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**Exploring Chinese International Undergraduate Students' Cross-cultural Adjustment
to American Universities**

by

Ningsheng Huang

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

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in Higher Educational Administration

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Dissertation Committee:
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Abstract

The rapid economic development in China has enabled an increasing number of Chinese students to pursue higher education in countries abroad. Since 2009, the largest group of international students in the United States has been Chinese students (Open Doors, 2020). Chinese international undergraduate students face various challenges during their cross-cultural adjustment in American universities, such as a language barrier, a lack of learning skill, an unfamiliarity with American educational systems and school facilities, a lack of ability to interact with native instructors and students, and psychological adaptation (Sun & Chen, 1999). These changes can create multiple acculturation stressors for Chinese students. Moreover, there is limited research focused on Chinese international undergraduate students studying at American colleges and universities (Yuan, 2010). Very few efforts have been devoted to understanding Chinese undergraduate students' difficulties, specifically to their intercultural adaptation experience and some particular challenges which arise in their first year studying at the United States colleges and universities.

This study investigated Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation, what challenges were most critical for Chinese undergraduate students, and how they coped with these challenges in order to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome challenges in their transition. At the same time, it was hoped that this study could help colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate students' experience in their transition, and to provide better services for them.

The setting for this study was selected from typical public state universities in Minnesota. As a representative group, twelve Chinese international undergraduate students from this university participated in this study. A qualitative research method of this study was used to help deeply understand this group's experiences in cross-cultural adjustment.

In this study the researcher found that culture is center of cross-cultural adjustment, and central to the adaptation process is communication. The findings shows that a long distance culture, English writing, lack of knowledge of American culture, class involvement and interpersonal communication are critical challenges for Chinese international undergraduate students. Furthermore, preferred acculturation strategies among Chinese participants are integration, followed by assimilation. Additionally, it is significant to find out Chinese students' ability to solve problems and adapt to uncertainties was improved significantly during COVID-19.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Shuhui Zhang, my much missed mother, who was the first person to tell me to pursue a doctor degree.

I dedicate this dissertation to Yongping, my wife, who have encouraged and supported me through this dissertation process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The rapid economic development in China has enabled an increasing number of Chinese students to pursue higher education in countries abroad. Since 2009, the largest group of international students in the United States has been Chinese students (Open Doors, 2020). As time has passed, the population of Chinese students in the United States shifted to include more young people recently graduated from high school or even still in high school. Instead of obtaining advanced degrees, an increasing number of Chinese students are pursuing bachelor's degrees or completing high school in the United States. During the academic year of 2018-2019, there were 372,532 Chinese students studying in the United States, accounting for 34.6% of the international student population nationwide (Open Doors, 2020). Based on past trends, it is expected that the number of Chinese undergraduate students studying in the United State will consistently increase (Open Doors, 2020).

Chinese international undergraduate students face various challenges during their first year in American universities. Many challenges relate to their cultural transition and adjustment. Due to different academic, social, and personal backgrounds, some students may not have a successful cultural transition and adjustment during their study abroad journey. Additionally, some American universities may not fully understand this population's experience to provide them sufficient services.

Statement of the Problem

Various challenges influence Chinese undergraduate students in their transition at American institutions. Berry et al. (1987) identified five major changes for cross-cultural transition: physical and environmental (e.g., climate, types of housing, population density), biological (e.g., types of food, nutritional adjustment, new diseases related to location), social

(e.g., homesickness, reestablishing social contact), cultural (e.g., linguistic, value differences), and psychological adaptation (e.g., well-being, self-identity). These changes can create multiple acculturation stressors for Chinese students (Xie, 2007).

Current Chinese international undergraduate students are facing various challenges during their study abroad journey, including a language barrier, a lack of learning skill, an unfamiliarity with American educational culture and school facilities, a lack of ability to interact with native instructors and students, and financial difficulties (Sun & Chen, 1999). Additionally, in a review of the literature, several studies have addressed various challenges the Chinese students face; limited studies can be found that attempted to study Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation.

This research investigates Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation and what challenges are most critical for Chinese undergraduate students, as well as how they cope with these challenges in order to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome challenges in their transition. At the same time, it is hoped that this study will help the colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate students' experience in their transition and to provide services for them by designing individual, group, and institutional approaches that work more effectively with Chinese students at various developmental levels and which facilitate their growth.

Description and Scope of the Research

This study revealed Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation and what challenges are most critical for Chinese undergraduate students, as well as how they cope with these challenges. From the empirical review on international students and Chinese international students studying in American universities, it is found that most of these

challenges are related to culture, and their academic and cultural experiences for the first year are the keys for their success (Andrade, 2005).

The theoretical framework with combined cultural adaptation theories was used for this study. It includes acculturation (Berry, 1998) and intercultural communication competence (Kim, 1991). A more detailed description of the theoretical framework is presented in Chapter 2.

A qualitative research method was applied in this study. A mid-western public state university was chosen as a setting for this study. The population of this study consists of the Chinese international undergraduate students from this university. The description of research methods was presented in Chapter 3.

Research Questions

Based on the research problems, I proposed four research questions as the following:

1. What are challenges for Chinese international undergraduate students during their first year? Which ones are most critical for Chinese students?
2. What are Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward intercultural adaptation?
3. How do they cope with these challenges of intercultural adaptation? What strategies are Chinese undergraduate students currently using to overcome cultural challenges in their transition?
4. What are their experiences with intercultural communication?

Significance of the Study

Andrade (2005) pointed out that the first year of study in American universities is crucial to an international student's success. International students studying in the United States may confront many challenges in their first year of studying abroad, such as a language barrier, lack

of study skills, unfamiliarity with the American educational system and school facilities, lack of ability to interact with native instructors and students, and financial difficulties (Andrade, 2005).

Chinese international undergraduate students also confront all those challenges during their first year in American universities. Many challenges relate to their cultural transition and adjustment. These challenges have a critical impact on students' development in studying at American colleges (Wei et al., 2007). It is significant to understand and study Chinese students' experiences in cultural transition in American universities in order to help them better adapt to American campus culture and to provide empirical suggestions for administrators so that they will develop positive attitudes and enthusiasm regarding intercultural adaptation in the students' learning and academic experience.

There is limited research focused on Chinese students studying at United States colleges and universities, specifically to qualitative research on Chinese international students (Davis & Marie, 2012). Very few efforts have been devoted to understanding Chinese undergraduate students' difficulties, specifically to their intercultural adaptation experience and some particular challenges which arise in their first year studying at the United States colleges (Zheng & Cirecie, 2016).

Delimitations

Delimitations arise from the process of selecting factors, populations, and the setting for this study. A limited number of factors that impacted participants' cultural transition and adjustment were examined in this study. The setting for this study was selected from typical public state universities in Minnesota. Participants in the study were limited to the Chinese international undergraduate student population. The results may not characterize the experiences of all Chinese undergraduate students.

However, the researcher serves as a qualitative researcher and the primary research instrument. Being a Chinese-American, the researcher may have a slight risk for biases. As an effect of COVID-19, the interviews in this study were conducted in summer 2020 through Zoom online. Because of limitations of technology, the researcher must be able to compensate for lack of physical presence by creating a natural environment where the participants feel comfortable participating in the interviews.

Assumptions

The trustworthiness of the study is based on a set of assumptions. It is expected that participants accurately and honestly describe their experience in context. Most participants interviewed were people the researcher knew well and had a good relationship with. It is assumed that there will be honesty in interview. Most participants of this study were international undergraduate students from mainland China. A qualitative research method of this study will help to better understand this group's experiences in cross-cultural adjustment.

Definitions of the Terms

Chinese International Undergraduate Students—individuals who come from the mainland of China who are currently enrolled in a United States higher education institution to pursue a bachelor's degree. The students are on F-1 visas, and their academic status is undergraduate students. The students from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan were not included in this study.

Acculturation—the process of cultural, psychological, and social adaptation to a new culture, and it deals with cultural adaptation phenomenon (Kim, 2001).

Adaptation—refers to changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands (Berry, 1998).

Summary

In summary, this chapter first provided an introduction of the study, including a general description of the research topic and background of the study. Then, it described statement of the problem, description and scope of the research, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the assumption of the study. Finally, it explained delimitation of the study and positionality of the researcher. A more detailed organization of the dissertation follows.

This dissertation of the study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, the background of this study, research significance, and the statement of the problem. A pertinent literature review, including the theoretical framework for this study, is presented in Chapter 2. Methodology for this study is presented in Chapter 3 and includes research questions of this study, the research design, setting of the study, participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 provides findings of the study. Discussion and conclusion are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review begins with a review of empirical studies on international students with a focus on Chinese international students studying in America. In reviewing literature related to the present study, three significant areas are examined. The first is cultural adjustment for international students, which includes academic experiences, social experiences, and emotional well-being. The second area is demographic factors related to their cultural adjustment. The third area is international student attitudes and behaviors toward intercultural adaptation, with an emphasis on Chinese international students.

It also gives an introduction of the theoretical frameworks for this study on cultural transition theory and intercultural communication competence, followed by a summary of this chapter.

International Students in American Universities

Berry et al. (1987) classified five different acculturation populations based on the nature of the contact with host culture: immigrants, refugees, native people, ethnic groups, and sojourners. International students can be described as a relatively short-term visitors to a foreign country and with the purpose of pursuing academic success (Rosenthal et al., 2007).

According to Open Doors (2018), the number of international students enrolled in the United States institutions of higher education increased by 1.5% to 1,094,792 students in the 2017-2018 academic year. Of all the international students, undergraduate students increased by 0.8% to 442,746 students; the graduate students decreased by 2.1% to 382,983 students. Contribution by international students to the United States economy in 2017 was \$42.4 billion. Moreover, international students contribute to globalizing the United States campuses, classrooms, and communities (Open Doors, 2019).

However, overall enrollment remains flat, with 2% decline in new enrollment. Multiple factors contribute to shifts in international student enrollment such as the visa application process or visa delay/denials, social and political environment in the United States, cost of tuition/fees at the host institutions, feeling unwelcome in the country, securing a resident job after their studies, and physical safety while in America (Open Doors, 2018). American institutions take certain actions to welcome international students by maintaining or increasing enrollment from Asian countries for the fall 2019 academic semester by increasing outreach to provide information to support for international students, engaging with policymakers to educate, and urging support for international students (Open Doors, 2018).

Challenges of International Students

Berry et al. (1987) identified five major changes for cross-cultural transition: physical and environmental (e.g., climate, types of housing, population density), biological (types of food, nutritional adjustment, new diseases related to location), social (e.g., homesickness, reestablishing social contact), cultural (e.g., linguistic, different values), and psychological adaptation (e.g., well-being, self-identity). These changes can create multiple acculturation challenges for international students (Xie, 2007). The following sections will focus on international students' academic, social, and psychological experiences in America universities.

Academic Challenges

Based on Andrade (2005), some challenges influencing international students were related to English proficiency, relationships with instructors, and participation within the classroom. Andrade investigated the first-year experiences of international students at an institution with a qualitative study. Twelve students from Pacific Island and Asian countries were selected for interview regarding their academic experiences in the first year. Andrade found that

international students experience a variety of challenges, which related to English proficiency and unfamiliarity with the American education system. The international students expressed continuing difficulty understanding the English of their professors and peers, particularly new terminology. Teacher-student relationships were problematic; they felt like the teacher was not really understanding international students. Asian international students were accustomed to passive learning, and they had difficulty giving presentations or with group study, which resulted a poor class participation. Andrade's (2005) study supports some aspects of traditional persistence theories such as the importance of involvement and integration. The implications of her study suggest that first-year programming for international students must address English proficiency and the development of social networks.

It was recognized that the steady increase in enrollment of international students and the high attrition rate were noted (Tomposon & George, 1996). They found three main behaviors in the classroom for international students: they did not participate in class, they did not ask for clarification, and they studied and sat only with other international students.

There are differences of culture, learning styles, and transnational educations between Western students and Asian students when measuring with a quantitative method (Heffernan et al., 2010). Heffernan et al. (2010) focused on exploring the differences between learning styles of Australian and Chinese university students by using a non-probabilistic sampling procedure. A total of 181 Australian students at a university in Australia and 235 Chinese students at a university in northeastern China participated in the research. The research has shown that the cultural differences between Australia and China are substantial, and Chinese students have unique characteristics that differentiate them from Western students, meaning there are

substantial differences in learning styles. Consequently, program managers need to consider these differences when structuring course offerings for students in China.

Yan and Berliner (2009) found that Chinese students experienced a high level of academic stress and its related factors, such as the cultural demand for educational excellence, language barriers, and differences in the educational system between China and the United States. The major obstacles of Chinese students included a lack of English proficiency and cultural differences, specifically, unfamiliarity with American campus culture (Sun & Chen, 1999). In the classroom, Chinese students cannot fully understand what is going on in group meetings since most professors and American students talk fast and use slang. The lack of American cultural background adds more difficulties for Chinese students to have effective and efficient conversations with American professors and students. The hardly fit-in phenomenon influences Chinese students' academic performances in American universities (Yan & Berliner, 2009).

Yuan (2010) examined academic and cultural experiences of Chinese students at one university in the United States with a qualitative method. Ten Chinese students and two American professors were interviewed, and participate observation was also used to collect supplemental information. The finding shows that Chinese students confront various challenges at school and outside of school, and oral English and class participation are their major challenges. Huang (2006) analyzed the academic listening challenges of Chinese international students at an American university, and found that the Chinese students were most confident about their reading ability and grammar. Their weakest areas of English proficiency were speaking and listening skills. In particular, there are substantial differences in learning styles between Chinese and American students due to differences between Chinese culture and

American culture. Chinese students' learning styles emphasize imitation, memory, and repetitive and passive learning, which can lead to a lack of creativity (Huang 2006). On the other hand, faculties and administrators in American universities need to understand and consider these differences when lecturing and developing programs to provide services for the population (Huang, 2006).

Social Cultural Adjustment Experience

Andrade (2005) found some social challenges that international students face, including language skills, social network, limited knowledge of the American culture, social involvement, cultural practices, and environmental difficulties outside of the classroom. She suggested that international students should have more and continual support to develop languages skills, interacting with others with diverse backgrounds, and engaging in campus activities, such as culture clubs, as well as making friends beyond one's own culture (Andrade, 2005). Additionally, involvement in religious life can help the students to establish identity (Andrade, 2005).

Andrade (2005) examined how international students change in order to integrate themselves into American culture and how this integration relates to their ability to be successful. Andrade demonstrates that cultural integration can be viewed as a positive action for international students, rather than being a form of assimilation or rejection of one's culture. Rice and Choi (2009) used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the relationship between international students and their academic advisers. They state that it is important for advisers to be sensitive to cultural differences to provide valuable social support to international students.

Since there are many differences between the Asian culture and American culture, Asian international students experience significant intrapersonal and interpersonal problems and conflicts (Lin & Yi, 1997). Lin and Yi (1997) provided an overview of sociodemographic characteristics of international students and common stressors Asian international students experience in the United States in order to develop needed culturally sensitive programs and services. The article shows that international students from Asian countries are often stereotyped as quite, reserved, and non-assertive. They confront common challenges, such as racial discrimination, language problems, accommodation difficulties, dietary restrictions, financial stress, misunderstandings, and loneliness. Specifically, since Asian cultures place an emphasis on harmony and respect for authorities, many Asian international students are reluctant to share their feelings or emotions or express their opinions or oppositions to anyone, especially to authority figures. The author argued that educating students about the balance of acculturation and maintaining their own culture would be very helpful.

Yuan (2010) examined cultural experiences of Chinese graduate students at Kean University with a qualitative study. Based on this study, cultural adaptation appears to be a major factor influencing Chinese students' studying experience in the United States (Yuan, 2010). Chinese students demand a higher level of knowledge of American culture and should be well prepared before pursuing higher education in another country (Yuan, 2010). Yuan (2010) also suggested Chinese undergraduate students should have been more concerned with their cross-cultural experiences at American university. In addition, intercultural adaptation theory can help us to understand Chinese students' cultural experience (Yuan, 2010). Chinese international students in the United States were found to experience more difficulties in adaptation and social

integration due to their lower English competence compared with their European classmates (Wang et al., 2012; Meng et al., 2018).

The effects of social support on acculturation and acculturative stress in Chinese international students was investigated with a consensual qualitative research method (Bertram et al., 2014). Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with eight Chinese international students. The results indicated that the Chinese international students experienced differences between their pre- and post-sojourn perceptions of the United States, encountered various forms of acculturative stress, and sought support from multiple sources. The implications of this study suggested that universities should develop monthly seminars and foster relationships between international students and personnel. It also suggested that a counseling center could recruit a Chinese counselor to come and speak to Chinese students during their orientation, and university personnel could consider conducting yearly interviews with Chinese international students to give them the chances to address their stress and current concerns.

Emotional Well-Being

Lin and Yi (1997) examined the emotional well-being of international students, including feeling of stress, frustration, uneasiness, homesickness, loneliness, and depression. They also tend to isolate themselves from the general population and socialize and study solely with other students. Jerry Gebhard (2012) used the qualitative method to study the adjustment behaviors of international students while they were enrolled at a university in the United States. The qualitative data was collected and analyzed for over a decade through ongoing interviews with 85 international students. Findings show that students were challenged by emotional reactions to their life. To manage their problems, students may make use of facilitative behaviors include

coping strategies, use of supportive people, observation and imitation, and reflection of the new life (Gebhard, 2012).

Chinese students share the same emotional difficulties with other Asian international students. Monica Li and Monika Stodolska (2006) studied the leisure life of Chinese graduate students in the United States with a qualitative method, and applied transnationalism as a theoretical framework. They concluded that transnational circumstances affected the emotional well-being of Chinese students and pointed out that the administrators and faculty members of American universities need to recognize their problems with balancing their leisure and learning times to provide recreational services (Li & Stodolska, 2006).

Wei et al., (2007) examined the impact of maladaptive perfectionism and length of time in the United States on acculturative stress and depression of Chinese international students with a quantitative study. Data were collected online from 189 Chinese international students from China and Taiwan. The result showed that there were significant effects of maladaptive perfectionism on depression. The findings suggest three areas of consideration. The first is to increase international students' awareness of how acculturative stress and maladaptive perfectionism are related to their depression at different point of time during their stay in the United States. The second is to conduct culturally sensitive outreach programs to inform the students about available resources. Finally, it is suggested that pairing newly arrived international students with American peers can facilitate the international students' transition and lessen their acculturative stress.

Cultural transition and adjustment is absolutely inseparable with identity development. Qin (2009) examined Chinese female graduate students' psychological experiences. It was found that the basic concept of self-identity was not entirely recognized by Chinese students during

their cultural transition due to the differences between Chinese collective identity and American individual identity or individual right. The finding of the study shows that establishment of self-identity would be a fundamental factor to cope with various challenges for Chinese international undergraduate students in cultural transition and adjustment. Specifically, it would help Chinese students to overcome emotional, psychological, and relational issues by involvement in the religious life of the institution and cultural clubs (Qin, 2009).

Demographic and Cultural Factors

There are some demographic factors influencing international students' cultural adjustment such as culture origin, gender, education level, length of residence, and cultural distance between the sojourners' culture and the host culture (Zimmermann, 1995). Srivastava et al. (2010) designed a comprehensive online survey to find preferences and concerns of international graduate students at the United States schools and found that their preferences and concerns depended on their age, gender, and status or subgroups. For example, for female students, safety and security of campus, language and culture change, and transcript evaluation ranked higher compared with male students. They argued that a university may improve their recruitment retention efforts by catering to preferences and influencing factors of subgroups among international graduate students.

Cultural demand for educational excellence plays an important role for Asian international students, specifically Chinese students' adjustment. According to Yan and Berliner (2009), Confucian philosophy in China or some Asian countries views education as important to job prospects, but even more importantly as a means of building one's character. Influenced by this philosophy, Chinese culture places well-educated scholars in the highest social work. Academic excellence is deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture (Yan & Berliner, 2009).

Chinese families work very hard and sacrifice much for their children to continue their higher education in the United States (Yan & Berliner, 2009). The pressure to succeed academically can be quite overwhelming for Chinese students when compounded with problems of adjusting to campus life (Yan & Berliner, 2009).

Huang (2006) examined Chinese students' confidence in their English abilities through their demographic information, and found that Chinese students who have been in America for more than one year are more confident in their English abilities than those who have studied in America for less than one year. According to Huang (2006), Chinese graduate students are more confident than Chinese undergraduate students, and Chinese female students are more confident than Chinese male students. Moreover, Samovar and Porter (1991) argued that Chinese students' coping experiences are likely to be more difficult compared with those students from European countries or even those students from other Asian countries since China and the United States have been identified as having maximum cultural distance. In addition, dating or marriage plays a very important role in Chinese students' cross-cultural experiences. The female students may feel more pressure from dating or marriage than male students (Yan & Berliner, 2009).

Attitudes toward Cultural Adaptation

Ngwira and colleagues, (2015) conducted a qualitative study at Central China Normal University to investigate two dimensions of acculturation (attitude towards maintenance of one's culture and attitude towards contact with other culture). A representative sample of 302 international students shows that Asian international students are less motivated to adapt than other students from other continents. Additionally, time and education level do not seem to be sufficient factors in facilitating adaptation. Moreover, the most preferred acculturation strategy is found to be integration. The findings suggest that a better understanding of acculturation, as well

as the factors which help facilitate adjustment to the new culture, are essential in assisting the host university to develop effective programs that enhance contact between cultures.

Furthermore, outreach programs that enable international students to interact with the natives not only help the international students, but also the host community in gaining appropriate acculturation. Moreover, based on the discussion of Andrade (2005), international students from Asia and the Pacific Islands were able to stay largely within their own culture groups.

Wenli Yuan (2010) used the qualitative method to examine academic attitudes towards assimilation into American culture and cultural experiences of international students and Chinese students at one university in the United States. Ten Chinese students and two American professors were interviewed, and participant observation was also used to collect supplemental information. Through observing the activities, Wenli Yuan (2010) noticed that international students tended to stay within their own ethnic group, and Chinese students prefer to only mingle with other Chinese students on campus or outside of campus. From the interview with Chinese students, it was found that when they first came to America, they liked to try their best to fit into a new culture by finding chances to make conversation with Americans and building up networks with their new classmates. After the first few weeks, things began to change. They could have conversations with their newly met friends, but it only involved small talk, and they could not make the conversation flow. To make things worse, small talk cannot replace deep conversations that have a lasting impact. Usually, Americans like talking to people who they find interesting or at least, who are on the same page. This phenomenon indicates that cultural adjustment cannot happen quickly and automatically. It requires hard, steady persistence and a deep interest in the local culture. During the process of cultural adjustment, some of the students may adapt quickly while others never fully adapt at all. Some feel well adapted, but regress back

to feeling culture shock after experiencing a series of new problems (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004). Additionally, Yuan (2010) examined Chinese students' attitudes towards assimilation into culture. The participants expressed mixed perceptions of American culture and different attitudes towards cultural assimilation. Some of them expressed positive attitudes, and some expressed a negative attitudes.

Theoretical Framework

One primary area that contemporary scholars have explored in relation to cultural transition is cross-cultural adaptation theory, which can be used for understanding issues that international students experience at American universities. Several salient features of this theory are noteworthy: acculturation, communication, models of intercultural communication, and influencing factors.

Acculturation

Acculturation is one of the most significant features of cultural transition for international students (Berry, 1998). Kim (2001) defined acculturation as the process of cultural, psychological, and social adaptation to a new culture, and it deals with cultural adaptation phenomenon. Kim (2001) argued that acculturation is an interactive process that involves the newcomers, the host environment, and the interplay of the two. She also stated that successful adaptation will occur when the strangers' internal communication systems sufficiently overlap with those of the natives. Cross-cultural adaptation is defined as the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments (Kim, 2001). On the other hand, the term *assimilation* has been used by many to emphasize the process

of a more comprehensive change whereby individuals become “absorbed” into the native population (Kim, 2001).

Berry (1998) identified acculturation into four strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation is defined as “when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures.” Opposite to this is separation alternative: “when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others.” Integration is defined as “when there is an interest in both maintaining one’s original culture and seeking to participate as a part of the larger social network.” Marginalization is defined as “when there is little possibility or interest in having relations with others” (p. 9). It can be seen that the four strategies are only different attitudes facing changes involved in the process of acculturation. Among the four strategies, the integration can only be successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity (Berry, 1998). Berry’s model provides a categorical paradigm for classifying the strategies of acculturation, which examines both individual-level phenomena and ethnic-group-level phenomena. This study focus on individual-level phenomena in that it examines how Chinese international undergraduate students perceive the host culture.

Adaptation

Adaptation refers to changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands (Berry, 1998). Cross-cultural adaptation has been one toward an increasing “pluralism” emphasizing the importance of ethnicity maintenance (Kim, 2001). Acculturative stress is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation (Berry, 1998). Acculturative stress was identified several groups of factors:

(a) the nature of the host society, (b) demographic factors, (c) the type of adapting group, (d) the type of adaptation being experiences, (e) psychological factors, and (f) social characteristics of individuals (Berry et al., 1987). However, coping and adjustment refer to psychological responses to cross-cultural changes, whereas integration has been defined as social participation in the host environments (Kim, 2001).

A Process Model of Acculturation

Berry (1998) presented a process model of acculturation which is core of newcomers' cross-cultural experiences in a new environment. In this model, Berry (1998) proposed five features of acculturation. First, intercultural contact in both cultures is the common starting point of the acculturation; in this process, the individuals have to deal with life events, participating in various activities. Second, the individuals evaluate these experiences as a source of difficulty or stressors. This process can be termed *adjustment*. The third feature of acculturation is that the individuals engage in coping strategies such as problem-focus coping and emotion coping, in order to deal with the stressors. The fourth aspect of acculturation is acculturation stress, including personal crises and commonly anxiety and depression. The last feature of acculturation is the long-term adaptation that may be achieved (pp. 19-20).

Factors Influencing Acculturation

Given the same length of time, why do some newcomers attain higher levels of adaptation than others? This is because there are different factors that influence foreign students' intercultural communication and acculturation, including factors existing prior to acculturation and factors arising during acculturation. The factors existing prior to acculturation include demographic factors such as cultural origin, age, gender, education level, status, motivation, and expectations, as well as cultural distance and personality (Berry, 1998); the factors arising during

acculturation include length of residence time, attitudes and behaviors of acculturation strategies, coping strategies, and social support (Berry, 1998). Berry's framework allows for many factors to be considered in analyzing the sojourner experience.

Intercultural Communication Competence

Taking a systems-theory approach, Kim (2001) presented a structure of cross-cultural adaptation from the perspective of communication. Communication is the process that makes the interaction possible through the exchange of messages which include all activities of message exchange between an individual and the environment (Kim, 2001). Moreover, Kim (2001) also emphasized the importance of communication in connecting a newcomer with the host society, and that successful adaptation will only occur when the newcomer's internal communication system sufficiently overlaps with the host society.

Kim (1991) defined intercultural communication competence as a measure of an individual's ability to interact in a variety of intercultural communication events. This ability, often called communication competency or social competency, is comprised of the cognitive, affective, and operational capabilities by which individuals organize themselves in and with their sociocultural milieu (Kim, 1991). From the perspective of a system, Kim (1991) presented that intercultural communication competence is the adaptability of an individual's internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment. Kim and Ruben (1988) used the term *intercultural adaption* to represent various other terms such as assimilation, acculturation, integration, and adjustment. More specific to intercultural communication competence, "Adaptability means the individual's capacity to suspend or modify some of the old cultural ways, to learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways, and to creatively find ways to the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity,

intergroup posture, and accompanying stress,” and adaptability is “the heart of intercultural communication competence” (Kim, 1991, p. 268).

According to Kim’s model, there are five dimensions or factors that relate to cross-cultural adaptation (2001). First, personal communication and host communication serve as the very engine that moves newcomers along on the adaptive journey. Second, there is host social communication, through which newcomers participate in host interpersonal and mass communication activities. Third, ethnic social communication is added to emphasize the role of the distinct, subcultural experiences of the newcomers with co-ethnics. Fourth, there are the conditions of the new environment which interact with the personal and social communication, including the receptivity and conformity pressure of the host environment. Fifth, the newcomers’ own predispositions in terms of preparedness for change, ethnic proximity, and adaptive personality set the initial parameters for the personal and social communication activities. Collectively and interactively, these five dimensions both influence and are influenced by the adaptive changes in the direction of intercultural transformation (p. 82).

All these factors would affect foreign students’ adaptation and adjustment to the new environment. This study focuses on these factors, examines what kinds there are, and which of them are most critical for Chinese international undergraduate students’ cultural transition and adjustment. In addition, Kim’s intercultural communication competency model is helpful for improving individual sojourners’ communication ability for their successful acculturation.

Summary

The empirical review on international students and Chinese international students was presented based on different themes in this chapter. From the empirical studies in this chapter, it is found that their academic and cultural experiences for the first year are the keys for their

success. There are different challenges that influence all international students' transition and adjustment to American universities, and cultural transition is the most crucial. Most of these challenges are related to culture; but intercultural adaptation may be the strongest challenge hindering the success of international students among these challenges.

Acculturation, cross-cultural adaptation, and intercultural communication competence theories can help us to understand international students, especially including Chinese students' experiences during their cultural transition and adjustment to American universities.

There is limited research on Chinese undergraduate students' first-year experience studying in the United States, so further research will be needed. In addition to this, in order to have a more complete knowledge and understanding of Chinese international undergraduate students, considering other demographic variables (gender, education level, length of residence, and multiple other factors) is important. Thus, further studies may focus on how these factors play a role in the adjustment of international students and Chinese international students at American institutions.

With a significant enrollment of Chinese international students in the United States institutions, issues for this population have increasingly drawn the attention of more researchers, educators, counselors, and psychologists. These people can provide excellent resources for other people who want to explore the experiences of Chinese international students and international students at American institutions.

Not much research has been devoted to Chinese international undergraduate students. Current literatures lacked any significant demographic analysis about Chinese international students' experiences at American universities. Little research was devoted to multiple factors' impact on international students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology, methods, and procedures used, which consists of the following sections: research question, research design, setting of the study, participants, data sources and collection methods, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations, and an overall summary.

Research Questions

In order to explore Chinese undergraduate students' experience in cultural transition to American universities, the following main research questions of this study are proposed:

1. What are challenges for Chinese international students in their first year? Which ones are most critical for Chinese students?
2. What are Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward intercultural adaptation?
3. How do they cope with these challenges of intercultural adaptation? What strategies are Chinese undergraduate students currently using to overcome cultural challenges in their transition?
4. What are their experiences with intercultural communication?

Basic Qualitative Research Design

This study explored the experiences of Chinese undergraduate students to gain a detailed understanding of “naturally occurring phenomena”. Qualitative methods would be particularly appropriate for this student population.

Merriam (2009) summarized the six more commonly used approaches in qualitative research from the variety of qualitative research strategies: basic qualitative research, phenomenology, ground theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, and critical qualitative research. A basic qualitative study is one of the strategies commonly used in qualitative research. It is the

most common “type” of qualitative research in an applied field of practice such as education and administration (p. 21). Moreover, Merriam (2009) stated that a basic qualitative study is interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their world, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (p. 23).

The basic qualitative research approach is best suited for this study since the aims of the study are to understand Chinese international students’ experiences in American universities. The basic research purposes for this study are to obtain an interpretation of Chinese students’ experiences of acculturation and have a better understanding of their attitudes toward intercultural adaptation, their first-year experiences, the most critical challenges for them, and how they cope with these challenges of intercultural adaptation to construct their world in their natural setting. Moreover, this study is more diverse and wide. As an essential main instrument, the researcher wants to gain a complete overview on Chinese international students’ experience of acculturation in American university.

However, Merriam (2009) also identified that data is collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis (p. 23). Data for this study were collected through interviews with Chinese international undergraduate students from a public state university in Minnesota. The Chinese international undergraduate students at this university come with diverse backgrounds from different areas of China and varying economic backgrounds, such as middle class or upper-middle class families. Their diverse backgrounds are important pre-school attributes for the data analysis in this study.

The data collection is typically prolonged and repetitive, as well as based on predefined research questions. The analysis of that data uses initial and focused coding to obtain the study’s

findings. In this study, an initial review of all the interview transcripts was conducted to get an overall sense of the data. Then, the researcher identified recurring themes and highlighted relevant information. Based on data analysis, the researcher proceeded further in-depth interviews. Finally, the researcher examined each theme in accordance with each research question and assessed the reliability of the data involving participants' confirmation and auditor's feedback on the rigor of the research process.

Setting of the Study

I conducted this study at a state university in Minnesota. This university was founded in 1869. It is located about an hour northwest of Minneapolis. The university has 200 majors, minors, and pre-professional programs, more than 60 graduate programs, and two doctoral programs. There are currently more than 14,000 students total, 9,640 of them enrolled in undergraduate programs. There are 1,411 international students from approximately 90 nations, with about 160 Chinese students (approximately 50% undergraduate and 50% graduate students) among them.

The Chinese international undergraduate students at this university come from diverse areas and economic backgrounds, mainly from middle class or upper-middle class families in China. Most of them were born in the 1990s. Their diverse backgrounds were important pre-school attributes for the data analysis in this study.

Participants

Participants in this study are limited to Chinese international undergraduate students. An email invitation including the purpose of the study and procedures was sent to Chinese international undergraduate students with the help of the Chinese Students and Scholar Association. A total of twelve Chinese students responded and participated in this study. There

were nine women and three men. Five of them were studying science or technology such as Math, Computer Information, Engineering, Chemistry and Biology; seven were from the different disciplines, including Finance, Music, English, and Accounting. Their length of stay in the United States is over two years. The participants were from different regions in China. Almost all of them had lived or studied in a large city in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjing, Shijiazhuang, or Chengdu.

Data Sources and Collection Methods

In order to gather data through multiple approaches, this study collected data from a survey and two interviews. Based on the current global health crisis situation, all of the interviews were conducted over Zoom video conferencing.

Data were collected through a survey and two interviews with each student. Interviewing students twice allowed the researcher to ask more questions and dig deeper into their experiences. First, a survey with demographic information was given to Chinese participants via email before interviews in order to get participants' background information. Next, based on the demographic information from the survey, the first interview was conducted. It focused on students' predisposition, including their preparedness for change and adaptive personality given the challenges they encountered during their first year. After an initial data analysis of the first interview, the second interview was conducted. It focused on their experiences of acculturation and communication. Each interview lasted about one hour, and the participant's responses were kept confidential. After each interview, a summary of the responses was emailed to the participant as soon as possible to check the accuracy.

Survey

A survey questionnaire was conducted in order to get students' demographic information to complete prior to the interview so that the researcher could spend more time talking with participants about their experiences. The survey includes some individual demographic attributes, such as age, gender, high school academic achievement, social attainments, degree program, TOEFL score, motivations, aspirations and goals, and length of time at the United States institution, as well as family background, such as socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and parental expectations. A survey questionnaire was designed. (see Appendix B. The survey was sent to participants by email.

First Interview

Before starting the first interview on Zoom, the participant was emailed a consent form to read and sign. The consent form provided more information about the purpose of the study, procedures, potential benefits, risk and discomforts, and rights of subjects. The participant was told that the interview was audiotaped. If the participants did not agree to be audiotaped, they were told that taping was a condition of participating, so the interview could not proceed further.

The first interview focused on the participants' sociocultural adaptation experiences refers to what kinds of the challenges they confront in their first year in American university, and how they copy with these challenges in the new cultural context.

Second Interview

After the first interview and initial coding, the second-depth interview started. First, the participants were asked to answer the questions about their understanding of acculturation, attitudes toward acculturation, and experiences of acculturation. Then, the interview focused on

the participants' communication experiences, including friendship with American people and interaction with professors. Finally, some follow-up questions were asked.

An interview guide or protocol was designed based on research questions aiming to investigate the factors that influence Chinese students' cultural experience. The questionnaire was written in English and communicated in both English and Chinese during the interviews with Chinese students. In order to protect their confidentiality and privacy, the names of the interviewees will not appear in any written document or publication.

Questions were evaluated by the research advisor in order to ensure validity and clarity of directions before the interview. During the interview, the researcher took brief notes on both the interviewee's verbal and non-verbal language. The interviews were recorded with permission of the interviewees, and the researcher arranged the notes and transcription after the interview. The interview was conducted in English, but the participants had the freedom to use Chinese whenever they experienced language obstacles.

Data Analysis

Qualitative coding is a process of defining what themes the data may represent. It is the first step of data analysis. Coding generates the bones of the analysis, and then theoretical integration assembles these bones into a working skeleton (Charmz, 2006). Coding refers to the operation of attaching labels to data segments to depict, sort, and compare with other data (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Coding consists of at least two phases: initial and focused coding. Initial coding should stick closely to the data by studying fragments of data—words, lines, segments, and incident; during focused coding, the most useful initial codes are selected and tested against extensive data (Charmz, 2006).

In this study, initial coding was conducted to store, identify, and label the data. After that, focused coding was conducted to further interconnect and conceptualize data. In addition, data such as notes, videos, tapes, transcribed and taped interviews, and extensive notes were stored and managed.

The data from the interviews was coded and entered into a computer file for analysis. The researcher did an early analysis to evaluate the existing data and generate modified questions and strategies for collecting new data.

Trustworthiness

This study, which uses qualitative data collection and analysis, focused on meaning and understanding, taking place in naturally occurring situations.

This study was composed of participants with different academic and family backgrounds, which enhanced the validity of the research and increased the study's reliability. The study with Chinese students and the university was appropriate for the research questions of the study and provided rich insights by focusing on actual practice *in situ*.

All interview questions were written in English in order to improve mutual understanding and interpretation. All data in Chinese was translated into English and sent to respondents for confirmation. The interviewers were asked to provide examples if the responses to the questions were not clear enough in order to decrease the risk of misinterpretation. After analyzing the information received, the researcher modified or added to the interview questions and provided modified interview questions or additional inquiries for respondents in written form in order to clarify any issues. The research model and methodology were reviewed and approved by the researcher's academic advisor, and IRB approval was obtained before the study.

I, personally, was serving as a qualitative researcher and the primary research instrument. As a Chinese-American, I am familiar with both Chinese and American cultures and certainly with facilitating the function of this study. Additionally, a coding assistant and an auditor assisted with this study. The coding assistant checked the transcripts, and the auditor gave feedback about the data analysis to ensure the rigor of the research process.

Limitations

The study may be limited to the Chinese students that volunteer, and the sample population is limited to one institution. Therefore, the results may not characterize the experiences of all Chinese students. This study also lacks any quantitative data collection or analysis. As a primary research instrument, the researcher may also have some unavoidable cultural and personal perspectives that affect the results.

Summary

In summary, this chapter first provided an introduction of the study, including the background of the study, significance of the study, and the research problems and questions. Then, it described the research methods and procedures used, which consisted of research design, the setting of the study, the population and sample, the data sources and collection methods, and the data analysis. Finally, it explained the trustworthiness, limitations, procedures, and timeline. A more detailed summary follows.

To reiterate, this study explores the experiences of Chinese undergraduate students in order to gain a detailed understanding of “naturally occurring phenomena,” or students studying, “in their naturally occurring state” (Patton, 1990). Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for this student population. Twelve Chinese international undergraduate students

from different backgrounds participated in this study. Data were collected through surveys and interviews. Data analysis was conducted by both initial and focused coding.

Moreover, in order to overcome research problems and ensure data quality, a basic qualitative research design and the procedure was conducted. For example, the study was composed of participants with different academic and family backgrounds, which enhanced the validity of the research and increased the study's reliability. Further, all interview questions were written in English in order to improve mutual understanding and interpretation. Specifically, the researcher used to be a Chinese international student, and was familiar with both Chinese and American cultures and certainly facilitates the function of this study.

However, the study may be limited due to some factors such as participants in one university, a lack of any quantitative data collection or analysis, and some unavoidable cultural and personal perspectives of the researcher that may affect the results.

Chapter 4: Findings

As a primary researcher, I organized and presented the findings of this study according to the response to the research questions in regard to literature review, Berry's acculturation model, and Kim's intercultural communication competence theories. First, I reiterated research problems and research questions. Second, I presented demographic information from the survey and interviews. Third, based on research questions, I described Chinese participants' challenges during their first year, their attitude toward acculturation, their coping experiences with acculturation, and communication at an American university. Finally, I introduced Chinese participants' experiences during COVID-19.

Statement of Research Problem

This research project investigated Chinese international undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation and what challenges are most critical for Chinese students, as well as how they cope with the challenges in order to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome their challenges in their transition. At the same time, I hope that this study will help the colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate students' experience in their transition, in order to provide services by designing individual, group, and institutional approaches that work more effectively with Chinese students at various developmental levels and which facilitate their growth.

Research Questions

1. What are challenges for Chinese international undergraduate students during their first year? Which ones are most critical for Chinese students?
2. What are Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward intercultural adaptation?

3. How do they cope with these challenges of intercultural adaptation? What strategies are Chinese undergraduate students currently using to overcome cultural challenges in their transition?
4. What are their experiences with intercultural communication?

Demographic Data

Demographic factors such as ethnicity of the immigrants, gender, education level, and length of residence have all been identified as possible sources of variation in acculturation (Zimmermann, 1995). This section discusses the demographic information of participants in the study.

Demographic Information

A survey was sent to participants by email before the first interview. The survey included some individual demographic attributes, such as age, gender, high school academic achievement, social attainments, degree program, TOEFL score, motivations, aspirations and goals, and length of time living in the United States, as well as each family background, such as socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and parental expectations. The participants in this study consisted of 12 Chinese undergraduate students, three men and nine women. Two of them completed their high school degrees in America; others completed their high school degree in China. One participant had been in the United States between 6 months and 1 year. Other participants had been in the United States for more than 2 years. Regarding language skill, all of them learned English in China for more than 6 years; six of them learned English in China for more than 8 years. All participants completed English proficiency tests, such as TOFEL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (The International English Language Testing System). One participant's score of TOFEL was more than 600, and two participants' scores of

IELTS was more than 7.5. Half of them had traveled or lived abroad before coming to the United States. Half of them had no abroad experiences. From the major perspective, five of them were studying science or engineering (Computer Science, Engineering, Chemistry and Math) and seven were from the social science disciplines (Music, English, Finance and Economics). All participants came from different regions in China. Almost all of them had studied or lived in a city in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjing, and Chengdu. Detailed information of each participant is listed in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Information of Chinese Participants

Name	Sex	Major	Age	Years in the U.S.	Years in learning English	Family annual income	Parental education level
Betty	Female	Engineering	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Over \$100,000	Above Secondary
Diane	Female	English	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Over \$100,000	Above Secondary
Jing	Female	Finance	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Over \$100,000	Above Secondary
Leqi	Female	Math	Over 20	Over 2	Over 6	Less \$100,000	Above Secondary
Qiong	Female	Chemistry	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Less \$100,000	Above Secondary
Qiu	Female	Information	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Less \$100,000	Above Secondary
Melody	Female	Accounting	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Over \$100,000	Above Secondary
Yining	Female	Music	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Over \$100,000	Above Secondary
Liang	Male	Music	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Less \$100,000	Above Secondary
Yatong	Female	Finance	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Less \$100,000	Above Secondary
Nelson	Male	Computer	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Less \$100,000	Above Secondary
Ting	Male	Biology	Over 20	Over 2	Over 8	Less \$100,000	Above Secondary

Note: Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the participants.

Chinese Students' Education Background

The education background was more diverse among these interviewees. All of them completed their high school degrees in China or America. Two of the Chinese participants studied at both private schools and international schools, two of the participants studied at a high school in the United States and the other had abroad experiences, such as summer camp and

music festivals in the United States. Those who studied abroad or from international schools believe that their experiences were beneficial for improving Chinese student's ability to speak English and embrace cross-cultural adjustment. Eight of the participants studied at a high school in China; they once stated that they would like to study abroad after graduating from high school in China. They thought that their strong background knowledge, specifically, mathematics and science that they learned from China, would be beneficial for their study in American universities. Overall, all Chinese participants finished their high school degree successfully and had been trained in English for more than 6 years. They were fully prepared and ready to start their college study at American universities.

Attitudes toward Studying in Abroad

All of the Chinese participants completed their high school degree. All of them except one went to study abroad after graduating from high school. Leqi came from Chengdu, a capital city in the Sichuan province located in southern China. Leqi stated that studying abroad opens a new window for her to discover the world. Melody came from Shijiazhuang, the capital of HeBei province in northern China. She graduated from a prestigious high school in Shijiazhuang and was admitted to the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE) in Beijing, China with a high score of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). She explained her attitudes toward studying abroad with the following statement: "I am not willing to study abroad; UIBE is one of key universities in China. I like this university. I like Beijing, but my parents want to send me to study abroad." Yatong, a finance student who came from Tianjing, said, "Studying abroad is very popular; most of my peers come to the United States for studying. And I also want better education and have a chance to see a bigger world." The data from the

survey revealed that all of the Chinese participants' parents were willing to send them to study abroad.

The Goals for Studying in America

The data from the survey revealed the different goals of Chinese participants for studying in the United States. Six of them wanted to get an advanced degree at an America university and then find a job in the United States. Betty, Diane, and Leqi wanted to get a bachelor's or master's degree and then stay in America. Ting wanted to get more working experience at an American company and then return to China. She said, "I wanted to stay at least a few years after college graduation to gain some work experience. And then I'll decide whether I want to go home." Her close friend, Yatong, also expressed the same idea: "I want to have a job in America, but maybe come back to China if I get a better job offer from China." Melody had no expectations, but just wanted to explore the world. She said that her temporary goals were "to get away from my parents to explore more opportunities in my life."

Foreign Cultural Experiences

The data of the survey also showed their different foreign cultural experiences. Some of them studied at an America high school or Chinese international school. Some of them participated in summer camp or international festivals in America. Yatong described how and why she come to the United States. She said, "My dad was completing his PhD degree in the United States, so I came here to attend high school. I wanted to experience a different education." Diane was born in Canada to Chinese parents, and they were working in Beijing. At the age of six, Diane was sent to international school in Beijing where all of the teachers and students were foreigners. They were communicating with each other in English. Diane spent twelve years at this school. After getting a high school degree, she wanted to go to America to

study for her bachelor's degree. Xiaoliang, a music student, participated in a music festival in the United States when he was in high school. Some participants mentioned that they made some American friends in China to get know the American culture.

Parental Educational Levels and Economic Status

Parental educational levels and family economic status are other important factors influencing international students' study abroad. The data from the survey also showed that the educational levels of all the parents of the Chinese participants were secondary and above, with all of them were willing to send their kids to study abroad. Fortunately, the rapid economic development in China has enabled most households to send their children to another country to study. From the survey, I found that there were five family annual incomes more than \$100,000, three of them less than \$50,000, and others that ranged between \$50,000 and \$100,000. All of the Chinese participants got their families' economic support for their study abroad endeavors. Qiu believed that the family economic statuses of Chinese students were better than the average economic status in China.

All of participants came from the urban areas in China; half of them came from southern China and half of them from northern China. Additionally, China is officially composed of 56 ethnic groups (55 minorities plus the dominant Han). All of the participants were Han.

Adaptive Personality

The factors existing prior to acculturation include demographic factors such as cultural origin, age, gender, education level, status, motivation, and expectations, as well as cultural distance and personality (Berry, 1998). The adaptive personality can be assessed based on observations of the person's behaviors, such as dressing, working, making friends, social skills, and community access skills. The personalities of Chinese participants may have an impact on

acculturation. In the interview, most of Chinese participants believed that positive personalities, such as openness, agreeableness, optimism, independence, and consciousness, would be helpful for them to adjust to a new cultural environment. When asked what happened when they were facing some challenges and hardships, Yatong said, “Just let time solve it. I try to learn thing myself.” Melody mentioned that she was “getting used to the norms and living on my own.” Betty recalled her first year of experience in America, mentioning that, “It was very hard at that time, and sometime I was frustrated.” She also added, “I try to look at the positive way about these challenges.” Jing had the same experience during her first year. Jing said, “I feel not good at first. On the other hand, I tell myself to overcome difficulties.” Leqi agreed with them by saying, “Lonely at first but more independent and got over the challenges eventually.”

Challenges of Chinese Students

Andrade (2005) conducted a qualitative study investigating the first-year experiences of international students at an institution. This study found some challenges influencing international students related to English proficiency, relationships with instructors, and participation within the classroom. During the interviews, Chinese participants mentioned that they met various challenges during their first year at an American university. The challenges can be broken into four categories, such as academic challenges, including language proficiency and learning style, psychological challenges, transportation, and doctor visitation.

Language Proficiency

Most of the Chinese students in this study thought that English proficiency was the biggest challenge during their first year in the United States, despite having learned English for over six years in China. Yatong said, “It was not very comfortable to use English to learn new things; sometimes it’s hard to understand. And my oral English is not very good. I have to live

by myself. I had no friends, no family here. I was feeling lonely most of the time.” Melody agreed with her and thought that learning slang was very hard, as she mentioned, “American students used a lot of slang; I really didn’t know what they were talking about. That was really discouraging and disappointing.” Xiaoliang thought that he had difficulties in chatting in English, let alone depression and loneliness. Limited English proficiency provided challenges for Chinese students in two significant areas: developing social friendships and participating in class.

Developing Social Friendships

A lack of English skills prevented these Chinese students from making friends. As Leqi said, “Making American friends and cultural differences are biggest challenges, since sometimes it is hard for people from small circles to know American people or make more friends.” Ting expressed her similar experiences, saying, “I didn’t have any language barrier. My biggest challenge was making new friends and understanding American culture because I didn’t grow up here with some TV shows, movies, and books as my American peers did.” She also added, “I have to learn to be independent as possible. Everyone in America expected me to select courses and design my own class schedule myself. It was hard for me to adjust because class schedule was set by the school in China.”

Due to moving away from their homeland to a new environment, Chinese students have to establish a new friendship network. Some of them mentioned that they often immerse themselves with Chinese students for socialization. As Betty mentioned, “I spoke English with American friends and Chinese with Chinese friends. Because speaking English with my Chinese friends feels wrong. I try to learn from other. Don’t give up. Face it.” When asked if they tend to speak mostly English or Chinese with friends, Jing answered, “I would say half and half. I speak

Chinese with Chinese friends, and speak English with non-Chinese friends.” Ting agreed with her, saying, “I speak English with my American friends. With Chinese friends we speak Chinese.” Yatang described her experience: “I use Chinese to talk with Chinese friends. It is very affectation, and it is not helpful to improve my English.”

Many Chinese students praised their professors positively, as Jing mentioned, “I enjoy professors who are knowledgeable and care about their students. In that case, I could learn from them and enjoy taking their classes. Professors in the United States have more authority. Different professor could set his own policy and syllabus for same class.” She also commented on the professors’ relationship with students, explaining that, “Student and professor are equal. Some students has good relationship with professors and some are not. This depends on lots of factors such as grades, personality, characteristic, and so on. Also, some student would be nervous when they say professors.” Leqi described her professors positively, saying, “I enjoy most of the professors I met in college. They’re all very caring, great at teaching, expecting my academic success and taking their job seriously. I can be friends with my American professors. I can tell them a lot of my personal things.” Melody agreed with her, saying, “Professors are chill and are less stressful to deal with. I feel like professors and students are equal.” Ting was able to enjoy her class because, “Teachers promoted critical thinking and different ideas.” She also added, “My professors are very kind and patient, I often ask them questions after class. I think students and professors should be friends. Students shouldn’t be afraid of professors.” Lastly, Yatang mentioned, “My professor seems kindly, friendly and cares about students. His class is very interesting. I feel safe, like will not be judged by him or her.” The majority of these Chinese students had a great relationship with their professors, leading them to have a positive learning experience.

Participating in Class

All of the Chinese participants had experience learning English for many years in China. However, they still expressed continuing difficulty understanding the English of their professors and peers, particularly incompetent oral and listening comprehension, as well as new terminology. These difficulties prevented the students from actively participating in class discussions.

During the interviews, Betty remarked, “I once asked questions in class, but I have to prepare very well before asking question. As the result, sometime it was too late. The chance slipped away.” Jing described her experiences in the classroom, saying, “My class are interesting. In my school, other than required classes, I could choose a lot classes I am interested such as painting, pottery, hockey, etc. I think these classes help me reduce stress, as well as help me find out my interest area.” When explaining her first day of school, she mentioned, “[My] first day of school is awkward because it is a new world to me. I do not know anybody. Also, there is no Chinese student in my class. I want to talk to my classmate, but I am nervous. However, my classmates are nice, and they come to talk to me at first.”

In order to facilitate learning activities, many professors like using cooperative learning techniques in their class, such as group study. Some Chinese participants expressed their experiences with group study in the classroom. Betty did not like this learning style, saying, “Group study was particularly uncomfortable for us since we used to individual study in Chinese education system rather than cooperating with peers.” She also added, “Some people would take advantage of you to get good grade.” Some of the students felt discomfort due to lack of confidence, difficulty with English, or cultural background. Melody described her experiences in class discussions: “I was always talkative one in the class in China than I came here and it’s

really different, I just sit back and listen since I couldn't follow class discussion totally. Maybe I am not very confident." Nelson thought, "It is better if American students can join our study group to share what they learned because my listening ability wasn't good, and I wasn't able to follow the professor said." The majority of these Chinese students had a great relationship with their classmates, leading them to have a positive learning experience.

Learning Styles

Chinese participants in this study stated that the learning styles in China are teacher-centered and passive learning styles, which focus on imitation, memory, repetition, and passive learning. All these study habits can lead to a lack of creativity. During the interview, Chinese participants expressed their interests in student-centered and active teaching and learning styles in American universities. They thought that American education encourages more class participation. Practice and research would play an important part in learning at school. Compared to American learning and teaching styles, some Chinese participants believe that traditional teacher-centered teaching and learning styles would be more effective in math and science disciplines. They found that some American students do not have a good foundation in mathematics and science. To understand this phenomenon, Yatong recalled her learning experience at America high school, explaining that "each teacher has their own style. Some classes are loose, fun, students can drink, eat and joke with the teachers. After school, we don't have to do a lot of homework, unlike China. All students can take classes which they are only interested in. As the result, not many students are willing to take mathematics, physics and biology classes."

During the interviews, most Chinese participants thought that similar to the English proficiency, a lack of knowledge about American culture was also a big challenge to them, since

language is related to a cultural background. As Melody stated, “However, learning pop culture and cultural differences are also big challenges, for example, if you know nothing about baseball, when American students are talking about baseball, how do you join their talking?”

All of the participants mentioned that they have tried to improve their English skills and knowledge about American culture through multimedia, such as TV shows, videos, newspaper, magazines, etc. Betty said, “When I just came here, I couldn’t understand everything American said. After 6 months, I found a job; I learned the culture and English by radio, newspaper, and watching TV at the work.”

During the interview, all participants thought that their school provided effective service to improve their English ability. Qiu expressed her appreciation of the Intensive English Center (IEC) which offers English language instruction to non-native speakers who wish to improve their language skills while learning about American culture and customs. Qiu stated:

My English was poor before coming to America. IEC provided a lot of helps to improve my English by developing various activities, such as ice skating, ice fishing, and snowboarding in winter, hiking and playing sand volleyball. Specifically, in holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Hollywood, Christmas, ICE arranged many interested activities for us. I was not feeling homesick. Through these activities, I got more understanding of American culture and improves my English at the same time.

In conclusion, most of these students believed that limited English proficiency and lack of knowledge in American cultural background (for instance, English slang) provided some challenges during their first year in the United States. These challenges can be resolved by developing social friendships and participating fully in class through involvement with

classmates and professors, as well as providing practical service in school to improve Chinese students' English proficiency.

Psychological Challenge

Acculturative stress is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation (Berry, 1998). Acculturative stress was identified through various factors, one of which is psychological factors (Berry et al., 1987). However, coping and adjustment refer to psychological responses to cross-cultural changes, whereas integration has been defined as social participation in the host environments (Kim, 2001). Yatong described her feelings in her first semester in an American university by saying, "I don't know any people here. When I was with Americans, it seemed that they were polite, but I really didn't know much about them and what they were really thinking. I feel frustrated and lonely." Ting expressed similar feelings, and stated: "I didn't have language barrier, but I feel lonely." Qiu also agreed with two of them; when talking about her first-semester experiences, she said,

For the first month when I came here, I felt that everything was fresh to me. I was very impressed by Minnesota nice. I met warmly welcome on campus. After two or three months, I was home sick and became to be very lonely. I was missing my parents very much. I often called them and cried.

Most Chinese participants did not use professional services to deal with emotional and personal distress and instead opted to resolve issues on their own or within their families. These students were asked, "What happened to you when you were facing all of these challenges and hardships?" Diane answered this question, highlighting the challenges by explaining: "I would miss home and family but I would get over the challenges when time passes by." Jing recalled,

“First day of school is awkward because it is a new world to me. I do not know anybody. Also, there is no Chinese student in my high school. I want to talk to my classmate, but I am nervous.”

Other areas that presented challenges to these students were environmental differences. Chinese participants found the size of the city and campus in Minnesota were very small compared to the campus and city in China. However, they tended to accept the change of a slower pace of life. As Diane explains, “I was a little bit bored because I’ve always lived in a big city [Beijing] in China, and the cities I’ve lived in the United States are smaller in size, so that was something I had to adapt to.”

Transportation

Transportation is still another challenge for Chinese students because most of them could not drive before coming to America. As Jing said, “Transportation is the most difficulty in my life. I do not know how to drive at that time. It is very difficult for me to go out without reliable transportation.” At the same time, it is not more favorable if you can drive. As Betty stated, “I need to drive on the road every day, for example, I always go to the market to buy plants, herbs and flowers. I really worry about driving and hate about it.”

Some Chinese students mentioned that they did not have a car during their first year. They could not go anywhere without a car, so they had to go shopping by bus. Nelson recalled his experience, saying, “It took me 15 minutes to walk to a bus station. You know, it was very cold in Minnesota winter. On the other hand, it was inconvenient to get on and off the bus with goods. Later, the church and my host family provided me a lot help for going shopping and social activities.”

Chinese students in the United States often have traffic accidents. One of the frequent fatalities for students are car crashes. Xiaoliang shared a sad story about that last year. A Chinese

student, who was interested in photography, parked his car on the shoulder of a highway to take some pictures; he then crossed the isolation zone on the expressway and went to the opposite lane, where he collided with an incoming car, dying on the spot. There is a big difference in traffic rules between China and the United States; Chinese people are used to Chinese driving rules, meaning that it is generally difficult to adapt to the driving rules in the United States. This is one of reasons why Chinese students in the United States often experience traffic accidents.

Doctor Visitation

Some Chinese participants mentioned that the cost of visiting a doctor in the United States is very expensive and inconvenient. Ting, a biology student, recalled that his Chinese friend had a stomachache during the night. To seek treatment, they went to a health center and found that there was a notice on the door asking them to go to an urgent care in the city. When they went to the urgent care in the city, it was closed, as it was night. So, they had to drive another 20 kilometers to go to a hospital emergency room. It took 12 hours there for admission, surgery, and discharge. A month later, they received a bill for \$30,000. Qiong, a female chemistry student, added that it is important to remember not to call an ambulance if you do not need to since you have to pay the extra costs despite having school health insurance. Diane talked about her first-year experience, saying, “Once I was feeling sick, I don’t know how to make appointment with a doctor. I have no friend here, and I don’t want to seek counseling’s help because of language barrier. I felt helpless, I have to call my parents to get their advice.”

However, Chinese participants also expressed continuing difficulty understanding the English of their doctors and nurses, particularly incompetent oral and listening comprehension for the medical terminology. Besides, there are some cultural misunderstandings between

American doctors and Chinese student patients. These difficulties prevented the students from attaining treatment and care effectively.

During the interview, it can be seen that visiting a doctor is expensive and inconvenient in the United States, which was a consistent issue among the participants. Chinese international students are faced with a variety of struggles to attain treatment and care in the United States.

In summary, various challenges the Chinese students faced were related to their cultural transition and adjustment in the United States. The next section presents Chinese participants' experiences of acculturation.

Intercultural Communication and Acculturation

Kim (1991) defined intercultural communication competence as a measure of an individual's ability to interact in a variety of intercultural communication events. This ability, often called communication competency or social competency, is comprised of the cognitive, affective, and operational capabilities by which individuals organize themselves in and with their sociocultural milieu (Kim, 1991). In this section, I mainly focused on the Chinese participants' knowledge of American culture, attitudes toward American higher education and cultural adaptation, and how they interact in intercultural contexts, such as coping with the challenges and communication experiences.

Knowledge and Perceptions of American Culture

Most of the Chinese students continued to embrace American popular culture, environment, and Americans' democracy. Betty, an engineering student who came from Qingdao, a harbor of Shandong province in northern China, stated, "I watched lots of America movies, so I know it [America] is a big country, and western and eastern coasts have some big cities. And America has a nice environment, there, lots of trees and lawn are green. At least, I am

living in this area now.” Diane expressed her feelings on American culture, saying, “[American culture] values democracy, freedom of speech, advanced economy. Before coming to the United States, I thought everywhere would be like NYC.” Qiu also agreed with her: “[In America] people have creative ideas, students have lots of types of outdoor activities. Americans have freedom and rights to choose what they want to do and what they want to speak. They are very polite and really like to say thank you. America has lots of wonderful natural views.” Melody described America as “KFC and McDonalds,” and she also added, “Americans like to eat fatty foods.” “Americans are simple and talk straight.” Yatong stated, “I know, American are very outgoing and very focus on hands-on experience. I thought it’s gonna be very open-minded and have lots of freedom.” Her friend, Ting, agreed with her in saying,

I knew, American culture is as more open than Eastern culture, and people like to eat more fast food. I was curious about American education and wanted to experience it. I knew some aspects of American culture through movies and books, and I met some foreign teachers in China.

Most of the Chinese participants were interested in American culture. When asked what some differences were between China and America in the way that the people think and behave, Melody said, “Americans are simple and talk straight, while Chinese people may be little bit complex and talk indirectly.” Ting, a biology major, said, “In China, people are expected to obey the elders and authorities. In America people are regarded more as equals regardless of rank or age.” Yatong looked at this issue from a similar angle, explaining,

I think Chinese and American are very different in the way they think and behave.

Americans are more outgoing, while Chinese prefer saying things in a more gentle way.

And Americans like small talks; they are very friendly and kind to strangers, like they

always smile to bus drivers. You're not sure if they really like you or just being polite.

But they may not truly want to help you when you're in trouble. Chinese never smile and say 'thank you' to bus drivers but once you become friends, you know they truly want to help you.

Jing said, "People in China are more traditional, but people here are more open. One culture shock I have experienced is paying tip after eating in a restaurant. In China, we do not need to pay tips. In United States, paying tip is their culture."

Most of the Chinese participants also expressed their appreciation of American personalities. In their eyes, Americans are very open-minded and fair. They like speaking up and generally going after what they want. Particularly in the classroom and apartments, American students are not afraid to voice their opinions.

However, some participants did not know a lot about American culture before they came to the United States. Ting said, "Not really, I didn't know a lot about American culture, and I didn't work with any Americans in China."

Attitudes toward American Higher Education

All of the Chinese participants completed high school education; two of them completed their high school education in the United States, and the others did in China. All of them thought that American higher education opens a new window of opportunity for Chinese students to explore the world. Xiaoliong, a music student majoring in piano performance, came from Shanghai, the biggest city in China. He participated in a music festival in the United States when he was in high school. He said, "I liked the atmosphere of the university where the music festival was held, and my piano teacher encouraged me to apply for American university after completing high school in China. I did, and later I was admitted." Jing, a finance student from

Tianjing, a big city close to Beijing, stated, “I knew that there were a lot of famous university in United States, such as Ivy League.” Yining, a music student, said, “[America] is a developed country with good educational resources.” Some of the Chinese participants held a neutral stance when comparing higher education in China and America. They thought both Chinese and American educational systems have advantages and disadvantages. Melody thought that in terms of undergraduate education, China focuses on the depth of knowledge, while education in America emphasizes the breadth of knowledge. She also thought that for graduate education, America has a better education opportunity.

During the interviews, Chinese participants expressed different perceptions about higher education in America. When asked what they thought the biggest differences between China and America were in the way that people think and behave, Betty responded:

I think the biggest differences between the two education systems are that American don't like to be told what they need to do, while Chinese are OK. Chinese Teaching style focuses on more technical part, while America teaching style emphasizes more personal style. Chinese teaching style is from a big picture to detail, and America teaching style is from detail to go to big picture in the end.

Diane thought that American education encourages more class participation. She also believed that completing practice and research would play an important part in learning in the United States. Jing mentioned some differences between China and American teaching styles, explaining,

In China, some teachers focus more on specific topics in classes of Chinese, Math, English, and so on. Classes are very serious. In the United States, each teacher has his/her own style. Some classes are loose, fun, students can drink, eat, and joke with the

professor. In China, all students must take some classes which they are not interested in.

In the United States, students have more flexibility to choose their interested classes.

Leqi thought that American students definitely believe in democracy and freedom. However, Chinese people do not necessarily believe in these aspects. Americans believe in individualism, while Chinese people believe in collectivism. She also added,

American teaching style is free— you can be who you want to be. If you do not get good grades, no one would be mean to you. However, teachers/professors in China can be mean to you if the same thing happens. Chinese style is more about doing problem sets and get practiced. American style is more about understanding the fundamental theory and applying it.

Melody agreed with her, saying, “Americans learn the framework, and Chinese students just care about getting the right answer.” Ting recalled her first year in the United States, mentioning:

It was hard in the beginning because I had to learn the new expectations [to me]. For example, in class, my teachers didn't expect me to recite a certain answer, but instead to come up with my original thoughts. It was very different approach in China. American teaching promotes more critical and creative thinking while Chinese teaching tries to give the students a correct answer to recite. American learning style requires students to have the initiative. Students need to be inquisitive and willing to research the topics. In China, the teachers tell you what and how to learn.

Yatong completed her high school in America and compared the differences between the two countries' education systems. She said,

In Chinese system you do not need to plan too much; just follow your teacher, or just follow the system; you'll get a job. But in America, you need to have your own opinion,

it's very important to plan ahead, and knowing what you want to do in the future. There are so much freedom in American's system.

The majority of the Chinese students had high praise for the American educational system since they had benefitted from this system. Some of them thought both Chinese and American education systems had their own advantages and disadvantages. As Betty mentioned, "Chinese education system focus on theory, while American system focus on practice, such as advanced project; it can provides sophisticated equipment. Some differences between two education systems are due to cultural differences."

Attitudes toward Cultural Adaptation

Berry (1998) identified acculturation into four attitudes: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Yuan (2011) examined the academic and cultural experiences of Chinese students at one university in the United States with a qualitative method. Ten Chinese students and two American professors were interviewed, and participant observation was also used to collect supplemental information. The finding of the study shows that Chinese students' attitudes toward adaption to American culture can be identified in different types. The first kind of attitude is to keep their own culture without thinking about adapting to American culture. The second is "depending upon the situation," which means that if they plan to work here, they will try to adapt to the local culture; if they go back to China after graduation, they will not worry about cultural adaptation. The third is that they thought Chinese students should minimize the differences and share the commonalities.

The finding of this study is basically consistent with Yuan's study as above. When I asked the Chinese participants if they would try to adapt to the host culture, they gave me different kinds of responses. The first response was "Yes." There were two participants that

stated they were willing to try to adapt to the American culture. Yatong said that as long as she is living in America, she would like to adapt to the host culture. During the interview, she mentioned, "Because of the internet, I already know many different cultures in different countries. I am very open to a new culture, and I am willing to respect their culture, but I do not want to adapt to American culture." Most participants expressed the third response, "integration" or "both assimilation and integration." Yatong stated, "I try to find a new way to work for both." Jing agreed with her, and added, "I asked some people who have similar experience with me, and see how to do the integration effectively."

During the interview, when participants were asked their attitude about adaptation to American culture, only one participant responded "No." Yining, who has been in America for one year, she said that she still wants to keep her own culture; her response was only one word: "marginalization." During the interview, she mentioned, "Because of the internet, I already know many different cultures in different countries. I am very open to a new culture, and I am willing to respect their culture, but I do not want to adapt to American culture."

Most of the participants expressed that as long as they are living in America, they would like to adapt to the host culture. Some participants stated that although they may not adapt to the entire American culture, they would follow the rules and norms of the host community. However, some participants believed it is definitely possible for Chinese students to successfully adapt to a different culture. Yatong, Diane, and Xiaoling had some cultural adaptation experiences, such as studying at an American high school, China international school, and summer camping in America. They loved American food. They thought Chinese food was not good for their health due to too much oil in the meal. They enjoyed American TV series and

movies, and they made a lot of American friends. They expressed that they are willing to adapt to American culture.

Actually, human beings always share some commonalities (Yuan, 2011). Nelson, a male computer science student, thought that science and arts such as music and martial arts have no border. For instance, Chinese martial art has over 5,000 years of history, which is a combination of Chinese traditional medicine, Chinese philosophy, and self-defense. There are more than one billion people in the world who play Chinese martial art. It really is a great civilization, which should belong to all of the world. As Chinese students, we should minimize the cultural differences as much as possible and share communities.

As a summary of this section, the majority of the Chinese students continued to embrace and adapt to American popular culture, although a lack of knowledge regarding American culture prevented them from adapting to American culture. However, they highly praised the American educational system because they had benefited much from this system.

Coping with Challenges

The third research questions in this study were designed to examine how the Chinese participants cope with these challenges. This section presents the Chinese students' experiences of coping with challenges in three areas, preferred coping strategies, school support programs, and religious involvement.

Preferred Coping Strategies

To cope with challenges international students face in their first year in America, Andrade (2005) suggested that methods of coping with these challenges were characterized by involvement behaviors and formal campus support services. The acculturation strategies were categorized into the four types, assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry

et al., 1987). During the interview, when asked what coping strategy was used to cope with some challenges, Yatong answered confidently, “Assimilation. I learned to talk more directly and seek help from Americans.” She came to the United States to study at a high school in a small town southwest of Minnesota. Just as she said, there were no Chinese students at her school. Local people were very simple and nice. She received a warm welcome on her first day in class, and many classmates were willing to help her. She was good at mathematics and willing and happy to help her classmates. During her school periods, she joined the school jazz band as a drummer, and made many American friends. After one semester, she was used to being there and became one of the top ten students at her school. Xiaoliong responded, “I guess assimilation. I tried to listen more and joined some group activities.”

However, some responded “No.” to this question. Only one participant gave me this response. Yining, who has been in America over one year, said that she still wanted to keep her own culture, with her response being only one word: “marginalization.” In this study, most of the Chinese participants preferred integration (75%) for their acculturation strategy. The second preferred strategy was assimilation (17%). However, separation (0%) and marginalization (8%) were not preferred among Chinese participants.

Chinese participants reported different attitudes toward coping with these challenges, and their coping experiences. Some of them mentioned that making American friends helped with their coping experience. As Ting stated, “I was a little anxious about not being able to make new friends, but it didn’t affect other aspects of my life. I learned to talk more directly and seek help from Americans. I learned to seek help from teachers and advisors.” Yatong expressed her attitude toward facing these challenges, saying, “I didn’t push myself to fit in, so it’s fine. Just let time solve it. I try to learn thing myself, and find a new way to work on.” Yatong also thought

that keeping good friendships with other students helped Chinese students to cope with challenges they were facing. As she mentioned, “My friends, they are all very positive and great. I learned a lot new things from them. Not for most of the class in first year, using English to learn new things is hard. I always need to transfer to Chinese. But it’s getting better and better.”

School Support Programs

There are a variety of support programs that play an important role in Chinese students’ adjustment. These support programs include school supports, such as ESL courses, school counselor, and cultural clubs, and ethnic group support involves the students’ organizations and organized religious activities. As Ting said, “I got support from academic advisors to help me adjust my schedule.” Yatong mentioned, “Yes. I went to many ISSS (International Student and Scholar Services) workshops that help you to adapt life in United States.” Many Chinese participants got ethnic group support, such as through Chinese Students and Scholar Association (CSSA) at the university. They described that they were welcomed warmly by CSSA and ISSS office when they arrived at school for the first time. They were picked up at the airport, received assistance with their living arrangements, provided English training, and advised on course selections.

Participants expressed their different opinions on school supports, such as counseling. Many believed that counseling would help, and they expressed a positive attitude toward seeking counseling. Other doubted the usefulness of counseling, especially when they considered their personal issues, such as psychological issues.

Religious Involvement

Religious involvement is another area that helped Chinese students to cope with adjustment. Some Chinese participants observed and participated in certain religious practices

such as church attendance, scripture study, and prayer. Qiu is a leader of scripture study group, and said, “I think the church really help me to know who I really am and what I am capable of doing. Church really helped us a lot.” Religious involvement not only helped Chinese students in adjusting to life in a new environment and providing them with social involvement, but also in persevering in their studies. Nelson, a male computer science student who came from Beijing, described his first week’s experience at an American university:

Needless to say, moving from a 21 million people, warm, northern big city in China to a 66,000 people, isolated, arctic town in Minnesota was a shocking change to me. Although I had no friends, nobody I could talk to, I was touched by the church. Even though the church was predominately white, everyone was very kind to me, they accepted me for who I am and help me to find my host family, go shopping, and move the furniture to new apartment. Without Heavenly Father’s help I could never accomplish my goal.

Devotionals gave me a spiritual uplift.

Participating in religious activities helped Chinese students to make necessary adjustments and be successful.

In summary, three key factors emerged as significant in regard to helping Chinese students cope with their challenges: (a) integration as preferred strategies, (b) school support programs, and (c) student involvement in their religious life.

Experiences of Communication

One of the most common factors that aided Chinese students’ cross-cultural adjustment was intercultural communication. This section outlines the Chinese participants’ experiences with intercultural communication, followed by their social communication.

Experiences of Intercultural Communication

Ngwira et al. (2015) investigated international students' intercultural communication experiences and found that Chinese students needed to be encouraged to be open to active interaction and be willing to even initiate conversations. My second interviews found that most Chinese participants showed better motivation toward intercultural communication.

When asked what their values are toward friendship in the United States, Diane said, "Yes. I highly value my friendship with them, and I'm grateful for the help they've offered me. I made some American friends, such as Brynna, Wendy, Abbey." She also added, "Friendships with American are important because friends can be there and support you when you are far away from family. Friends should be there for each other and support each other. I share different aspects of my life with different groups of friends." Jing expressed a positive attitude toward friendship:

Friendship means a lot to me. In other word, a good friend is like a family member to me. In China, because of one-child policy, most of us does not have brother or sister. Thus, when we have something that we do not want to share with parents, we would like to share with friends. Therefore, good friends seem like brother or sister to me.

I would tell them what I think, and what Chinese values is. I believe they would respect my decision. It does not really affect my relationship with Americans if we both respect each other.

Melody explained,

Friendships with Americans share the same traits as Chinese except Americans are more independent on what they want to do and friendship is more open and laid back. I have

close friends who are Americans. I think I just learned to accept our differences, but the commonality outweigh the differences and we get along just fine.

Most of them thought that a good friendship is based on respect and trust. As Ting said, Yes. I have some very close American friends. Hadley, Raasha, Susy. Friendship with Americans is no different from friendship with Chinese people. A friend should be supportive and kind. I don't think there's different in developing meaningful relationships with Chinese versus Americans. They are all built upon trust and respect.

On the other hand, a few Chinese students expressed their disappointment creating friendships in America. Yatong stated the struggles of class friendship, saying,

I made some friends, but I think our relationship is not very strong. It's broke easily after we graduate or not in the same class anymore. I make these friends in classes, so our friendship is only in class. We talk about assignments, group work, nothing too much. We don't spend time together outside classroom. True friend probably should like you and can talk about everything. I think it's the culture differences and my personality that makes me hard to have American friends.

Qiu described her first-semester experience:

When I first come to America, I would like to try my best to fit into a new culture by living with American roommates. But I found that my roommate often takes her boyfriend to our room, and they like to have a party at weekend while I am studying during the weekend. In our apartment, I am cooking Chinese food. My roommate may not like the smell of Chinese food; she sprayed some perfume on my food when I left. Anyway, it is really difficulty to live with her. Later, I moved out.

Social Communication

Participating in a number of social activities will help Chinese students overcome the challenges they face in adjusting to social, cultural, and physical environments by being active in cultural clubs and through involvement in the religious life of the campus (Andrade, 2005).

Diane, a professional volleyball player and Chinese music instrument player, expressed her experiences, saying, “I was in the volleyball club and Asian music ensemble. These involvements not only assisted me in adjusting to my life but also in persevering in my studies.” Jing, who is good at Latin dancing, stated, “I have participated in some extracurricular activities such as Dance Club, international club, and so on. By joining these clubs, it helps me make good friends and learn new things.” Most of the Chinese participants expressed their experiences with social activities. For example, Leqi was chair of Chinese Culture Club, Ting played the flute in a band, and Yatong joined a ballroom dance club. Through these social activities, they created a good relationship with American students and other international students. As one of them described, “It’s interesting, and I got a lot of new friends there.”

Melody comes from a traditional Chinese Kung Fu family and is a certified senior athlete in Chinese Kung Fu. Her mother was a senior Kung Fu coach and the National Kung Fu champion in China. Melody learned martial arts from five years old with her mother. After coming to America, she kept up her martial arts training and has become a coach of the Taichi club at school. She explained,

At the club, I was impressed when I find so much American students are very interested in Chinese martial arts and Chinese traditional culture. I made a lot of American friends there. Teaching martial arts improved my communication skill and English proficiency. I really enjoy teaching in Taichi club.

Specifically, Melody is also interested in learning American or other country's martial arts, such as American boxing, Karate, Judo, Taekwondo, and Hapkido. She developed her martial arts teaching by combining these different martial arts styles, and now a lot of American students are interested in her martial art class. As she said, "Civilization belongs to all of the world. I want to enhance the integration of various martial art. I like diverse culture."

Nelson is a member of the Chinese Music Ensemble Minnesota, which is an organization to disseminate Chinese traditional culture. He and his group are often invited to church and schools, as well as the Mall of America, to present Chinese music instruments such as the dulcimer, flute, Hulusi, erhu, banhu, Gaohu, and Jinghu. They are met with a warm welcome everywhere and have become very popular in the Twin Cities area. During the interview, Nelson mentioned,

Chinese culture has more than 5,000 year of history. Chinese music is important to Chinese culture. As Chinese student, I love my own culture. I am willing to introduce Chinese traditional music, musical instruments to the American people in order to enhance the integration of each national culture.

When asked how to enhance this integration, he responded, "We try to play American or western music by combining American music elements into Chinese music instrument. For example, we invite American musician to join us, such as American Gita, Bass players, so that our performances were successful."

Qiu is a chair of Chinese Christian Fellowship. There are about 20 Chinese students in the club. They get together to study the Bible every Friday, and they go to church on Sunday. For Chinese New Year 2020, the church created themed activities, including playing Chinese music before the pastor's speech and cooking Chinese food. Qiu and her group played Chinese music

instruments such as the flut, Guzheng, and erhu. When talking about this event, Qiu said, “I can’t believe that so much Americans like Chinese culture. I am really happy to have this chance to demonstrate Chinese music instrument to enhance the integration of two cultures.”

Making friends and social involvement aided Chinese participants in overcoming the challenges they faced. The culture clubs offered by the university were a significant way for Chinese students to build up strong communication skills.

Experiences of Acculturation during COVID-19

COVID-19 (coronavirus) broke out in 2020 and affected the world drastically, including higher education campuses in the United States. This affected all international students, including those from China. An examination of the Chinese students’ experiences of acculturation during COVID-19 is significant to understanding their adjustment in the United States. This section primarily presented their experiences, such as challenges they are facing, their perceptions of acculturation in the crisis, coping with these challenges, and communication.

Challenges during COVID-19

Most Chinese international students have to stay in the United States to take online classes due to the pandemic. They are still facing many new challenges adjusting to this rapidly changing and unexpected period. These challenges include distance learning, cultural stress and discrimination, transportation, psychological issues, and the uncertainty of immigration policies.

Distance Learning

As an effect of COVID-19, since March 2020, a majority of colleges and universities in the United States are offering more online courses. Most person-to-person courses have transitioned to all online learning due to COVID-19. Facing a big challenge due to this pandemic, all colleges and universities are reacting more responsively and flexibly to students'

needs. Professors are now concerned about how well students are prepared to transfer to a new teaching and learning environment and how they achieve academic success.

When asked what challenges and hardship they faced during the COVID-19 period, Diane responded, “Online class. It lost connection from face to face. I don’t like it, but it has been done.” A few students, who were mainly from the engineering disciplines, expressed their disappointment. Betty, an electricity engineering student, said:

Some instructor select very good videos for us, very easy to understand, but it just a piece and another piece; we couldn’t connect each other the relationship, which is easy to forget. It looks like memorize the book. An instructor took a half hour on team, but she just talks herself. Because she always said I forget my book, I used my phone, I didn’t have my computer, so she can’t give us exist answer for it. She said she don’t want to lead us in the dark. Useless.

It can be seen from the interviews that it is very significant to enhance the distance teaching and learning effectively at American universities.

Cultural Stress and Discrimination

When the epidemic spread in the United States, the Chinese and Asians were associated with symbols such as viruses and masks, and they became targets of prejudice and discrimination. Some Chinese students mentioned that from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, people acted as if they were uncomfortable around them because of their ethnicity. From a cultural perspective, if they wear a mask when going out in public, other people might be suspicious of them and assume they have COVID-19. Xiaoliang mentioned that he wore a mask to go to the supermarket. As soon as he walked in, he was stopped by the clerk and asked why he

wearing a mask and if he was sick. He was very depressed. This led to the students becoming very depressed and to now prefer staying at home.

Transportation

Since the end of February 2020, travel restrictions have impeded Chinese students' travel to or from China due to China being the country with the longest and largest COVID-19 caseload. Since March, that burden has shifted to America. Some of the Chinese students wanted to fly back to China. The flight tickets were too expensive, and it was very challenging to book the tickets. Melody thought of travel issues as her first challenge, recalling,

In March, the ticket for returning to China rose to \$6,000 (regular price is about \$1,000).

Later, no matter how much money, I couldn't buy a ticket. My parents were so anxious that they could only send me four boxes of masks by international express, so I must be careful to take care myself.

Ting agreed with her, saying, "Whenever I have time, I was looking for my return ticket.

Although I don't know when I can go home, looking at the ticket platform has become the only thing I can do when I am homesick."

Psychological Issues

When asked what their biggest challenge was in COVID-19, Qiu responded, "Depression. Due to epidemic, most Chinese students have been staying home over four months. Their walking distance every day is just between their room and trash can; really makes people crazy."

Additionally, all of the Chinese participants have expressed their concern on the change of immigration policy, for example, when the Department of Homeland Security declared the policy that would have required international students to take at least some in-person coursework

in order to remain in the United States. All international students including these Chinese participants were actually depressed. They were feeling very helpless. Although the Department of Homeland Security later rescinded this policy in response to a lawsuit by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, this uncertainty about immigration policy has become a serious factor influencing Chinese international students' emotional well-being.

Perception of the Global Health Crisis

At the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak, all Chinese participants were already on United States campuses, as they had never left the United States during the winter holidays due to travel restrictions. Facing this global health crisis, they realized that this was a new challenge they were encountering, describing it as, "an unexpected epidemic disrupted our life." Diane said, "This year, foreign students are too miserable." She described her experience,

Because the holiday this year was relatively short, I did not choose to go home for the Chinese New Year. When the pandemic first broke out, I planned to return to China to accompany my parents, but my parents were worried about my safety and asked me to stay in the United States.

When asked how they felt about these challenges, Betty answered, "I have to deal with it.

Keeping going, don't give up."

Coping with the Challenges

Coping with these many challenges created by COVID-19 is a challenge itself. Qiu thought that building a positive attitude in this critical situation is very important for international students. During the second interview, Qiu mentioned her experiences:

In March, the epidemic became serious in America. Some students are very worried about it, and booked the flight ticket to China. I called my parents in China and discuss

this situation. With my parents' support, I decided to stay here to face this challenge. I set up a study, health training plan every day. During this time, I taught myself Python computer language. At the same time, I applied for graduate study in computer science, and is admitted by Maryland University.

In order to overcome these challenges, Qiu organized Chinese students to play sports online and engage in academic lectures and discussions every day. They created and joined some Chinese groups, such as a shopping and studying group, to help each other. This spirit of mutual assistance also made them feel the power of collectivism in Chinese culture. On the other hand, they tried to donate epidemic prevention supplies to the Americans, but they were rejected and were told that they would solve the issue of lack of supply themselves. This also made them see the independent spirit under Western individualism.

Communication

At this critical time, communication among advisors, faculty, and students plays a very important role. Schools are providing their strong commitment to supporting the students by providing counselling services and communication. School advisors and faculties have been in communication with students to offer comprehensive help to them. Liqi mentioned her experience: "In spring break, professors established a frequent communication with us by informing their plans for alternative instruction to students before school reopen." It can be found that creating a strong communication would play a very important role during this critical period.

Overall, the majority of the Chinese participants expressed their positive attitudes toward the global health crisis. Chinese students' major challenges in adjusting to this rapidly changing and unexpected period were related to cultural stress, academic issues, discrimination,

psychological issues, long distance learning, and the uncertainty of immigration policies.

Chinese students also had to become accustomed to their current situation. They overcame these challenges by building a positive attitude toward the situation. They improved their communication with advisors, faculty, and other students, and to some degree, formal school support services were particularly effective. Distance learning and sufficient healthcare on campus helped Chinese students immensely during the uncertainty of the global health crises.

Summary

In summary, this chapter presented the responses to the research questions in regard to review of empirical studies on international students with a focus on Chinese international students studying in America and the use of Berry's acculturation model and Kim's intercultural communication competence theories.

First, this chapter presented demographic information from the survey and first interview, including a demographic data table, attitudes toward studying abroad, the goals for studying in America, foreign cultural experiences, family educational levels and economic status, ethnic proximity, and adaptive personality. Second, it examined the challenges that Chinese international undergraduate students confront during their first year, and addressed the most critical ones among the challenges. Third, it described Chinese participants' experiences of acculturation in America, consisting of knowledge of American culture, attitudes toward American higher education and acculturation, challenges of acculturation, and strategies of coping with the challenges. Fourth, this chapter described Chinese participants' experiences of communication, involving their attitudes toward intercultural communication, social and personal communication with American professors and classmates, and environment support and

differences, as well as psychological challenge and identity establishment. Finally, it introduced Chinese participants' experiences during COVID-19.

The detailed explanation and analysis of the findings, as well as conclusion are provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, I will begin with an introduction, briefly restating the purpose of the study, the problem statement, the research questions, the theoretical framework, the methodology, and a summary of the findings of the study. I will follow with a discussion and a conclusion of this study. The chapter will conclude with the implications for theory and practice with recommendations, implication for future research, and the limitations of the study.

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

This research will investigate Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation, what challenges are most critical for Chinese undergraduate students, and how they cope with these challenges in order to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome their challenges in their transition. Hopefully, this study will assist the colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate student experiences in their transitions and provide better services for them by designing individual, group, or institutional approaches that work more effectively with Chinese students at their various developmental levels to facilitate their growth.

Statement of Research Problem

Various challenges influence Chinese undergraduate students in their transition at American institutions. Berry et al. (1987) identified five major changes for cross-cultural transition: physical and environmental (e.g., climate, types of housing, population density), biological (e.g., types of food, nutritional adjustment, new disease related to location), social (e.g., homesickness, reestablish social contact), cultural (e.g., linguistic, different values), and

psychological adaptation (e.g., well-being, self-identity). These changes can create multiple acculturation stressors for Chinese students (Xie, 2007).

Current Chinese international undergraduate students are facing various challenges during their study abroad journey, including a language barrier, a lack of learning skill, an unfamiliarity with American educational culture and school facilities, a lack of ability to interact with native instructors and students, and financial difficulties (Sun & Chen, 1999). Additionally, in a review of the literature, several studies have addressed various challenges the Chinese students are facing; limited studies can be found that attempt to study Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation.

This research investigates Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation and what challenges are most critical for Chinese undergraduate students, as well as how they cope with these challenges in order to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome their challenges in their transition. At the same time, it is hoped that this study will help the colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate students' experience in their transition and to provide services for them by designing individual, group, and institutional approaches that work more effectively with Chinese students at various developmental levels and which facilitate their growth.

Research Questions

1. What are challenges for Chinese international undergraduate students during their first year? Which ones are most critical for Chinese students?
2. What are Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward intercultural adaptation?

3. How do Chinese undergraduate students cope with these challenges of intercultural adaptation? And what strategies are they currently using to overcome cultural challenges in their transition?
4. What are their experiences with intercultural communication?

Theoretical Framework

Berry (1998) identified acculturation into four strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation is defined as “when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures.” Opposite to this is separation alternative, when individuals tend to view their original culture as most desirable and want to separate themselves from others. Integration involves a desire to stick to one’s original culture while also broadening one’s social network to include participating in other cultures. Marginalization is defined as “when there is little possibility or interest in having relations with others.” Berry (1998) presented a process model of acculturation which is core to newcomers’ cross-cultural experiences in a new environment. In this model, Berry (1998) proposed five features of acculturation. First, intercultural contact in both cultures is the common starting point of the acculturation; in this process the individuals have to deal with life events, participating in various activities. Second, the individuals evaluate these experiences as a source of difficulty or stressors. This process can be termed *adjustment*. The third feature of acculturation is that the individuals engage in coping strategies such as problem-focus copying and emotion copying, in order to deal with the stressors. The fourth aspect of acculturation is acculturation stress including personal crises and commonly, anxiety and depression. The last feature of acculturation is the long-term adaptation that may be achieved.

Taking a systems-theory approach, Kim (2001) presented a structure of cross-cultural adaptation from the perspective of communication. Communication is the process that makes the interaction possible through the exchange of messages which include all activities of message exchange between an individual and the environment (Kim, 2001). Moreover, Kim (2001) also emphasized the importance of communication in connecting a newcomer with the host society, and that successful adaptation will only occur when the newcomer's internal communication system sufficiently overlaps with the host society.

Kim (1991) defined intercultural communication competence as a measure of an individual's ability to interact in a variety of intercultural communication events. This ability, often called communication competency or social competency, is comprised of the cognitive, affective, and operational capabilities by which individuals organize themselves in and with their sociocultural milieu (Kim, 1991). From the perspective of a system, Kim (1991) presented that intercultural communication competence is the adaptability of an individual's internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment. Kim (1988) used the term *intercultural adaption* to represent various other terms such as assimilation, acculturation, integration, and adjustment. More specific to intercultural communication competence, "adaptability means the individual's capacity to suspend or modify some of the old cultural ways, to learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways, and to creatively find ways to the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity, intergroup posture, and accompanying stress," and adaptability is "the heart of intercultural communication competence" (Kim, 1991, p. 268).

Acculturation, cross-cultural adaptation, and intercultural communication competence theories can help us to understand international students, especially including Chinese students' experiences during their cultural transition and adjustment to American universities.

Methodology

The basic qualitative research approach is best suited for this study since the aims of the study are to understand Chinese international students' experiences in America universities. The basic research purposes for this study are to understand Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward intercultural adaptation, their first-year experiences, the most critical challenges for Chinese students, and how they cope with these challenges of intercultural adaptation to construct their world.

However, Merriam (2009) also identified that data was collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis (p. 23). Data for this study was collected through interviewing with Chinese international undergraduate students from a public state university in Minnesota. The Chinese international undergraduate students at this university came with diverse backgrounds from different areas of China and different economic backgrounds, such as the middle class or upper-middle class families in China. Their diverse backgrounds are important pre-school attributes for the data analysis in this study.

The data collection was typically prolonged and repetitive, as well as based on predefined research questions. The analysis of that data used initial and focused coding to obtain the study's findings. Based on data analysis, further in-depth interviews were conducted.

The information gathered in this study was based upon the following procedures:

1. The survey was administered to Chinese international students in order to get their demographic information completed prior to the interview.

2. The first interviews with participants took place during the months of May 2020 and July 2020.
3. The second interview with participants took place during August 2020 and October 2020.

The data analysis in this study was based on the following procedures:

1. An initial reading of all the interview transcripts was conducted to get an overall sense of the data.
2. The researcher then identified recurring themes and highlighted relevant information.
3. The researcher then examined each theme in accordance with each research question.

Summary of the Findings

A total of 12 Chinese international undergraduate students at a public state university participated in this study. All of them completed their high school degrees in China or America, and the majority of them had been in the United States for more than two years. Regarding language skill, all of them learned English in China for more than 6 years and completed English proficiency tests, such as TOFEL and IELTS. Half of them have traveled or lived abroad before coming to the United States. Half of them have no abroad experiences. From the major perspective, five of them were studying science or engineering (computer science, engineering, chemistry, and math) and seven were from the social science disciplines (music, English, finance, and economics). All participants come from different regions in China. Almost all of them had studied or lived in a city in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjing, or Chengdu.

The demographic information revealed that all of the Chinese participants were willing to study abroad and obtained their parents' financial support. The goals of Chinese participants for studying in the United States were different, such as getting a degree from an American

university and then finding a job to work in the United States, or going back to China after getting a degree. Half of the participants had foreign cultural experiences from studying at an American high school or international school in China and participating in summer camp or international festivals in America. Based on the observations in the interview, most of Chinese participants demonstrated positive personalities, such as openness, agreeableness, optimism, independence, and consciousness.

English proficiency was the biggest challenge during their first year in the United States, despite having learned English for over 6 years in China. Limited English proficiency provided challenges for Chinese students in two significant areas: developing social friendships and participating in class. Additionally, a lack of knowledge toward American culture prevented them from making friends and improving their English proficiency. On the other hand, acculturative stress, transportation, and visiting a doctor were other critical challenges during their first year in the United States.

The majority of the Chinese students continued to embrace and adapt to American popular culture and expressed their positive attitudes toward acculturation. Most of the Chinese participants' preferred strategy of coping with challenges was integration. They overcame these challenges through school support programs, involvement in religious life, and participating in cultural clubs. Making friends and social involvement aided Chinese participants in overcoming the challenges they faced and building up their strong communication skills

During COVID-19, Chinese participants were still facing many new challenges, adjusting to this rapidly changing and unexpected period. These challenges include cultural stress, academic issues, discrimination, psychological issues, and the uncertainty of immigration

policies. They overcame these challenges with a positive attitude toward this change and strong communication.

Discussion of Findings

This section provides a discussion of the findings used to address the four research questions of this study and groups the findings to discuss each separately. In this section, discussion and conclusions are presented in terms of three dimensions: predisposition, academic experience, and acculturation.

Demographic Data Analysis

Chinese Students Family Economic and Education Background

The survey indicates that the educational levels of all students' parents were secondary and above. These parents paid more attention to their children's education. Specifically, they were interested in sending their children to western countries, such as American universities for studying. Of course, the families with low income in China may still not send their children to study abroad, except for families whose children get financial aid or scholarships from American universities or other resources. These findings raise the question why these parents were willing to send their children to study abroad. A possible explanation to this question could be that as Yan and Berliner (2009) observed, in China, Confucian philosophy views education as important to job prospects; more importantly, it is a means of building one's character. Deeply influenced by this philosophy, Chinese families work very hard and sacrifice much for their children to continue their higher education in the United States (Yan & Berliner, 2009). However, with the rapid economic development and opening policy of Chinese economic reform in China, the proportion of middle class families continues to rise. Many Chinese families with middle income have the financial ability to send their children to study abroad.

Chinese Students' Perceptions of Studying Abroad

Regarding perceptions of studying abroad, the majority of the Chinese participants expressed their willingness to study abroad with only one exception. These participants' parents insisted on sending them to study abroad, so they came to the United States just for their parents' sake. A possible reason is that Chinese culture places an emphasis on harmony and respect for elder people. Some Chinese students that are studying abroad only do so to obey their parent's decision. They think that whatever their parents do for them is for their own good.

Unanimously, most of the Chinese participants believed that studying abroad is in pursuit of self-improvement and broadening their knowledge since the United States offers the best first-class higher education in the world with its internationally acclaimed scholars, advanced teaching and research facilities, and diverse academic environments. They considered these advantages and the top reasons why they should choose to study in the United States. Meanwhile, all the Chinese interviewees acknowledged that they like the natural and cultural environments in America. They regarded studying abroad as a channel to realize their self-worth and an opening to a new window for themselves to discover the world.

The Future Plan after Graduation in American University

From the literature review, it seems that the proportion of people studying for reasons such as immigration is gradually decreasing (Yuan, 2011). Two of the Chinese participants mentioned that when they get degrees, they would be going back to China; five of them were willing to find a job in foreign countries after graduating and get some working experience before going back to China. One of the important reasons for this choice was due to single-child families. Their parents hope their children can stay with them together in China. Five of the Chinese interviewees were willing to stay in America after getting their degree if possible.

Overall, the perception of studying abroad for Chinese students and their family is closely related to Chinese traditional culture founded by Confucianism. Confucian philosophy views education as an important bridge to a high-paying job and a bright future. Influenced by this philosophy, Chinese families highly respect well-educated scholars and place them in the highest social status. They hope someday their children can obtain the honor and get to the top level in the society. With that expectation, they are willing to send their children to study abroad.

Chinese Students' Experiences in the First Year

Cultural Adjustment

Based on limited empirical researches on Chinese students, many of the challenges Chinese students are facing are related to their intercultural adaptation abilities. In the interview, some Chinese participants described a common phenomenon on campus that some international students, particularly Chinese undergraduate international students in American universities, prefer to only mingle with other Chinese students. It was not true when they first came to America. They encouraged themselves and would like to try their best to fit into a new culture by finding chances to create conversation with Americans and build up networks with their new classmates. After the first few weeks, things began to change. They could have conversations with their newly met friends, but it only involved small talk, and they could not make the conversation flow. To make things worse, small talk cannot replace deep conversations that have a lasting impact. This phenomenon indicates that cultural adjustment cannot happen quickly and automatically. It requires hard, steady persistence and a deep interest in the local culture. During the process of cultural adjustment, some of the students may adapt quickly while others never fully adapt at all. Some feel well adapted, but they regress back to feeling culture shock after experiencing a series of new problems (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004).

Academic Challenges

English Proficiency. Compared with their predecessors who came to America for studying 20 years ago, most Chinese participants showed proficiency in English since they had learned the language for at least 6 years before coming to the United States. In the interview, most Chinese participants confirmed that although English is still a barrier for their academic performance, lack of knowledge of America slang and American cultural background would be a more critical challenge for their adjustment. In addition, English education in China mainly relies on written tests to evaluate students' performance with less emphasis on speaking and listening skills (Yuan, 2011). Hence, many Chinese participants did not feel confident to speak English in class. Since Chinese traditions do not praise openness and self-expression, naturally, neither Chinese nor Americans are enthusiastic in communication, so they can hardly achieve close American friends (Yu & Wang, 2011).

Class Discussion. Regarding Chinese students' low involvement in the class discussion, there may be several reasons. On one hand, Chinese students cannot fully understand what is going on in group meetings since most professors and American students talk fast and use slang. The lack of American cultural background adds more difficulties for Chinese students to have effective and efficient conversations with American professors and students. The low participation in the classroom, such as remaining quiet, withholding expressing their thoughts, and lack of asking questions leads to their low involvement in class activities, which can also impact their academic success. On the other hand, Chinese students' low involvement in the class discussion could be traced back to the Chinese cultural values. China is a highly collectivist nation. Chinese tradition does not praise openness and self-expression. In a Chinese classroom, arguing with the teachers is often considered challenging the credibility and authority of the

teacher (Yuan, 2011). It may be necessary for American professors to encourage Chinese international students to get more involved in various class activities if they want to better understand those students' academic performance in class.

Learning Style. There are substantial differences in learning styles between Chinese and American students due to differences between Chinese culture and American culture (Fletcher & Bohn, 1998). Chinese culture is significantly impacted by Confucianism, which emphasizes that the ultimate goal of human behavior is to achieve “harmony” (Yu & Wang, 2011), which leads Chinese people to pursue a conflict-free and collectivist approach to learning. The collectivist nature and the Confucianism elements of the Chinese identity have influenced teaching and learning styles in China (Heffernan et al., 2010). However, Chinese students may be still accustomed to Chinese teaching and learning styles and not familiar with American teaching and learning styles, specifically in their first year in the United States. As a whole, the Chinese participants thought that combining those two teaching and learning styles would be more effective, by reading materials, gathering questions, listening to lectures, engaging in class discussion, and practicing with worksheets, along with providing the instructors or tutors assistance to achieve a higher academic level.

Understanding students' learning styles has been studied by many educators. Research finding has demonstrated that when teaching styles are compatible with student learning styles, students retain information longer, apply it more effectively, have a more positive attitude toward their subjects, and are greater achievers (Heffernan et al., 2010). Hence, faculties and administrators in American universities need to understand and consider these differences when lecturing and developing programs to provide services for this population.

In summary, to overcome Chinese students' academic challenges, Andrade (2005) proposed different solutions to international students in the first year, which were characterized by passage of time, involvement behaviors, goal-setting, study strategies, and formal campus support services. These solutions will be helpful and practical for Chinese students' academic adjustment.

Emotional Well-being

Chinese international undergraduate students also confront emotional well-being challenges during their first year in American universities. In fact, those challenges are associated with China's one-child policy, which may have a critical impact on students' psychological development when studying at American colleges.

China has been working under the one-child policy since 1970 in order to control the increasing population. All Chinese participants in this study come from one-child families due to this policy. In recent years, Chinese and foreign social scientists have done many research studies to explore the impact of the one-child policy on Chinese youth. It is found that the one-child generation in China has at least three characteristics: a longing for intimacy and belonging, a tendency to be dependent, and carrying a high degree of expectation and pressure (Feng et al., 2014). As the only child of a Chinese family, they are generally expected of too much in their academic performance. So, they are busy attending various classes without spare time to enjoy with their friends. They are under pressure to not to fail in their studies. They are trying to do everything in school perfectly to win their parents' favor. As an exchange, parents will do everything for their kids as long as the kids are excellent in school. Before they come to the United States, they are highly dependent on their parents at home. Now they feel such a loss without parents accompanying them. Most of the Chinese participants in this study mentioned

that homesickness was the most challenging thing that they were facing, specifically, within the third month, which was a critical time for their first year in America. Consequently, they were longing for a close relationship with a Chinese group and looking for belonging with them. In fact, school administration would be their best option for belonging. It is critical to hire professional Chinese advisors to help Chinese students to overcome emotional well-being issues. Meanwhile, it would also be helpful to encourage international students to overcome emotional, psychological, and relational issues through involvement in the religious life of the institution and cultural clubs (Andrade, 2005).

Cultural Identity Development

Cultural transition and adjustment is absolutely inseparable from identity development. Establishment of self-identity would be a fundamental factor to cope with various challenges for Chinese international undergraduate students in cultural transition and adjustment. Chinese students attempt to look for a new self-identity after coming to America. In the interview, most participants were willing to be identified as “a Chinese person living in the America.” They would like to keep their original culture and embrace American culture by participating in school clubs, involving themselves in the religious life of the institution, and making American friends. Ma and Cartier (2003) described this kind of identity as a “hybrid identity or “malleable identity.” The basic concept of American self-identity is not entirely recognized by Chinese students during their cultural transition due to the differences between the Chinese collective identity and American individual identity or individual right. It is a worthy topic to understand and study Chinese students’ experience in their identity development and to provide better services for them.

Chinese Students' Attitudes toward Acculturation

Perceptions of American Culture

Arguably, during the interviews, Chinese participants showed their positive attitude toward American popular culture. They thought most Americans they met, specifically Minnesotans, were very nice, and they were also impressed by American competition and their independent culture. As we know, from a young age, children are encouraged to work hard and try their best to be successful, particularly in academics and sports. After age 17 or 18, most Americans no longer live at home with their families. They also do their own working or studies on their own. Many young American people love to follow sports, such as football, baseball, and basketball. In China, most Chinese children are encouraged to study hard without any other work or sports in order to get a high score on the National College Entrance Examination.

Moreover, Chinese participants also realized that America is a melting pot and its people come from many different backgrounds and cultures, which leads to a wide variety of beliefs, values, and traditions. Although diversity and inclusion can be seen everywhere on campus, Chinese students still face a challenge—the dilemma between adapting to American values and preserving their native values. We will discuss this issue in the next section.

Attitudes toward Cultural Adaptation

Yuan (2011) examined the academic and cultural experiences of Chinese students at one university in the United States with a qualitative method. The finding of the study shows that Chinese students' attitudes toward adaption to American culture can be identified in different types, such as keeping their own culture without thinking about adapting to American culture, "depending upon the situation," minimizing the differences, and sharing the commonalities. The findings of this study are basically consistent with Yuan's study. This study demonstrates that

Chinese participants have differences in their attitudes toward cultural adaptation. This may be due to their various attitudes toward cultural values. Some of them believe in democracy and freedom definitely, while some do not. At the surface level, every Chinese student needs to make some adjustments; but at a deeper level where some fundamental beliefs and values exist, Chinese students differ from each other on whether they need to adapt or not (Yuan, 2011). What strategies did the Chinese participants take in their acculturation? That will be discussed in the following section.

Preferred Strategies to Overcome Cultural Challenges

One of this study's additional objectives was to find out the predominant acculturation strategies among Chinese participants. In the framework of the bidimensional models of acculturation (Berry et al., 1987), two issues are proposed: the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity and the degree to which people seek involvement with the host society. The acculturation strategies were categorized into the four types, assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry et al., 1987). In this study, most of the Chinese participants preferred integration (75%) for their acculturation strategy. The second preferred strategy was assimilation (17%). However, separation (0%) and marginalization (8%) were not preferred among Chinese participants. This result is almost consistent with other studies in this field. Some surveys even focused on Chinese overseas students, but were conducted in other western countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia; they also confirm that integration is the most effective strategy of successful adaptation (Berry et al., 1987). In the following section, I will focus on Chinese participants' integration and assimilation to see how they coped with challenges in their acculturation.

Integration

Berry (1998) mentioned that some individuals prefer the option of keeping both cultures, otherwise known as integration, “when there is an interest in both maintaining one’s original culture to seek to participate as a part of the larger social network.” However, previous studies have suggested that integration is the most preferred and produces the best results in the immigrant’s adaptation (Berry, 2009). To determine preferences in acculturation strategies among Chinese students in Germany, Yu and Wang (2011) also discovered that 87.1% of Chinese students preferred the option of integration.

During the interviews in this study, nine Chinese participants out of twelve chose integration, reaching 75% of the total participants. The result is consistent with those of Yu and Wang (2011). In this study, most of the Chinese participants mentioned their integration experiences in acculturation, such as participating in a social activity, church study, class discussion, team project, making American friends, or joining different clubs. Specifically, they expressed in their experiences that they liked to try their best to minimize differences and maximize communities between the Chinese culture and American culture. In fact, a lot of communities exist between both cultures, such as love, friendship, festivals, education, time efficiency, music, and sports. With China’s economic reform, more and more young Chinese people are interested in and getting to know and accept Western culture.

However, Chinese participants also expressed their dilemma between conforming to American values and preserving their native values. They may be significantly impacted by Chinese culture, which leads them to pursue a conflict-free and collectivist lifestyle with fewer in-groups, but tend to have few but intimate relationships (Yu & Wang, 2011). Western culture is one that highly values individualism. People are expected to take the initiative in advancing their

personal interests and tend to be direct and assertive in interacting with others (Samovar, 1991). The culture difference is a shock to the majority of Chinese participants who had only stayed a short period of time in the United States. No doubt, the conflict between the consciousness of Chinese cultural identity and the strong aspiration toward American culture would be a critical challenge faced by Chinese students in their acculturation.

Assimilation

Based on Berry (1998), assimilation is defined as “when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures.” Ngwira et al., (2015) examined international students’ preferred acculturation strategies in central China. They found that most international students preferred integration (71%) for their strategy. The second preferred strategy was assimilation (17%). Separation (6%) and marginalization (7%) were the least preferred strategies among the participants.

In this study, there were two Chinese participants who had chosen assimilation as their preferred strategy in acculturation, reaching 16.6% of the total participants. Interestingly, this result is consistent with those of Ngwira et al. (2015). It is noticed that these two students had studied at international school in China and American high school. Their experiences in these foreign environments would be beneficial for their assimilation in acculturation. These two students also felt that it is necessary to change your cultural value if you prefer assimilation. Some cultural conflicts exist between Chinese and American culture values, such as collectivism and individualism, and you have to select one in your acculturation. They suspend or modify their old cultural ways to learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways and to creatively find ways to cope with the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity, intergroup posture, and accompanying stress (Kim, 1991, p. 268).

From the perspective of intercultural communication competence, Chinese participants' integration and assimilation experiences demonstrate that successful adaptation will only occur when the newcomer's internal communication system sufficiently overlaps with the host society (Kim, 2001). However, Chinese participants' predisposition, such as preparedness for change and adaptive personality, set the initial parameters for their personal and social communications (Kim, 2001). Additionally, the receptivity of the host environment is one of the conditions that relates to cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001). It is more significant that university professionals develop effective strategies to provide a diverse, equitable, including, and comprehensive cultural environment for Chinese international students' cultural adjustment.

Gender and Acculturation

In the study of finding out the preference and differences in acculturation strategies among Chinese students in Germany, Yu and Wang (2011) discovered that the most dominant strategy for male students was integration followed by separation; for female students, it was integration followed by assimilation. This study did not find any differences in the dominant strategy between male and female Chinese participants. But it is noticeable that among all the Chinese participants, there were three male students. Hence, it may be necessary to recruit more male Chinese students for further study.

Major and Acculturation

Chinese participants majoring in science and technology felt satisfied with acculturation. They mentioned that they use a special language, such as math and physics, which are universal. They thought that they would still achieve academic success without demanding a higher level of English skill and American cultural knowledge. Students majoring in social science disciplines reported more pressure and frustrations since they require a higher level of English skills and

knowledge of American culture. Therefore, it may be significant to help those students get more involved in cultural activities.

Acculturation during COVID-19

When the epidemic in China eases and the virus spreads in the United States, some people may choose to return to China to avoid the risk, while some may prefer staying and continuing learning here. Facing this global health crisis, most Chinese participants decided to stay here to continue their studies. They mentioned that the crisis gave them a good opportunity to hone themselves. Under this critical environment, they can survive and adapt themselves, and learn to control themselves. All Chinese participants firmly believed that the end of the epidemic is only a matter of time, but learning is a lifetime matter; the long-term goal will not change. They created and joined some Chinese groups, such as a shopping and studying group, to help each other. This spirit of mutual assistance also made them feel the power of collectivism in Chinese culture.

When facing the cultural conflicts caused by masks, on one hand, the Chinese participants understood that the Americans love freedom; on the other hand, they stepped forward and worked with locals by donating epidemic prevention supplies to the Americans to resolve the cultural conflicts. This also made them see the independent spirit under Western individualism.

During the interview, Chinese participants expressed their concerns with online classes. They agreed that online teaching and learning would be the best way to ensure students' health and safety, but may cause a lack of interaction between professors and students, so that they cannot enjoy and learn the class culture. They suggested that holding lectures and seminars in larger rooms to minimize contact would be good way to combat this. Moreover, it would help

ensure access to dedicated health professionals and establish a 24-hour helpline for students in need. Chinese participants also expressed their more critical concerns on health safety and the uncertainty of American government's policy on international students' visa and immigration laws, which would significantly impact on their study and life in the United States, specifically, during the COVID-19 period.

Implications for Theory

Within the conceptual framework, the acculturation strategies theory (Berry, 1998) and the structure of communication competence (Kim, 2001) were used to guide this research and shed light on the result.

The factors existing prior to acculturation include demographic factors such as cultural origin, age, gender, education level, status, motivation, and expectations, as well as cultural distance and personality (Berry, 1998). Berry's framework allows for many factors to be considered in analyzing the sojourner experience. Under this framework, this study first introduced the demographic information of the participants, such as age, gender, high school academic achievement, social attainments, degree program, TOEFL score, motivations, aspirations and goals, length of time living in the United States, and each family background including socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and parental expectations. All these factors could be considered for the further analysis.

The structure of communication competence, including cognitive, effective and behavior dimensions, and the process model of acculturation (Kim, 2001), is a guide to the theme of this study. Following this model, this study examined Chinese international undergraduates' knowledge and perceptions of American culture, attitudes toward cultural adaptation, and strategies of coping with their challenges.

The acculturation strategies were categorized into the four types, assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry et al., 1987). Based on this strategies, the study also discussed the Chinese students' experiences of coping with challenges including preferred coping strategies, school support programs, and religious involvement.

From what the study collected and observed, the findings support the acculturation strategies theory (Berry, 1998) and the structure of communication competency (Kim, 2001). There were no findings that were inconsistent with Berry's acculturation strategies theory and Kim's structure of communication competency.

To summarize, the model of acculturation stresses two important components: culture and communication. It argues that acculturation and communication are probably the most important and essential factors in Chinese students' adjustment in American universities. Therefore, a better understanding of acculturation would be the best method to explain Chinese international undergraduate students' adjustment experiences in the United States and also assist universities to come up with better programs for international students. It is worth mentioning that the model of acculturation would be useful for many cultural adjustment areas, such as the campus cultural adjustment from high schools to colleges, and from colleges to the working field.

Implication for Practice

Chinese international students are the fastest, greatest population in American universities. Undoubtedly, they will confront more and more cultural, economic, social, and psychological challenges. The need for social services and school support will obviously become more imperative. Hopefully, this study will help American universities better understand the experiences of Chinese international students and their transitions, promoting them to provide

better services. Based on the research findings in the study, the following are recommendations for professional practice. These suggestions might be helpful for Chinese international students, school administrators, and faculties alike.

Recommendations for Chinese International Students

The following recommendations are intended to provide insight for Chinese international students to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome their challenges in their transition.

1. In the interview of this study, it was found that some Chinese participants prefer to only mingle with other Chinese students on campus. Chinese international students should recognize the importance of American cultural knowledge, show better motivation to adapt to the host culture, and increase their American cultural background by getting out of their own circles and submerging themselves with other students within the host community. This can be done by participating in the class activities and social activities available on and out of campus.
2. The previous studies and this study reveal that the most preferred strategy for international students' acculturation is integration. It is recommended that Chinese international students should create a positive attitude toward acculturation and develop an effective integration strategy to cope with the various challenges of acculturation. When encountering possible cultural shock phenomena, such as misunderstanding, prejudice, and discrimination, they should not engage in unnecessary arguments; rather, they should try to insist on seeking common ground while reserving differences to strengthen cultural communication.

3. During the process of cultural adjustment, some of the Chinese students may adapt quickly while others never fully adapt at all. Some feel well adapted, but regress back to feeling culture shock after experiencing a series of new problems. Therefore, cultural adjustment cannot happen quickly and automatically. It requires hard, steady persistence and a deep interest in the local culture for Chinese students.
4. One of the critical challenges faced by Chinese students is the dilemma between Chinese cultural identity and American cultural identity. Some of them were confused with the question, “Who am I?”, which was called “identity crisis.” By recognizing and understanding the basic concept of American self-identities during cultural transition to establish a positive self-identity, Chinese international students can better cope with various challenges in the cultural transition and adjustment. Due to the differences and some conflicts between the Chinese collective identity and the American individual identity or individual right, it may be necessary for Chinese students to establish a “hybrid identity,” which would be identifying themselves as a “Chinese person living in the America.” They can keep their original culture and embrace American culture, or create an American self-identity in the United States.
5. Some Chinese participants in this study, for example, Qiuping, showed their experiences of involvement within the religious community, which would be beneficial for them to overcome emotional, psychological, and relational issues. Chinese students can adjust to the life through involvement within the religious community of the institution, as well as cultural clubs.
6. It was found in this study that some Chinese students were not fully aware of the counseling process and not willing to seek school counseling services. So, it is

recommended that Chinese students should recognize the importance of seeking school counseling, create a positive attitude toward seeking counseling, and be fully aware of the counseling process and procedure to fix different types of problems with the aid of counseling resources.

Recommendations for School Administrators

The following recommendations are intended to provide insight for school administrators to provide services for Chinese students by designing individual, group, and institutional approaches that work more effectively with them at various developmental levels and which facilitate their growth.

1. The findings of this study revealed that lack of American culture background was one of the critical challenges Chinese international students faced. It is recommended that schools should offer more training about American culture for Chinese international students and provide outreach programs to help them gain greater familiarity with the customs, behaviors, and other cultural aspects of living in the United States. University professionals should also develop effective strategies to provide a diverse, equal, inclusive, and comprehensive cultural environment for Chinese international students' cultural adjustment.
2. The goal of this study is to help the colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate students' experience in their transition and to provide services effectively. It may be necessary for schools to offer more training about Chinese culture or Asian culture for administrators and faculties who work with Chinese students. Before working, the administrators and faculties need to understand

- how American culture is different from Chinese culture in order to resolve cultural issues.
3. Since some Chinese participants in this study stated concerns about language, specifically using English to describe their feelings or complicated issues, and lack of trust in American counselors to really understand their concerns, it is recommended that schools hire professional Chinese advisors and counselors to help Chinese students to overcome emotional well-being issues and normalize counseling services as one of the regular services on campus to support students and their academic success.
 4. The majority of Chinese participants in this study expressed serious concerns regarding the uncertainty of American governmental policy on international students' visa and immigration laws. It is recommended that schools increase professional development with a specific focus toward the international students' more critical concerns on the uncertainty of American governmental policy on international students' visa and immigration laws, which would otherwise impact their studies and life in the United States.
 5. Some Chinese participants in this study reported their concerns about transportation and doctor visitation. The school could develop special programs and services to address the international students' concerns about transportation and doctor visitation issues.
 6. Specifically, Chinese participants reported their concerns about health safety concerns during the COVID-19 period; schools should develop more effective strategies and

programs to ensure access to dedicated health professionals. For instance, establishing a 24-hour helpline would help international students with health concerns.

Recommendations for Faculty Members

Recommendations for faculty members are suggested as following:

1. This study mentioned that American teaching and learning styles are different from Chinese teaching and learning styles. It may be necessary for faculties to understand and consider these differences when lecturing and developing compatible and effective teaching methods. This can be done by combining various learning and teaching styles to provide better services for this population of students.
2. It was found in this study that Chinese students' low involvement in class discussions can be traced back to the Chinese cultural values which do not praise openness and self-expression. To Chinese international students and their culture, arguing with the teachers is often considered challenging the credibility and authority of the teacher. It may be necessary for instructors to understand the cause of Chinese students' low involvement in the class and encourage them to get more involved in various class activities.
3. Chinese participants in this study believed that online teaching and learning would be the best way to ensure international students' health and safety during COVID-19, but it lacks any interactions between professors and students. Students cannot enjoy and learn the class culture because of this medium of communication. Therefore, holding lectures and seminars in larger rooms to minimize contact or developing online class discussions using online teaching software effectively would be very significant for international students in need.

4. Chinese participants in this study stated that the learning styles in China are teacher-centered and focus on imitation, memory, repetitive, and passive learning. All these study habits in China can lead to a lack of creativity. Instructors could interact comfortably with the Chinese international students to learn various cultures and emphasize critical thinking, active learning styles, and problem-solving abilities by developing various teaching methods and class activities. Additionally, instructors may frequently assess and report students' progress and feedback on how they are performing academically.

Implication for Research

This study has covered many areas of Chinese students' acculturation experiences, so it may be necessary to narrow the research in future studies. Some specific research about Chinese students' acculturation could be conducted by the following:

1. This study reveals the need for continued research into the acculturation process of Chinese students by adding quantitative research methods. Specific research could be conducted on relationships between intercultural communication competence and acculturation. An accurate acculturation scale would be needed in further study. Quantitative analysis could also examine if there is a positive relationship between intercultural communication competence and acculturation. A positive relationship between them suggests a preference for having contact with and participating in the new society created by Chinese students and leads to successful adaptation into new cultures.
2. A more in-depth study of demographic factors that affect acculturation could also be conducted. It will be important to find out if there is a large connection between

- demographic factors and acculturation. Continued study could expand the sample to include different demographics. The study could be aimed to answer these questions: Do the demographic factors impact Chinese students' acculturation? Which factors are critical? A study in this area could be beneficial to the preparedness of Chinese students that are studying abroad.
3. This study did not include enough information on Chinese international students' experiences of acculturation during COVID-19, so further research would be needed. A follow-up study about Chinese students' cultural adjustments to American universities during COVID-19 should be conducted. This study could focus on Chinese students having a deep understanding of American culture issues on campus, such as the cultural conflicts caused by masks, and coping with these new cultural challenges.
 4. Continued research into the role of ethnic groups such as Chinese Students Association and their support for the students could be conducted. This study could help researchers better understand the role of ethnic groups and help the ethnic groups to provide better services that assist Chinese students to gain greater familiarity with the customs, behavior, and other cultural aspects of living in the United States.
 5. The basic concept of American self-identity is not entirely recognized by Chinese students during their cultural transition due to the differences between the Chinese collective identity and the American individual identity or individual right. It is a significant research topic to understand and study Chinese students' experiences and how they adapt into their identity in order to provide better services for them.

Continued research into the role of religious support for Chinese students will help researchers better understand the students' identity development experiences.

6. This study also reported that the uncertainty of American government's policy on international students' visa and immigration laws really impacts Chinese international students' experiences in American universities, and these policies may have become the most critical challenge at the time. Further research in this area should be conducted.
7. This study did not recruit enough male participants for research. It may be necessary to recruit more Chinese students, specifically male Chinese students, and expend the samples to include different international student populations for further study.
8. Our world as we know it will become more and more digital focused. In time, the cultural differences among different countries will become smaller and smaller. Will our acculturation theories still be useful? Further study in this area might be required in the future.

Additionally, research for acculturation in the past has often been mainly confined to the sojourner experiences, such as international students, refugees, and new immigrants. Higher education needs to explore other areas for study. For instance, research on American high school students' cultural adjustment to college or college students' adjustment to the working field could also be conducted using the intercultural communication competency and acculturation model.

Limitations

The study is limited to the Chinese students that volunteered and the sample population from one institution. Therefore, the results may not characterize the experiences of all Chinese

students. This study also lacks any quantitative data collection or analysis. As a primary research instrument, the researcher may also have some unavoidable cultural and personal biases that may affect the results. Additionally, this study has not recruited many male Chinese students, so it may be necessary to recruit more male Chinese students for further study.

Conclusions

Preferred acculturation strategies among Chinese participants are integration, followed by assimilation. A long cultural distance between east Chinese culture and west American culture may impact Chinese students' acculturation. The conflict between consciousness of Chinese cultural identity and the strong aspiration toward American culture would be a critical challenge faced by Chinese students in their acculturation. It was not found that gender factors impacted preferred acculturation strategies among Chinese participants. All Chinese participants expressed a positive attitude to the current global health crisis and demonstrated their strategies to cope with this crisis.

These findings suggest that a better understanding of Chinese students' acculturation and factors that help facilitate adjustment to the new environment are essential in assisting American universities to come up with effective programs that work more effectively with Chinese students at various developmental levels to facilitate their growth.

It may be necessary for American professors to better understand Chinese international students' performance in class and learning style to encourage them to get involved in more class activities and enhance their academic achievement.

The establishment of self-identity would be a fundamental factor to cope with various challenges of Chinese international undergraduate students in cultural transition and adjustment.

It is significant for school administration to understand and study Chinese students' experience in their identity development and provide better services.

It is significant to hire professional Chinese advisors to help Chinese students to overcome emotional well-being issues. Specifically, it would be helpful to encourage Chinese students to overcome emotional, psychological, and relational issues by seeking school counseling services, and being involved in church activities or school cultural clubs.

The present study examined Chinese international undergraduate students' experiences of cross-cultural adjustment to American universities. It was believed to be as important as the literature present regarding cross-cultural adjustment to American universities. The findings of the study, including conclusions, discussion, limitation, recommendations for future study, and practice, could be shared with Chinese international students to better understand acculturation and cope with their challenges in their transition at American universities. With this information, school administrators and faculties can better understand Chinese undergraduate students' experience in their cultural transition and provide effective services for them.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear fellow Chinese undergraduate student:

I am writing to invite you to participate in my doctoral dissertation “Chinese International Undergraduate Students’ Cross-Cultural Adjustment to American Universities”. This research will investigate Chinese undergraduate students’ attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation, what challenges are most critical for Chinese undergraduate students, and how they cope with these challenges, in order to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome challenges in their transition. At the same time, it is hoped that the result of the study will help the colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate students’ experience in their transition and to provide services for them by designing individual, group, and institutional approaches that work more effectively with Chinese students at various developmental levels and which facilitate their growth.

Your participation will be important for this study. Participation in this study will involve a one-hour face-to-face interview. Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be identified with your name.

Your contribution to this study will be much more than what I can pay. However, to show my appreciation, each participant will receive \$15 for his/her participation in this study. If you are interested in this study, please fill out a brief demographic survey below and email it to me at huni1201@stcloudstate.edu. I will contact you further after I receive your response. Please feel free to email me if you have any questions about this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Ningsheng Huang
Doctoral Candidate
Higher Education Administration
Department of Education
St. Cloud State University

Brief Demographic Survey:

Your Age:

Your Gender:

What's your field of study/major:

Where are you from in China:

How long have you been in the United States:

Have you ever had a cross-cultural adjustment experience (yes or no):

Appendix B: Survey and Interview Protocol

Before starting the interview, the participant will be given a consent form to read and sign. The consent form will provide more information about the study and outline the confidentiality terms and benefits as a participant in the study. The participant will be told that the interview will be audiotaped. If the participant does agree to be audiotaped, she/he will be told that taping is a condition of participating, so the interview cannot proceed further. The interview will be conducted in English, but the participants have the freedom to use Chinese whenever they experience language obstacles.

This study will explore the experiences of Chinese undergraduate students. A basic qualitative approach in qualitative research will be used for this study. Chinese international undergraduate students with different background from St Cloud State University will be selected to be participants in this study. Data will be collected through a survey and two interviews with each student. Interviewing students twice will allow researcher to ask more questions and dig deeper into their experiences. First, a survey with demographic information will be given via email before interviews in order to get participants' background information. Next, based on the demographic information from the survey, some Chinese international undergraduate students will be selected for interview. The first interview will focus on students' predisposition including their preparedness for change and adaptive personality. The second interview will focus on their experiences of acculturation and communication. Each interview will last about one hour, and the participant's responses will be kept confidential. After each interview, a summary of the responses will be emailed to the participant as soon as possible to check the accuracy. Data analysis will be conducted by both initial coding for the first interview and focused coding for the second interview.

Survey

A survey questionnaire will be conducted in order to get students' demographic information to complete prior to the interview so that researcher can spend more time talking with participants about their experiences. The survey will include some individual demographic attributes, such as age, gender, high school academic achievement, social attainments, degree program, TOEFL score, motivations, aspirations and goals, and length of time at their United States institution, as well as family background, such as socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and parental expectations. The survey will send to participants by email. A survey questionnaire was designed as the following:

1. What is your Gender?

Male

Female

2. What is age?

Between 18 and 19

Between 19 and 22

More than 22

3. Where are you living in China?

Southern

Northern

City

Rural

4. What score of TOFEL?

Less than 550

Between 550 and 600

More than 600

5. What is your score of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in China?

Less than 500

Between 500 and 600

Between 600 and 700

More than 700

6. How long have you been in the USA?

Less than 6 months

Between 6 months and one year

Between 1 and 4 years

7. What about your family annual income?

Less than \$50000

Between \$50000 and \$100000

More than \$100000

8. What is your parental educational level?

No education

Primary

Secondary and above

9. What is your aspirations and goals in abroad study?

Non-degree

Undergraduate

Graduate

10. Are you living in school dorms?

Yes

No

First Interview

Before starting the first interview, the participant will be given a consent form to read and sign. The consent form will provide more information about the study and outline the confidentiality terms and benefits as a participant in the study. The participant will be told that the interview will be audiotaped. If the participant does agree to be audiotaped, she/he will be told that taping is a condition of participating, so the interview cannot proceed further. The interview will be conducted in English, but the participants have the freedom to use Chinese whenever they experience language obstacles. After the first interview, data analysis will be conducted by initial coding.

The first interview will begin with the following general questions on students' background.

1. How long have you been studying English in China?
2. Have you ever traveled or lived abroad before coming to the United States?
3. What did you know about America before coming here? How did you feel about America?
4. Can you describe how and why you come to the United States?
5. Did you already have family members in the US?

6. What are your goals for your study in America? To obtain a bachelor's degree or advanced degree? To get away from your parents?
7. Are you willing to study abroad, or are your parents willing to send you here?
8. At the time that you came, what were your expectations? Did you expect to stay, or did you want to go back home?
9. Did you know a lot about American culture before you came to the United States? Did you meet a lot of Americans or did you study or work with Americans in China before coming here?

Second Interview

After first interview and initial coding, the second depth interview will start. First, the participants will be asked to answer those questions about their understanding of acculturation, attitudes toward acculturation, and experiences of acculturation. Then, the interview will focus on the participants' communication experiences, including friendship with American people and interaction with professors. Finally, some follow-up questions will be asked. After the second interview, data analysis will be conducted by focus coding.

Experiences of Acculturation

1. In general, what were the biggest differences between China and America in the way that people think and behave?
2. How would you describe your experiences of acculturation?
3. What challenges and hardship did you face in the first year?
4. What was the most difficulty in your life to adapt to since you come to USA?
5. What contributed more to these challenges (family to support, language barriers, housing difficulties, cultural differences, or others)?

6. What happened to you when you were facing all of these challenges and hardships?
7. How do you feel when you were facing all of these challenges and hardships?
8. What coping strategy did you use to cope with these challenges? For example, assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization.
9. Did anything help you to cope with these challenges and hardships (personal characteristics, religious beliefs and values, social networking, language, family support, community support, or any other support)?
10. Did you seek any support to get help?
11. Do you want to add anything else?

Experience of Communication

1. Tell me about your class.
2. Tell me about your first day of school.
3. Do you enjoy attending classes? Why or why not?
4. Do you tend to speak mostly English or Chinese with your friends? Why?
5. What classes do you enjoy most?
6. What professors do you enjoy most? Why?
7. In general, what differences did you notice in the teaching style between America and China?
8. In general, what differences did you notice in the learning style between America and China?
9. Can you describe the relationships between students and a professor? How do Chinese students think the professor should behave in China?
10. How do Chinese students think the professor should behave in the United States?

11. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities? Tell me about that.
12. Have you been able to make friends in the United States, and how do you feel about your friendships with Americans? Please list the first name of three American friends.
13. What does the friendship mean to you? What do you think a friend should be like?
14. What are values underlying friendship in China, such as commitment, dependence, trust, openness, or sharing of emotions?
15. In your opinion, what are values underlying friendship in the United States, such as independence, privacy, openness, or individualism?
16. How do these differences affect your relationships with Americans?
17. When your American friend does or expects something that doesn't match with Chinese values, what do you do? How do you respond?

Experience in COVID-19

1. What challenges and hardship did you face in COVID-19?
2. What happened to you when you were facing all of these challenges?
3. How do you feel when you were facing all of these challenges?
4. How do you copy these challenges?
5. What do think of the course's online delivery?

Follow-up Questions

1. Do these finding represent your experiences?
2. Do you want to add or modify something related to this study?
3. Is there anything missing?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Title: Exploring Chinese International Undergraduate Students' Cross-cultural Adjustment to American Universities

Primary Researcher: Ningsheng Huang, candidate of doctor in education

Background information

My name is Ningsheng Huang. I am a graduate student in the Department of Higher Education at St. Cloud State University. You are invited to participate in a study of Chinese international undergraduate students studying in American universities. This research will investigate Chinese undergraduate students' attitudes toward cross-cultural adaptation, what challenges are most critical for Chinese undergraduate students, and how they cope with these challenges, in order to help them to better understand acculturation and overcome challenges in their transition. At the same time, it is hoped that the result of the study will help the colleges and universities in the United States to better understand Chinese undergraduate students' experience in their transition, and to provide services for them by designing individual, group, and institutional approaches that work more effectively with Chinese students at various developmental levels and which facilitate their growth. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

Procedures

The study involves a survey and two interviews. A survey with demographic information will be given via email before interviews in order to get participants' background information. Next, based on the demographic information from the survey, some Chinese international undergraduate students will be selected for interview. The first interview will focus on students' predisposition including their preparedness for change and adaptive personality. The second

interview will focus on their experiences of acculturation and communication. Each interview will last about one hour. After each interview, the transcripts will be reviewed carefully. A summary of the responses will be emailed to the participant as soon as possible to check the accuracy.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no known or expected risks from participating in this study. With your permission, I would like to record our conversation on audiotape. If you don't feel comfortable answering my questions, you can choose not to answer.

Benefits

Benefits from this study include learning more about acculturation in transition. You may gain a greater understanding about yourself. You will also be helping other professionals in their work with Chinese international students and other international students.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. Your name will not appear on the tapes as well as in all the interview transcripts and in any report I might publish. Research records will be kept in a password-protected computer, and only I, my advisor, and two coders will have access to them. The recordings of the interview will be kept for three years; then they will be destroyed.

Contact and Questions

If you are interested in participating in this study and have any questions or concerns, you may raise them now or during the interview or you can also contact me at 651-216-1753 or by email at huni1201@stcloudstate.edu.

Advisor contact: Prof. Dr. Jones, Jennifer B jbjones@stcloudstate.edu

IRB contact: 320-308-4932 rspgrad@stcloudstate.edu

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information; I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Permission for Recording the Interview

I grant permission to record the interview on record tape.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Ningsheng Huang
Email: huni1201@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: **Exempt Review**

Project Title: Exploring Chinese International Undergraduate Students' Cross-cultural Adjustment to American Universities

Advisor: Jeniffer Jones

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1964 - 2537	Type: Exempt Review	Today's Date: 4/24/2020
1st Year Approval Date: 4/24/2020	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date:	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date: