a successful transition in a U.S. university or college.

I respectfully request your permission to participate in this study that I am conducting for my dissertation research for the Doctoral degree of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. My advisor is Dr. Denise Collins. Attached please kindly find the questionnaire for a participant who will be interviewed. Please consider my request and give the permission for me to arrange an interview.

My dissertation is to develop the elements of an orientation for Chinese students to be familiar with U.S. campus culture so that they will adapt and adjust themselves to study in a college or university in the United States. The process of interview will help me learn more about the topic area and develop skills in research design, collection and analysis of information, writing a research paper, and developing the orientation elements.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 30-45 minutes in length to take place at a mutually agreed time on site. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded by a digital recorder to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. The name of a participant or any other personal and institutional identifying information will not appear in the research paper resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Notes and/or data collected during this study will be retained for three year in a secure location and then destroyed. Only the members of my
dissertation committee and I will have access to the data. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me by email at ylin20@sycamores.indstate.edu. You can also contact my advisor at (812) 237-2918 or E-mail at denise.collins@indstate.edu.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at the Indiana State University. If you have any concerns in this study, please contact this Research Office at ISU-IRB@indstate.edu.

I very much look forward to contact with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Yi Lin
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership
Indiana State University
200 North Seventh Street
Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809-9989
U.S.A.
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant___________
Date___________

Chinese International Student Transition

Interview Protocol

A. “Thank you for taking time to participate in my research study. I am looking for the transition of Chinese international students in our university. I have several open-ended questions to ask, and I hope you will feel free to talk about any experiences or ideas that come to mind.”

B. “Let’s learn and go over an informed consent form. Do you have any questions about that? I asked for your permission to record this interview. Is it okay for your? Please remember that you may turn off the recorder at any time.”

C. “The interview questions deal with challenges in academic study and personal development. Academic study can be furthered as the interaction inside and outside classroom, communication with advisor, professors, and peers. Personal development means the acquisition of intercultural competence in the host culture.”
D. Questions

For Chinese international students:

1. Could you give me the examples illustrating that the challenging moments in your performance in classroom participation, discussion and/or presentation, and group project? How did you overcome these challenges?
   在课堂参与、课堂讨论抑或报告、以及小组项目时，你是否遇到挑战？是怎么回事呢？你是怎样克服这些障碍的呢？

2. Could you give me the examples showing that cultural puzzle or conflict and culture shock that cannot be avoided when you come to the United States? How did you realize the situations and change yourself to fit the environment?
   你是否觉得来美国时会遇到因文化不同而产生的困惑或冲突，以及文化惊诧呢？你遇到的是什么情况？你是如何认识到这样的问题，而且又是怎样改变自我去适应环境的呢？

3. Could you give me the examples to explain that your advisor have provided the important instruction and direction on your academic progress?
   在你学术提高方面，你的导师是如何给予引导的呢？说说这样的例子好吗？

4. Could you give me your opinion what the critical elements are to learn from your advisor and how to learn from your advisor?
   你认为从你导师那里你学到的最关键的东西是什么？你是如何学到的呢？

5. Could you provide the idea how to seek for assistance on campus, such as international office, counseling department, student organization, and other services?
如果要在学校里寻求帮助的话，你能说说学校各个服务部门是如何有效帮助学生的吗，例如：国际办公室、心理咨询、学生团体以及其他的服务部门？

6. What are the essential elements to have a successful transition?

你认为对于中国学生刚来美国时，他们应该知道哪些基本因素对他们成功融入到新的环境是很重要的呢？

For professors:

7. Could you give me the examples that Chinese international student have challenges in classroom participation, discussion and/or presentation, and group project? Do you have any advice for them to overcome these challenges?

8. Could you give me the examples to explain that you have provided the important instruction and direction to Chinese international students with academic progress?

9. Could you give me your opinion for the critical elements to learn these students and help them development?

10. What are the essential elements to have a successful transition?

For staff:

11. Could you give me the examples showing that Chinese international students have experienced cultural puzzle or conflict and culture shock that cannot be avoided when they come to the United States? How did you help them to realize the situations and help them to fit the environment?
12. Could you provide the idea for Chinese international students how to seek for assistance on campus, such as international office, counseling department, student organization, and other services?

13. Could you give me your opinion for the critical elements to learn these students and help them development?

14. What are the essential elements to have a successful transition?

E. “Really appreciate your time and assistance in responding these questions. If you would like more information about the research study or have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email.”
APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

*Chinese International Student orientation to a Public Institution of U.S. Higher Education*

My name is Yi Lin, a student in the Educational Leadership Department at Indiana State University. I invite you to participate in a study being conducted for my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Denise Collins, faculty sponsor. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The purpose of this study is to gain the information about the elements helpful for Chinese international student orientation and transition to a U.S. institution of higher education. I have contacted you to participate in this interview because you were identified as a Chinese international student who has been studying in the United States more than one year, a faculty member who advised Chinese international students, or a student affairs professional who assisted Chinese international students in their orientation and/or transition. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to respond to several questions.
RISKS

The primary foreseeable risk for a Chinese international student to participating in this study can be emotionally uncomfortable when you talk about the challenges coping with a different culture. As a faculty member or student affairs professional, since you can be asked to indicate your roles in helping Chinese international students, your individual identification could be touched potentially.

I will take precaution to protect the identity of the participating institutions and the individual respondents. Your voice messages and data will be stored and tracked with a password-protected computer and password-protected files. Should the date be published, no personal identifiable information will be disclosed.

BENEFITS

The participants will not benefit directly from this study. Nevertheless, this study will inspire them to review their experience in Chinese international student orientation and transition. Reviewing previous experience may help them to improve their performance later on.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. They can only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me, the researcher: Yi Lin, 7984 Greenwood Ct., Terre Haute, IN 47802, ylin20@sycamores.indstate.edu or contact the faculty sponsor: Dr. Denise Collins in the department of Educational Leadership, Bayh College of Education, Indiana State University, 200 N 7th Street, Terre Haute, IN 47809 or at denise.collins@indstate.edu or by phone at 812-237-2918.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, 200 N 7th Street, Terre Haute, IN 47809, Office of Sponsored Programs, Attn: Mark Green, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at 812-237-8217, or by e-mail at Mark.Green@indstate.edu.