

Exploring Academic Socialization and Identity  
of Chinese Undergraduate Students in the U.S.

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**Abstract**

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Under the worldwide trend of internationalization of higher education, the number of Chinese students studying in the U.S. has increased dramatically in the past ten years. In some American universities, such as a large research university in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. where this research was conducted, Chinese students are the largest segment among all the international students.

Through the lens of poststructuralist conceptualization of identity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Hall, 1996), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) and imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003), this research focused on Chinese undergraduate students' academic socialization experiences in the U.S., especially concerning their proficiency in English and academic knowledge, their interactions with professors, TAs and classmates, and their understandings of their identities over time. This study

offered opportunities for Chinese undergraduate students' to have their voices heard and their stories shared. Through mixed qualitative methods with ethnographic characteristics, such as interviews and observations, the research interpreted experiences of six student participants, found differences and commonalities among them, and factors that influenced their experiences.

By triangulating data from multiple sources and carefully analyzing data, this study has found that there are many differences among the six Chinese undergraduate students, and no major generalized behavior of Chinese undergraduate students could be identified. In some ways, Chinese undergraduate student participants in this study are not that different from their American peers, in the sense that there are discrepancies in students' frequency of visiting instructor's office hours and speaking up in class no matter where students are from. Factors such as students' personality and students' previous experience helped explain their behaviors. On the other hand, these Chinese international student participants showed some common tendencies and challenges caused by language and cultural differences, which distinguish them from American students. One should be cautious in viewing Chinese students as a homogeneous group or stereotyping their academic behaviors.

Additionally, the researcher's reflections on the findings are presented along with suggestions to smooth the process of academic socialization for future Chinese undergraduate students. Suggestions were given by current Chinese international students, and their professors and TAs. Implications of the study for current and future Chinese international students, their instructors, as well as future researchers studying international students' learning are proposed. I propose that a joint effort should be made by international students themselves, their American peers, professors, TAs and university administrators to together ease international students' process of academic socialization.

## **Dedication**

To my mother and father who have given me life and unconditional love.  
Ming Guo and Tieqiang Zuo.

To the man in my life who give me tremendous support and encouragement in everything I do.  
My husband, Travis Bond.

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I love you all and hope you will enjoy reading this dissertation that I have written with passion, heart, and soul. I hope some will find it helpful as they pursue their own studies, work, and socialization. Indeed, that would really make the hard work of the last five years even more worthwhile and meaningful.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### A Personal Story

I came to the U.S. four years ago pursuing an MA degree in Education at this prestigious, large research university in the Northwest. By then, I had already been studying English for 17 years and had taught TOEFL for about two years. I had no problem with daily English conversation and academic vocabulary; and I was confident in my ability to communicate with people and express myself in English. I came to the U.S. in pursuit of a better education in a world-class university and with the hope of better understanding and integrating into the American culture. Coming to the U.S. was my own decision and my parents fully understood and supported me financially and emotionally. I also came to the U.S. knowing that my boyfriend, who is an American that I had known for 4 years, and his family would be there welcoming me and helping me. I knew back then it would be a challenging and meaningful journey, it would be a battle with unknown difficulties but rewarding in the end. I felt confident that I had the ability to adjust to life in the U.S. and become successful as a student.

I knew things would be hard, but had no idea how hard it could be. The first quarter was very depressing, with huge financial pressure pushing me to the wall, feeling like a sword hanging over me which might fall at any given moment. I came without a scholarship, which is common for those seeking an MA degree in liberal arts. I was hoping that I could find funding soon for my next year since my savings were running out and I felt ashamed to dig into my parents' savings any more. I applied for jobs frantically, any sort of TA, RA, Graduate Staff Assistant (GSA), hourly staff such as librarian, Chinese tutor, etc... I either did not receive a

reply or I received a letter of “thank you for your interest, however, we regret to inform you...” All my friends would comfort me by saying “be patient, it takes time and things will be better.” I felt that I was not well supported, I had to start from scratch. All the confidence, achievement, network, and ability that I had accumulated in China was worth an absolute zero to me in this new institution. The financial pressure inhibited my concentration on my studies, my mood in learning and even my sleep and my happiness. My focus was not on studying but how to get money for my next year. Even though I could not concentrate while studying, my grades did not suffer much.

Fortunately, I heard about the Master of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATESOL) Program in the English Department from a senior peer who also came from China pursuing her MA in the College of Education. When I first heard about the program, I felt like I should have originally applied to this program since it better matched my interests. I applied in January just a few months after beginning my post-graduate studies and luckily was accepted with funding working as a GSA for the next year. At that time, I felt that was a lifesaver, I could finally concentrate on studying without worrying as much about money. I promised myself that I would try my best to learn as much as I could, so that I would be able to contribute to the field of English teaching and learning to thank the program that supported me.

When I started my second year, it was totally in a different situation. I worked 20 hours as a GSA, making friends at my workplace; I absorbed knowledge in TESOL like a sponge fallen into the ocean, sharing my teaching experiences and personal stories with professors and coworkers who were very friendly and encouraging. I chose courses that I was truly interested in, both in and out of the English Department, without feeling that I needed to stick strictly to only graduation requirements and finish as soon as possible to save money. I became much happier,

more open-minded, and confident again. The confident Wei from China was back, I felt like I was again who I had been.

Studying in the MATESOL Program was very rewarding and fulfilling. I fully appreciated the knowledge I acquired in the field, since I enjoy learning English and helping others learn English. I knew in one way or another, I would continue my education in English. Hence, after completing both an MA in Education and MATESOL, I chose to continue pursuing a PhD degree in English.

During my second year at this university, I took a yoga class where I met a Chinese undergraduate student who asked me after one class, “Are you an ABC (American-born Chinese)?” “I am not.” I said. “Then you must have been here for a long time, like you came here for high school?” “Not really, it is my second year here!” “Woo! Your English is amazing!!” She exclaimed in an exciting tone, with admiration in her expression. I thanked her for her compliment, and asked her how she was doing, as well as, how her life had been since her arrival in the U.S. She told me that she hung out with her Chinese friends most of the time even though she wanted to make American friends. It was hard for her to stay focused in a two-hour lecture with 200 other students in the big lecture hall. She said she felt that the university did not care enough about international students, even though they paid three times the tuition fee compared to the in-state-students. She did not fully know what resources were available for her, nor how she could make full use of them... That conversation lasted about an hour, which was much longer than I thought it would be since I barely knew her. But I gave her tips about the university's resources, strategies for participating in class and making American friends. I told her how hard it was for me during my first year. I encouraged her never to give up but keep

trying and pushing herself. Without too much thought, I was actually serving as a mentor for her at that moment.

Another similar situation occurred not long after. I was invited to be the student MC for “I Sing Beijing,” a music concert. The concert took place in the University HUB (the student union building). I used English to welcome the performers and director to Seattle and thank the audience for being there. After the show, a female student came to talk to me. After I answered her question saying that I was doing my master’s degree in English and that I was in my second year in the U.S., I saw a sparkle in her eyes. She then began asking me very detailed questions about how I was able to speak English so confidently in front of an audience of 400, among whom many are native speakers; she asked how I practiced my English on a daily basis; she was also curious to know what extra-curricular activities I had been involved in that helped me look confident on stage. I answered all of her questions in detail, and also asked her about her studies and activities. She shared her creative “1-2-3” method with me. This involved counting to 3 so she would push herself to raise her hand to answer the professor’s question, since participation was a very important component in the grading system, and normally she was too shy to volunteer answers. She also told me about one of her most embarrassing moments since coming to the U.S. when her teammates switched the discussion topics from a class project to TV shows they were watching; she could only smile and nod without saying anything because she had no idea what they were talking about. We exchanged our contact information and I promised that if she had questions about studies and social life, I would be willing to help as much as I could.

After those two encounters, I became more aware of my interactions with Chinese undergraduate students. I noticed that both small talk and deep conversations about my and their lives took place very often, in the classroom and outside of the classroom, at social events and

extra-curricular activities. Because I was an older graduate student from the same culture, they were open to share their personal experiences. I was also able to hear different Chinese undergraduate students' stories, struggles, challenges, strategies, successes, and reflections. Because of the respect and faith they had in me, I felt comfortable to tell them about my hardest times and how I made it through those days. Most of the time, I ended up serving as a mentor and role model to a certain degree, since many of them are surprised and impressed that a Chinese Master's student (later a PhD student) could major in English. I was frequently asked about how I practiced my English so that I became so fluent, how I made American friends that I seemed to be confident and comfortable with, and what I did to participate actively in class. It was then that I told myself, since I am much older, by that time had been here longer, was working on a degree that is more advanced, I had the responsibility to help other Chinese international students out to the best of my ability. At the same time, I also felt so similar and close to these students having the same Chinese international student identity, the same mother tongue and similar cultural background, experiences in the Chinese educational system and now the American higher educational system. I thought there must be something that I could do to use my skills and experience to help them. Something that could make full use of my own background, cultural identity, academic knowledge, and personal experiences. Something that could benefit Chinese undergraduate students, Asian international students, international students, even American students, professors, and other U.S. universities. I wanted to serve as a bridge among people from different cultural backgrounds and educational systems helping them understand each other. I wanted to use my personal experience and academic knowledge to help international undergraduate students fit into the American educational system, while promoting understanding and support from their instructors and universities.

Because of my personal experiences, I became very excited about my dissertation topic: Exploring Academic Socialization and Identity of Chinese Undergraduate Students in the U.S. My research focuses on Chinese undergraduate students' academic socialization, including their learning of academic knowledge and development of English proficiency, interactions with peers, TAs and instructors, and their understanding of their self-identity.

I chose the university that I was attending as the site of the research, firstly because, as a large research university in the Pacific Northwest, it has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of international students, especially Chinese undergraduate students, which has become the most populous group among international students studying at the campus. In addition, I have studied here for four years as a Chinese international student, and become very familiar with its setting and educational practices. Conducting the research at this university provides me relatively easy access to research participants and a familiar research environment which offers logistical strengths and practical convenience. At the same time, my personal experience and lens can also provide useful insights throughout the process of research.

## Background

Internationalization of higher education is a worldwide trend (OECD, 2004, 2006, 2011). One of the most significant definitions of “internationalization” is offered by Altbach (2010) as “specific policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments to deal with globalization”. Within the trend of internationalization, an increasing number of international students are coming to the U.S. to study. According to data from the *Open Door Report*, a yearly report published by the non-profit organization the Institute of International Education, which includes specific data about international students in the U.S., the United States attracts the largest number of international

students to its higher education system. At the same time, since 1999, China has been one of the top two countries sending students to the United States. For the year 2009-2010, Chinese student enrollment in the United States increased by 30% compared to the previous year. With a total of nearly 128,000 students, or more than 18% of the total international student population, China was the leading sending country of international students to the United States in 2009. China has continued to be the number one sending country of international students to the U.S. from 2009-2014 (*Open Door Reports, 2009-2014*). According to the most recent 2014 *Open Door Report*, in the 2013/14 academic year, there were 274,439 students from China studying in the United States, which increased by 16.5% compared to the previous year. This made China remains the number one sending country of international students coming to the United States for the fifth year in a row. The data also showed that Chinese students make up 31% of international students studying in the U.S.

The demographic information for my university reflects a similar trend. At this large research university in the Pacific Northwest, in 2006, only 2% of the incoming freshmen were international students (UW International Student Service, 2011). During 2011-2012, there was a 10% increase of the international student population from the previous year, reaching its current level of 18% of incoming freshmen coming from abroad, primarily from China (UW Provost Office, 2011). Specifically, during 2011-2012, among 4,853 international students who were enrolled in my university, 42.15% of them came from China (UW International Student Service, 2011). The number of registered Chinese students rose to 2,806 the next year, taking up 47.76% among all international students (UW International Student Service, 2012). During 2013-2014, there were 3,553 Chinese students registered at this university, composing 52.34% of its 6,788 registered international students (UW International Student Service, 2013). The number and

percentage of Chinese students continued to grow in this university, reaching 3,845 in the year of 2014-2015, taking up to 52.67% of the total number of registered international students (UW International Student Service, 2014).

On the macro level, China has continuously been the largest sending country of international students to the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2012). At the institutional level, Chinese students have composed the largest portion of international students in the university where my research is located (UW International Student Service, 2012). Because of the dramatically increasing population of Chinese students studying in the U.S., especially ones pursuing their undergraduate degree, there is an urgent need for more understanding regarding this group of students' academic experiences while studying in the U.S.

## Research Questions

This research focuses on Chinese undergraduate students' academic socialization, including their pursuit of academic knowledge, interactions with peers, TAs and instructors, and their understanding of self-identities.

This research uses qualitative methods with ethnographic characteristics, including: recruiting six Chinese undergraduate students on campus, observing them in classroom settings and taking detailed notes of their behaviors, interviewing them three times during the quarter, as well as, some of their instructors and TAs, collecting the students' syllabuses and coursework, and organizing a focus group discussion.

This study focuses on Chinese undergraduate students' academic socialization in the U.S. and is guided by the following questions:

(1) What are these students' learning experiences in terms of gaining academic knowledge: for example, what strategies do they use to improve their English and content

knowledge, what differences do they notice between the educational system and academic norms of the U.S. and China, what are challenges and achievements in their study, and what efforts have they made to be active members of their academic community?

(2) What are their interactions with classmates, TAs and instructors? This includes students' socializing with others in the environment, and their relationship-building experiences with their classmates, teammates, TAs, and professors.

(3) How do students' self-identities develop over time? For example, how much do they assimilate and integrate into American culture and the educational system, how much do they decide to keep to their own, what are their reflections on changes happened to them since their arrival in the U.S.?

## Chapter Overviews

The dissertation consists of six chapters, and they develop according to the following logical relationship:

The first chapter is an introduction, explaining the background and purpose of the research, research questions, and the importance of the research. The literature review examines what has been learned from previous research and literature on Chinese undergraduate students' learning experience in the U.S. Key categories include "academic socialization" and "L2 Learning and Identity." The theoretical framework includes "poststructuralist conceptualization of identity," "investment" and "community." I discuss why combining multiple theoretical lenses was the most beneficial for this study.

The second chapter is devoted to methodology, explaining in detail what methods I chose to use in this study and why, the advantages and limitations of each method, and actions which

were taken to increase the validity of the research. I also explain the research context, recruiting methods, participants' criterion, and the process of data collection and analysis.

The third chapter is a descriptive introduction to the six student participants of this study, their personal and family backgrounds, plans for the future, understanding of their English proficiency, as well as ideas about advantages and disadvantages in their academic life. It also includes special things they identified about their previous academic training, habits and extracurricular activities, as well as some personality traits. This chapter helps readers become familiar with each student so that they can better understand each student's behaviors and experiences that were recorded during the study period.

After coding and analyzing the data collected during this study period, I categorized the results so they could be presented according to the major themes identified. The fourth and fifth chapters report on these major findings. The fourth chapter focuses on student participants' academic behaviors in the classroom and their drivers. There, I address two research questions: What are these students' learning experiences acquiring academic knowledge? What are their interactions with classmates, TAs, and instructors? I analyze academic performance-related themes observed in classrooms and explained by the student participants. I focus on students' language learning, motivation for learning, learning preference, as well as their academic performance in class and interactions with professors and TAs.

The fifth chapter centers on the analysis of themes that were not necessarily observable in a classroom setting, but rather surfaced during interviews and informal discussions. There I address the research question: How have the students' self-identities developed over time? This chapter is divided into three main sections: factors that influenced students' academic behavior,

student participants' ways of giving back to the community, and their understanding of their identities and how that has changed over time.

The last chapter consists of recommendations, discussion and conclusions. I first synthesize recommendations given by students, their TAs and instructors for future Chinese undergraduate students, their instructors and TAs. I then address my reflections on the methodologies and findings of the research, including the issues of stereotypes, generalizations and representativeness. I then summarize the research findings, the contribution of the research and implications for Chinese students and their instructors and TAs. I also provide my thoughts on the limitations of the research and potential directions for further research.

## Literature Review

### Academic socialization

This discussion mainly focuses on Asian students' experiences in North America, especially on the finding that the U.S. Academic socialization is a salient challenge and is very different from English proficiency. International students, even those with high competence in English, might not find it easy to become competent and valuable members of their academic discourse communities. Generally speaking, the bigger the gap is between the host culture and the home culture, the more difficult the process of adjustment and cross-cultural adaptation, and the longer it will take international students to get acclimated to it (e.g., Bart, et al., 2012; Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002; Ward, 1993). The process of academic socialization is a complicated and conflictual process of negotiation, rather than a smooth, predictable and unidirectional process of transition (Morita, 2000)

The first major challenge in academic socialization is to understand instructors' expectations in class. International students who come from different cultures might have different understandings of the host countries' learning style, academic systems, and instructors' teaching styles. Cultural differences create problems for international students to understand, and accept, and make it difficult to meet instructors' expectations and requirements in the host countries, since they might lack the tacit knowledge and subtle skills which are not taught in their home countries. The lack of familiarity with new academic systems and host cultures, which may vary from their home countries in terms of learning preference, communicative styles, self-expressions, and so on, make it hard for them to understand the expectations of their instructors, as well as the purposes of some class activities (e.g., Yang, 2010).

Directly related, another major challenge is to participate actively in class discussions and other oral activities. Silence, in many Asian cultures, is a sign of respect for wisdom and authority, but it can be viewed as incompetent and passive in Western cultures (e.g., Liu, 2001; Morita, 2004; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Asking questions in class, which is normal and encouraged in U.S. universities, could be thought of by Asian students as inconsiderate and rude to their fellow classmates. Similarly, challenging instructors in class is considered disrespectful in many Asian countries, but not so in the U.S. As a result, international students can get lost and frustrated facing these differences; they can get discouraged and become reluctant to engage in class discussions (e.g., Huang & Brown, 2009; Liu, 2001; Morita, 2000).

Writing can also be difficult for international students' academic socialization, especially the requirement of appropriate citation in the Western universities; failing to do might could be judged as plagiarism. Using a writer's words without appropriate citation is considered academic misconduct and dishonesty on North American campuses. However, the definition of "plagiarism" varies greatly across cultures. As Pennycook (1996) claimed, the way ownership is understood within the U.S. context needs to be seen as a very particular cultural and historical development, which varies greatly from the Chinese context.

Critical thinking is one of the most salient challenges in international students' academic socialization. In many Asian countries where the tradition of respecting instructors is highly valued, students see themselves as recipients of knowledge from their instructors, rather than partners in learning (e.g., Huang, 1997; Li, 2001). Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) reported that Chinese students tended to treat instructors and texts as highly authoritative sources of knowledge, and students were expected to "copy, drill and memorize" the "foundational knowledge" presented by these sources. Durkin (2004) claimed that Chinese students were

always presented with the correct perspective of the essay questions and they did not have to analyze and debate as they are required to in Western universities. Ku & Ho (2010) claimed that Chinese students' tendency was to look for answers from preconceptions, authorities or other people, rather than being trained to make individual judgments based on truth, evidence, and reasoning. In comparison, in the U.S., instructors mainly serve as facilitators in students' learning, rather than the key source and authority of knowledge. Students are expected to think critically and not accept everything they hear from instructors. International students who have not received critical thinking training in their home countries might find a huge gap in critical thinking between themselves and their American peers, who are more experienced in and comfortable with critical thinking (e.g., Gu, 2009).

In order to deal with the challenges in academic socialization, international students have adopted a variety of strategies to become more legitimate members of the learning community, such as working with co-nationals, bringing personal stories, identity negotiation/ (re)construction/resistance, observation, and seeking available resources.

One of the immediate strategies international students have adopted is to work together with students from the same country or similar cultural backgrounds, who might have similar problems, difficulties and struggles. This strategy can be seen in the studies of Kobayashi (2003), Koehne (2005), and Yang (2010), to name a few.

Some international students fill the gap between the new academic community and their home country by observing and adapting. Observing what their peers have done successfully and unsuccessfully (e.g., Vickers, 2008), and observing what their instructors have illustrated (e.g., Morita, 2000) can help them learn lessons, and develop their own output. For example, Morita (2000) notices that in two TESL program graduate courses, non-native- (as well as native-

English-speaking) students gradually became familiar with the academic discourse and competent in oral academic presentations (OAPs) as they prepared for, observed, performed, and reviewed them.

International students also try to find support from individuals, groups and organizations on campus (e.g., Hechanova-Alampay, et al. 2002; Liu, 2001; Oropeza, Varghese & Kanno, 2010). For example, some of them talk to their professors about the assignment requirement and their specific situations (e.g., Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999); some turn to their academic advisors to talk about challenges in their studies (e.g., Charles & Stewart, 1991); some ask classmates to study together and/or join a study group; some go to a writing center to talk about their writing and have their work polished (e.g., Williams, 2004); some ask for help from friends and classmates (international and American), use resources from libraries (e.g., Knight, Hight & Polfer, 2010), and so on. Seeking support takes place in different forms among different groups, and many international students are continuously and actively looking for resources in order to ease their transition and apprenticeship of cultural norms.

### L2 Learning and Identity

My research interests extend beyond Chinese undergraduate students' academic socialization to their identity in U.S. universities. Previous researchers have used the lens of identity to learn about international students' learning and adaptation, for example, the impact of their identity on their socialization and relationship-building (Chen, 1994); the influence of identity on their classroom participation (Liu, 2001); the relationship between their English learning, identity, and confidence-building (Ying, et.at, 2005); reflections on their hybrid subjectivity and interaction with the local community (Koehne, 2005).

Identity is a powerful and meaningful tool. In the process of academic learning and relationship-building with classmates and instructors, some international students empower themselves by negotiating, reconstructing and resisting their identities to become competent and legitimate members of the academic community. For example, some international students try to be self-confident about who they are (e.g., Peng & Woodrow, 2010), embracing their identities with the belief that as long as they have enough training, they can be as successful in academic communities as more experienced members of these communities. Some try to be more tolerant of their identity as non-native language speakers, developing faith in themselves as valuable intellectual resources, cultural carriers and links between cultures who can make unique contributions to their classrooms (e.g., Morita, 2004; Sam, 2000). Some try to negotiate their identities and have developed two sets of values: one for the host country and one for the home country, because they do not want to be treated as foreigners in either context (e.g., Gu, 2009). Also, some international students imagine that they are already as skillful and proficient in the academic community as other expert members, even though they might be at the early stage with fewer skills and less experience. The imagined identities help them empower themselves and participate effectively in new academic communities (e.g., Vickers, 2008).

“Identity resistance” (Norton and Toohey, 2011) and “identity negotiation” (Liu, 2001; Morita, 2000; Yang, 2010;) are important in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research because they reflect second language learners’ struggles which drive them to take actions; at the same time, they also acknowledge language learners’ strategies and strengths. Yosso (2005) defined “resistant capital” as “minority individuals’ ability to challenge the status quo by resisting negative stereotypes and labels and claiming counter identities of their own”. One focus of this research project is the efforts my Chinese undergraduate participants make to enable them

to acquire more positive identities. How do these students learn social identity negotiation skills in their academic communities? Under what scenarios will they initiate/insist on/give up their identity negotiation/resistance? It is also important to note that their identity resistance and negotiation can influence findings. The ongoing negotiation of power and identity, as well as, the resistance of negative identities, are extremely valuable to understand both in the course of students' academic socialization as well as in the course of the research.

### Chinese Students' Learning and Chinese International Students

Literature has claimed that Chinese students' traditional learning style involves treating the instructors as an authority and source of information instead of a facilitator of discussion (Liu, 1998, etc). In a culture where authority is highly respected, Chinese students expect that information and answers to questions coming from the professors are correct (Huang, 1997). Li (2001) examined conceptions of learning collected from Chinese undergraduate students. The study showed that "seeking knowledge" was the largest category and was often used interchangeably with "learning" or "study." Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) reported that Chinese respondents tended to treat instructors and texts as highly authoritative sources of knowledge and students were expected to "copy, drill and memorize" the "foundational knowledge" presented by these sources. Durkin (2004) claimed that in Chinese schools, Chinese students were always presented with the correct perspective of the essay questions and they did not have to analyze and debate as they are required in Western universities. Ku & Ho (2010) claimed Chinese students' tendency is to look for answers from preconceptions, authorities or other people, rather than training their individual judgment based on truth, evidence, and reasoning. Their research confirmed that in Chinese society which has strong traditional Confucian-collectivistic values, people are used to giving priority to consensus; therefore, diverse opinions are not highly

appreciated. The concept of “harmony” in Chinese rhetoric has an effect on how Chinese writers use and criticize citations, which is why Chinese academic writers usually make indirect criticism and avoid pointing out others’ names (Bloch & Chi 1995).

Many studies have been conducted concerning Chinese international students. Zhang (2007) claimed that language difficulties influenced respondents' goals and level of satisfaction with their education experience in their host country (New Zealand). Ward (2001) argued that with different learning styles as a significant study problem, many Chinese students found group discussions challenging with New Zealand students. Zheng and Berry’s (1991) study found that Chinese students in Canada reported lower English fluency, challenges in making friends, and more adaptation and communication problems for Chinese compared to non-Chinese Canadian students. Yang (2010)’s study closely examined and analyzed the experience of five Chinese ESL students of Commerce at a Canadian university doing a group presentation. These students’ unfamiliarity with the communication style in Canadian classrooms, limited experience with group projects, and underdeveloped English conversation skills had made it difficult for them to give their presentation. However, by observing their instructor’s reaction to their presentation and observing their classmates’ presentation, they demonstrated the negotiation of identities and understanding of the norms of presentations during that course. The process of them learning how to make presentations in class is a step in the process of their academic socialization, changing their identities from new members of the specific academic community to more experienced members.

Chen’s (1994) dissertation tried to explore Chinese students' relationship-building with Americans in United States universities. She found that several student participants in her study faced a dilemma that while they didn’t want to be treated as an “outsider,” they still wanted

others to consider their "specific needs." She also claimed that students' lack of proficiency in English or appreciation for American humor constantly reminded them of being "outsiders" when communicating with American students. Comparing Americans with Chinese students, the author pointed out that the former respected their own individual standard, while the latter usually sought an external and group standard. All students in this study struggled in maintaining or changing their "Chineseness," experiencing tensions between getting and losing, acquiring and letting go, maintaining old identities and building up new identities. In another study about self-identity changes and English learning among Chinese undergraduates, Yihong et al. (2005) claimed that English learning influenced participants' identities and self-confidence, in addition, learners' values and communication styles also experienced changes at the same time.

Liu (2001) analyzed Asian students' classroom communication patterns in U.S. universities, pointing out that in Chinese culture, students usually see themselves as recipients of knowledge imparted from their instructors, rather than partners in learning. In his study, Asian students showed different degrees of participation in the classroom, and there were several reasons behind it. For example, one student majoring in music kept silent in class participation due to her lack of language ability and her heavy reliance on her Chinese counterparts for debriefing after class. The sense of linguistic inferiority as well as relatively less working experience to share hindered her from actively participating in the class discussions. However, Asian students in his study were not all silent participants in American classrooms, and the majority of the Asian students in his study were able to perceive the benefits of oral classroom participation.

The previous studies provide a good foundation for learning about Chinese students' learning overseas. My research validates these findings with additional work, but also looks for

changes. What is more, the previous literature focuses mainly on one aspect of Chinese students' learning, such as participation in classroom discussion (Liu, 2001), group presentation (Yang, 2010), relationship-building with Americans (Chen, 1994), attitudes towards instructors (Pratt, Kelly, and Wong; 1999), language barriers (Zhang, 2007) and learning styles (Ward, 2001). In contrast, this study integrates Chinese undergraduate students' experience in all the above aspects as those themes naturally rose up during interviews and observations with the student participants. Rather than being structured around particular aspects of academic socialization, this study is built around the complex, integrated experiences of individual students.

## Theoretical Framework

### Poststructuralist conceptualization of identity

In the paradigm of poststructuralism, truth is multifaceted, and subjectivity is paramount. It is claimed that there is no fixed, single-dimensional and constant identity. Just the opposite, identity is multidimensional, dynamic, and constructed. It is multiple rather than unitary, decentered rather than centered (e.g., Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Hall, 1996; Norton, 1995). Individuals are diverse, contradictory, and dynamic; they talk and act differently in different situations and at various times/locations, and together contribute to the overall identity of the person. Additionally, poststructuralists argue that identity is not discovered, but co-constructed by the researcher and the researched via their interaction. It emphasizes the discursive construction of identity, the existing power relations and strategies for change (e.g., Weedon, 1997). Norton (1995) employed the poststructuralist concept of identity in understanding language learning within the social world in which it takes place. This poststructuralist approach to identity has become the approach of recent choice for researchers to explore the connection between identity and second language learning (e.g., Duff & Talmy, 2011; Norton, 2011).

The poststructuralism paradigm has been used as the conceptual framework and theoretical approach in many research studies, for example, when Duff (2010) studied language socialization in academic discourse communities, she used the lens of poststructuralism by claiming academic socialization as a multifaceted, dynamic and non-neutral process, and that factors of race, culture, ethnicity, and gender should all be considered. Koehne (2005) uses a poststructuralist view to look at ways international students (re)construct storylines about themselves, embracing their hybrid subjectivities and celebrating their newly negotiated

identities. Norton (1995, 2010, 2013) draws broadly on poststructuralist theories of identity as well as feminist scholarship such as Weedon's (1997), asserting that "the individual is diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over time and space," and that the statement that language keeps constructing and negotiating identities.

Identity mediates the relationship between language learners and the society where they are situated (e.g., Belz, 2002; Edwards, 2009; Norton, 2010, 2013). Identity is learners' positioning of their affiliation with other people, their relationship with the target academic community, and relationship between their current situation and their future (e.g., Oropeza, Varghese & Kanno, 2010; Ushioda, 2011). Identity is complex and constructed in specific historical, cultural, and social settings, especially as seen through the lens of poststructuralism. By looking at learners' multiple identities (and the processes by which these are constructed and negotiated), with classmates, instructors, the educational setting, the society and the world, researchers can develop a better understanding of the language socialization process.

What's more, identity can reflect the power of language learners, which is an important theme in the construction of SLA. Identities in feminist and poststructuralist theories put emphasis on power relations, symbolic domination, and the role of gender, race, and class in the language learning process (e.g., Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Norton 2000; Ogulnick, 1999; Pavlenko 2007). Widdicombe (1998) explicitly points out that identity is viewed as a standard for the distribution of resources, including power and status. Norton and Toohey (2011) further claim that from the poststructuralist perspective, practices, resources, and identities are mutually constituted, produced and inherited. Identity and power have a bidirectional relationship: first, because learners' power can influence their identity, including what they feel about themselves and their relationship with others. If someone has proficient

knowledge of cultural norms, he or she will be more comfortable and confident in carrying out language practices and in interacting with other members of the community. On the other hand, if someone is a newcomer to an academic community, he or she might find it hard to be a legitimate member of the community because of the lack of academic norms. The level of his/her interaction with the rest of the group and chances for him/her to participate in academic practices might be inhibited. On the other side, learners' identities can also influence the power they possess. Since individuals have dynamic identities, when one is disfavored in a specific setting, learners can try to use others to gain more power. This can be seen in Norton's (1995) study, when a Czech immigrant woman was looked down upon by her teenage coworkers because of her limited English, she used the identity of an adult and a mother to gain the right to speak and feel more in control.

Identity is also very helpful as an analytical perspective because it switches focus from "teacher-centered" to "student-centered." Students' perspectives are given weight, their struggles, worries, and reflections are given opportunities to be shared. Importantly, one should admit that students do not behave the same way in all their classes, in all skill areas (such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing), or over a long period of time. Identity is viewed as dynamic and a site of struggle by poststructuralism. This theoretical lens will be particularly valuable for my research since it will imply a focus on students' academic behavior in different classes over a period of time, which might show changes and inconsistency. In cases when students are doing fine in one class but struggle in another, theories of identities in the poststructuralist paradigm can be utilized to provide possible explanations and the blame is shifted from the students to other possible factors, such as the program's positioning of students, instructor's teaching style, classroom atmosphere, etc. (e.g., Atkinson, Okada, & Talmy, 2011;

Morita, 2004). Therefore theories on identity encourage empowering students to become more competent language learners, and may also assist teachers in becoming more effective.

Regarding my research interest in Chinese international undergraduate students' academic socialization in U.S. universities, examining their identity changes and development can be informative for the participants. Researching international students' identity gives them the opportunity to share their stories. It offers them a chance to reflect historically on who they have been in the past, who they are at the moment, and who they want to be in future. It also gives them opportunities to look holistically at their relationship with their teachers, classmates, friends, host society, and their home countries. Therefore identity is a powerful and meaningful tool to help researchers understand their participants better and also help participants express themselves better.

### Community

Community is important as the place where students' second language learning takes place; where the power relationship between second language learners and target language speakers changes. Community serves as the situated context which is shaped by social, historical, cultural, political and economic conventions. Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the idea of "situated learning" which claims that "learning is a socially situated process by which newcomers gradually move toward fuller participation in a given community's activities, by interacting with more experienced community members" (P.49). In my study, Chinese undergraduate students are newcomers, and their classrooms in the U.S. university are communities in which they need to make efforts to become legitimate members. This process will develop through interactions with experienced members, negotiation of their roles, participation in community practices, as well as, potential struggles and conflicts. The community of practice (COP) is defined by Lave and

Wenger (1991) as “an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities.” (p. 98)

According to them, learning can only take place if newcomers understand the norms of the community and have legitimacy to participate; then engagement and interaction with existing members may happen, which contributes to learning. The concept of COP will be extremely helpful for understanding Chinese undergraduate study in the U.S., since they are newcomers to communities with many norms to learn and many practice activities to fulfill. In addition, there will be dynamic interactions between these students and their peers, professors, and other members of the existing community, the process of which involves power relationships and identity development. Students might show a level of development and changes of positions through their participation in the COP; all of which can reflect their learning, their relationship-building, and their identities.

There are many different communities within the scope of students’ learning and the people they are interacting with. This fits well with poststructuralist theories, where individuals are viewed as multifaceted. In addition, Anderson (1983), Norton and Toohey (2011), and other scholars have adopted the concept of an “imagined community,” where a target language community exists in learners’ imaginations and desires that creates positive identities in language practices.

### Investment

First introduced by Norton (1995), “investment” examines the “socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn it” (e.g., Norton & McKinney, 2011). According to Cummins (2006), the concept of investment has become an important explanatory construct in language learning. Investment is

different from motivation (such as instrumental motivation and integrative motivation, e.g., Gardner and Lambert, 1972), in the sense that it acknowledges learners' various desires, human agency, multiple identities and co-constructive relationship with the social world. A learner might be highly motivated, but chooses not to invest in a specific class due to complicated reasons. Investment closely connects other key concepts such as power, communities, identities, in the sense that it reflects second language learners' struggles and reconstruction of their identities through interactions with target language speakers, in the community where power is unevenly distributed between them (e.g., Duff, 2010; Norton & McKinney, 2011).

Investment illuminates questions for my research such as in what scenarios will Chinese undergraduate students be willing to invest in their learning. What factors impact their change in investment? How is the process of academic socialization characterized by their levels of investment?

To sum up, the lens of poststructuralism provide understanding of the complexity of identity as well as its specific historical, cultural, and social settings. COP and Imagined Communities offer valuable frameworks to recognize identity as learning to become members in certain communities.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methodology**

In this chapter, I will explain the reasons why I chose qualitative methods over quantitative methods for this study from the perspective of characteristics of qualitative methods and the nature of this study. Among mixed qualitative methods, I focus on three which were heavily employed in this research: interview, observation and narrative. Strengths and limitations of each specific method will be analyzed after a general introduction of qualitative methods. The chapter then continues to explain the criteria and recruiting methods for participants, decisions I made as a researcher during the stage of data collection and data analysis, and reasons for making those decisions.

#### **Qualitative methods**

I chose to use qualitative methods for this research instead of quantitative methods because of many unique strengths the former can offer.

First of all, qualitative research methods emphasize the relationship with the participants, rather than acting on the participants, as quantitative methods do (Glesne, 2005). In qualitative research, participants give researchers access to part of their lives. Instead of being controlled in the clinical setting, participants remain in their natural setting and share their experiences with researchers; who interpret the data according to their conceptual framework and understanding. The amount and degree of interaction between researchers and participants are incomparable to quantitative methods, which characterize the world as made up of observable and measurable facts and aim to produce generalizable results through objective research designs and implementation (e.g., Glesne, 2005; Norton, 2013).

Since this research focuses on Chinese undergraduate students' learning, identity, language development, success, and struggles, these factors can be complicated and situational, numbers and numerical measurements might not be the most effective way to analyze and describe the data. The mean, variance, and sum fail to give readers a relatable and direct idea of, for example, what these students feel in the "native-speaker" dominated classroom, how they negotiated their identities as active members of academic communities, etc. In contrast, because of the interactions and rapport, qualitative researchers have a better chance to capture the individual's point of view and get close to their perspectives regarding the world around them. The qualitative paradigm allowed me to sit in the classroom with the student participants, observe their behaviors, meet them in and after class, listen to what they felt, and get feedback from their instructors (professors/lecturers/TAs), all of which worked together to provide a deep understanding of the research questions that this research is exploring.

What's more, one of the greatest strengths of qualitative methods is that they give voice to those who have been marginalized (e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010), a group who might not be reflected accurately as numbers in a large data pool. For example, Chen (1994) offers a stage for Chinese students to explain their strategies in relationship-building at U.S. universities. Kanno & Varghese (2010) allow refugee ESL students to talk about their difficulties in getting accepted to four-year colleges. Vitanova (2004) gives immigrant women a chance to express their self-consciousness, insecurity, and vulnerability associated with language usage in their everyday realities. Qualitative methods serve a unique opportunity for the marginalized, disadvantaged, and otherwise mute groups to have their voices heard, which provides an opportunity to raise people's awareness of social problems and challenge the power dynamic (e.g., Bloor, 2012). In this case, the Chinese undergraduate student participants were given voice

to tell their experiences and stories, which people might not have heard before or been aware of. They could feel free to explain their motivations, challenges, strategies, and decisions, in a space where their privacy was being protected and their views were valued.

The same result cannot be achieved in the same fashion by quantitative methods because when second language learners talk about their learning, identity, and struggles, the narratives can convey a much more complex, nuanced, and moving picture of these kinds of topics than can solely quantitative data. Because of the unique characteristics of qualitative methods, the six student participants were given the floor to share their experience, to look into their stories and reflect on their own. They were given room to tell people about themselves, their highs and lows, their motivations and challenges, their reasons for choices and behaviors. They did not have to bear the responsibility of representing the whole group but just be the way they were, telling what they felt and experienced as much as they were willing to. The data depth and richness for each participant from the qualitative methods far exceeded the mere numbers in quantitative methods.

In addition, the word *qualitative* “emphasizes the qualities of entities, processes, and meanings” that cannot be “measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012, p. 8). Though qualitative research is concerned with transferability, the ability to apply the findings of a particular study to other similar settings, it does not purely seek generalizability, which is the goal of quantitative research via the methods of careful sampling and experimental designs (Glesne, 2005). Qualitative research has the primary goal of understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Qualitative methods can provide opportunities for researchers to find deep understandings, profound interpretations and holistic insights towards certain issues, phenomena, situations, and problems. In my research, these are issues related to

second language learning, identity, language development, and success. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; the researcher-as-instrument is an inquirer, a writer, an analyst, and an interpreter (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Since researchers participate in co-construction and meaning-making, they have a better chance to reflect and interpret the socially constructed nature of realities.

This qualitative study used mixed methods. Methods with ethnographic characteristics included semi-structured interviews three times throughout the quarter with student participants, semi-structured interviews with some of the students' instructors and TAs, a group interview with student participants, non-participant observations of the students' classes, and course-related data collection. The following section discusses ethnography, interview, observation, narrative, and discourse analysis, as well as methods I used in my data collection and analysis. I understand that they are not in a perfectly parallel relationship; instead, one method might overlap/include/highly relate to another. In addition, each method has its advantages and disadvantages. One should be aware of the limitations of each method.

### Ethnography

While this study is not a full ethnography, its methods are ethnographic. The literal meaning of ethnography is the description of people, a narrative account of people and their way of life (Angrosino, 2005). Ethnography is a form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the way of life of the writer and those written about. (Denzin, 1997). First, ethnography has the advantage of reflecting cultures (e.g., Angrosino, 2005; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Since researchers study an entire social group in its natural setting where the researched conduct their everyday lives (e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010), researchers have the chance to closely examine customs and ways of life; therefore, they can not only describe,

but also interpret cultural patterns of behavior, values, and practices with a deeper understanding. Unlike in the laboratory setting where participants' behaviors are controlled; in ethnographic studies, participants exhibit more natural behaviors. Also ethnography typically involves a long period of research and interaction with the researched, allowing researchers to understand the researched better and observe more carefully, offering a chance to comprehend their lives emically (participants' views), as understood by the people themselves (e.g., Atkinson, Okada & Talmy, 2011; McCarty, 2005). Ethnography's relatively long period of research, the rapport built up between researchers and the researched, and the emphasis on the participants' ways of social life can increase the trustworthiness of the data and interpretations.

According to the definitions above, this study did not fall into the strict category of being ethnography study. For one thing, I did not move to a community where the student participants live and spend all day with them on an ongoing basis, I still maintained my way of life as a researcher. For another, the data collection period lasted for an academic quarter, instead of a few years. A better way to put it is that this is a study with ethnographic characteristics. I closely observed my participants' way of life (mostly based in an academic setting) where they were able to exhibit natural behaviors with a minimal amount of interruption and interference from me. In addition, I tried to build rapport between us to deeply understand the cultural patterns of their behavior, values, and choices. All of these are ethnographic characteristics.

### Interviews

This research heavily used interviews to collect data. As the most commonly used method of data collection in qualitative research (e.g., King & Horrocks, 2010). The essential nature of interview is a jointly constructed discourse between interviewers and interviewees by asking and answering questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Mishler, 1986; Talmy & Richards, 2011).

Understandings and meanings are contextually grounded. I understand fully that my identity (as a Chinese graduate student at the same institution) might have impacted my student interviewees with regards to their level of comfort and willingness to share openly. But this will not be the focus of the data analysis.

Interview provides a chance to listen to participants' perspectives on an event or experience, to have them explain what they think and feel, and to give them the floor to share their thoughts (e.g., Miller & Glassner, 2012). It is a good complement to observation since when researchers observe, they cannot observe everything, nor is everything observable. The gap between researchers' observations and the participants' understanding of an event can be filled by interviews. For example, Asian students' quietness in the classroom can be due to many reasons. In Morita's (2004) study, it is from interviews that we know silence could be a legitimate strategy of learning since the instructor approves of it (in Nanako's class E), it could be a sign of marginalization and isolation (in Nanako's class G), and it could be a signal of resistance in a powerless situation (in student Rie's case).

When using interviews, special attention should be paid to relationship building between interviewer and interviewees. I was very careful not to overpower interviewees but to provide them a comfortable environment for the interview to flow naturally. In question design, I avoided leading, negatively worded, and hard-to-understand questions. During interviews, I followed the suggestions of not asking several questions at a time, or "yes" or "no" questions when detailed explanations were needed (e.g., Angrosino, 2007; Glesne, 2005; King & Horrocks, 2010; Merriam, 2009). I also waited for interviewees to finish what they wanted to say as well as allowed them to pause and take breaks, without cutting them off or interrupting their talking.

## Observation

This research also relied on observation as a method of data collection. Researchers should not only hear what participants say during interviews, but also see what they do in natural settings, which is mainly the classroom and study rooms in this study. It is not for the purpose of finding out if participants are lying, or to check how much they are telling the truth, but sometimes, they might not be aware of things they do or might ignore things that could be important to the study. The observation I used in this study mainly refers to non-participant-observation. It helped fill the gap between what participants said and what they actually did, and helped discover different partial realities as well as other aspects important to the study.

Observation also assists researchers to discover the world views of people from different backgrounds, and even aids participants to understand themselves. It can also be very useful under the scenario where the researched feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or unwilling to talk about certain issues (e.g., Angrosino, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Besides, since context is important for interpreting and explaining the narrative observation can help describe the context and explain what has happened. When conducting observations, researchers should build respect and trust with participants as well as keep an open and flexible attitude towards the environment and the researched. Detailed field notes should be taken immediately and referred to during data analysis. In my notes, I recorded the settings, the people, the activities, and direct quotations; followed the sequence of events as closely as possible, and used pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy and rights, as suggested by previous researchers (e.g., Angrosino, 2005; Bailey, 2006; Glesne, 2005; Merriam, 2009). When I chose pseudonyms, I respected student participants' choice of using a Chinese name or English name. For those who got used to use English names in their daily life, I referred them in the English pseudonyms.

## Narrative

Narrative research has had two foci. Research in education and applied linguistics has been divided between narrative analysis and narrative inquiry. The main differences are that narrative inquiry focuses more on “big stories” (such as life histories), while narrative analysis focuses more on how “small stories” are told in interaction (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Georgakopoulou 2007, cited in Higgins & Sandhu, 2015). Both approaches are equally legitimate, but because of my research interest, I chose to use narrative inquiry as a tool to look at how students describe their experience. This is done primarily through thematic analysis of their stories.

Pavlenko (2007) cautioned that researchers with autobiographical narrative data should go beyond thematic analysis, paying close attention to the content, the context and the form. In this study, the data is richly contextualized. Information takes into account how students perform identities in ways that paralleled the context of the themes they were talking about. Throughout I address how my own identity might have had an impact on the stories that were told to me.

Traditionally, Labov’s (1972) description of the oral personal experience is event-centered, and he uses a six-part model to analyze narrative which includes: abstract, orientation, complicating action, result, evaluation, and coda. Similarly, Toolan (1988) defines narrative as “a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events”. However, these event-centered definitions take little account of complicated and dynamic context. In more contemporary understandings, narrative inquiry goes beyond the use of a rhetorical structure submitting the stories to an analytic investigation of the underlying assumptions that the story demonstrates (e.g., Bell, 2002; Riessman, 2008). Connolly & Clandinin (2004) pointed out that narrative is a method that has potential for “the improvement of practice and of how researchers and

practitioners might productively relate to one another.” This collaborative relationship during storytelling is also acknowledged by scholars such as Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008), Bamberg (2006), Baynham (2011), Pavlenko (2007), and Tannen (1989).

Narrative is the means by which people give their lives meaning through self-defining stories (e.g., Linde, 1993; McAdams, et al. 2006; Pavlenko, 2007). It has the advantage in the establishment of characters and identities across time and space, and it can be used to examine the performance of identity in talk (e.g., Baynham, 2011; Schiffrin, 1996). It is used to interpret narrators’ experience and cultures, how they would like to be understood, and their relationship with others (e.g., Gergen, 2001; Nair, 2002). As a rich source of data, narrative can reflect narrators’ perspectives on what happened, based on how the story is told and what they choose to include and exclude. We also need to think about whose stories are not told, which reflects ownership and power relations among different speakers (e.g., Baker, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko, 2002). Several examples of its application can be seen by Gebhard (2010), Jackson (2006) and Menard-Warwick (2005).

One should be conscious that narratives are discursive constructions rather than merely reflections of realities or factual statements; therefore, they should not be taken at face value as if they are authentic modes of social representation (e.g., Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010; Pavlenko, 2002, 2007). Instead, researchers should embrace a critical and analytic attitude, clearly understand specific social, cultural, and historical contexts when narratives were produced and delivered, as well as acknowledge the co-constructive relationship between narrators and interviewers.

In this study, quotations of participants’ narration are provided according to themes; my interpretation and analysis of the narration, as well as the context of quotations, would also be

provided to help readers better understand what participants meant. More focus is given to the explanation of what participants meant when they described stories in a specific way, instead of fact checking whether stories actually happened.

### Discourse Analysis (DA):

Discourse analysis was also used to analyze the data in this study. One definition of DA has been the study of language beyond the sentence (e.g., Atkinson, Okada & Talmy, 2011; Paltridge, 2012; Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2003; Widdowson, 2004). Many scholars now agree that discourse analysis is the study and method of language-in-use (e.g., Gee, 2011; Paltridge, 2012; Riley, 2007; Silberstein, 2011). Language is not simply a static linguistic system, but a social practice in which experiences are organized and meanings negotiated (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Riley (2007) asserts that DA involves the investigation of the relationships between discourse, the social knowledge system, and communicative practices. Gee (2011) argues that discourse analysis is based on the details of speech/writing that are relevant in the context.

Because of these properties, DA has the advantage to interpret the relationship between language and identity, for example, individuals as agents enacting their identities and how they want to be perceived by others, because people can perform certain identities through the use of spoken and written discourse (e.g., Johnstone, 2003; Paltridge, 2012). It helps researchers to analyze relationships among participants, as well as relationships between participants and their social and cultural settings (e.g., Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2003). DA helps reveal specific community's norms, advocated/disregarded values, and expectations of interactions, since it examines what people mean by what they say and how they are understood by others (e.g., Tracy, 2003). DA considers the ways that the use of language presents different visions of the

world and various understandings (e.g., Silberstein, 2002, Paltridge, 2012). DA can also assist us to understand situated meanings, not just literal but more sophisticated and hidden ones, of words and phrases in both spoken and written forms, because it looks at patterns of language across texts in the social and cultural contexts where texts are located (e.g., Gee, 2011).

## Participants

My research included both student participants and instructor/TA participants.

### Inclusion Criteria

The student participants fit the following criteria: they were from China, coming to the U.S. to further their education as bachelor degree students and have received most of their previous education in China. They were willing to talk about their academic experiences in terms of academic learning and language acquisition, social experiences in terms of social life and cultural adjustment, and their opinions of their identity. Their age, gender, major, and place of birth did not influence their eligibility to become participants in the research.

In order to gain a better understanding of student participants' class participation and overall learning, I also included their instructors (professors/lectures/TAs) as my participants. They had the research student participants in their classes, and they were willing to give feedback about focal students' learning styles, challenges, and strategies. Their discipline, age, gender, and race did not influence their eligibility to become participants in the research.

### Exclusion Criteria

Regarding students, those who were not Chinese international students or who had studied in the U.S. for more than a year before entry to the university were not eligible. This research was also not targeted at Chinese graduate students since their academic challenges and learning processes could be very different from the undergraduate population.

As for instructors/TAs, those who do not have my student participants in their classes were not eligible for the study. Those who were not willing to talk about their Chinese students' learning were also not selected for interviews.

I recruited student participants through two channels. First and foremost, I sent my research participant recruitment notice to the Chinese Student and Scholar Association (CSSA)'s mailing list. The "Recruitment notice posted through CSSA mailing list" (both Chinese and English version) is attached in Appendix A. The CSSA is a popular and influential Chinese student organization on campus; many Chinese students know of it, and/or have participated in its activities and events. CSSA's weekly mailing list includes upcoming activities it will host, resources for Chinese students, programs and projects looking for volunteers (the category where my recruitment notice fell into), and other information. I wrote the recruitment notice in both Chinese and English, explaining who I was, what my research goals were and what the participants' criteria were, with my contact information for those who were interested in the research to contact me. For students who contacted me, I provided them more details about my research and their rights as participants, and answered all their questions by emails and in person. I was careful and clear in explaining who I am, what I want to do research on, why the research is important, and how participants' rights would be protected throughout the research. I also asked for their year of school, major, gender, place of origin in China, and courses they planned to take during the spring quarter as basic information before confirming them as participants in the study.

Another recruitment route was through my personal contacts. I have been interested in Chinese undergraduates' learning for a few years. When I took the Qualitative Methods and Discourse Analysis courses as a Ph.D. student, I completed two pilot projects interviewing two

Chinese female undergraduates I had met through extra-curricular activities. Because the projects were designed for those two courses, I did not need to go through the IRB process. However, I did write interview protocols, audio-record the interviews with the interviewees' approval, transcribe the data, and write reports on my findings. I thought of those interviewees when I started recruiting student participants for this research. One of them agreed to participate immediately, and the other declined because she was graduating soon and she would not be taking many courses during the research study period. I also talked about my research with other Chinese friends I made through my social life, such as a dancing class, badminton, volunteer work as a radio DJ, to see who might be interested to participate. I followed up with those who showed interest in participating with more details and information.

Through the above two channels, I had about 10 people who responded, willing to participate. I knew I would not be able to have 10 people in my study because I aimed to deeply understand their lives and stories, frequently go to their classes, interview each person three times throughout the quarter, and talk to their instructor/TAs upon arranged appointments. When deciding who to include in my research, my criterion was to have a limited number of student participants who nonetheless came from a large cross section of the Chinese undergraduate community at this university. I tried to have student participants who were in different stages of their undergraduate study (so the influence of time they studied in the U.S. might be explored in this study), who majored/plan to major in different fields, were from both genders, different places of origin, and so on. In addition, I asked everyone why they were interested in participating. From the researchers' perspective, I was aware that I would only have a small number of student participants to start with, therefore any attrition would be difficult to manage. As a result, I wanted to choose those participants who seemed to truly understand my study,

showed strong interest in and commitment to the research. I also did not want someone to choose to participate only as a favor to me, or out of a short-term interest which would wane over time. The recruitment process took place in the Winter Quarter 2014. After considering the above factors, I decided to recruit six out of the 10 at the end of the winter quarter. Among the six, two student participants were recruited through my personal contacts.

I then met with student participants one on one, at a time and location of their convenience. During the first meeting, I introduced myself and presented the consent form which clearly addressed the purpose, the procedures, risks and benefits of the study. I fully explained my research and emphasized their participation would totally depend on their willingness to participate, and that they could withdraw at any time during the research. I notified them that this research would have no influence on their personal grades and that efforts would be taken to ensure their confidentiality. In all field notes and accounts, I would refer to the university, participants and their instructors using pseudonyms to prevent disclosure. The observation notes, interview notes, audio materials, and other reference documents would be kept in a secure location that no one else had access to. I would use these materials in writing the dissertation and for potential future publications. All audio recordings, materials and notes would be kept for five years after the completion of the study, which will be June, 2019. After this time period all study materials will be appropriately destroyed. I also had student participants take the consent form home to look at more carefully and write down questions if they had any. Being fully aware of their rights, all six student participants signed the consent form at the start of the spring quarter. As a result, data collection was able to take place during the Spring Quarter 2014.

For the recruitment of instructor/TA participants, I had my student participants send me their syllabi so that I knew what courses they would be taking and who would be their

instructors/TAs. Based on my time availability and the balance of observing all six student participants in their different courses, I made a rough observation plan of the courses which I wanted to observe. I then emailed instructors/TAs teaching those courses, introducing myself and my research project, and asking for permission to observe their classes. I emphasized in the email that as a non-participant observer, my presence and observation would not interfere with students' classroom behavior, as well as, their interaction with classmates and instructors. My presence and observation would only influence instructors' teaching in a minimum degree, and should not have influenced their student evaluations. I also explained in the email that I would take close observation notes of the classroom atmosphere, environment, student participants' performance, their interaction with their classmates and instructors.

Upon receiving approval via email from the instructors and TAs who participated, I began observing the student's courses. At the end of the first class I observed, I presented the instructor/TA with the consent form which clearly addressed the purpose, the procedures, risks and benefits of the study. I explained that if they would like to withdraw from the study, they could do so at any time. Since there were different degrees of participation, I asked separately in the consent form if they would permit me to observe their class, audio record the class, collect course-related materials, be added as an observer in the course website, interview them, and contact them for future research purposes. I emphasized the importance of the interview with them about the focal students' behaviors in their classes, and that the interview would take place at a time and location of their convenience. Also, they were advised that if they were uncomfortable with any specific questions, they could choose to not answer those questions. After clearly explaining procedures, risks and benefits of the study, as well as answering their questions, the instructors/TAs signed the consent form for this study. Some agreed to do

everything, while some gave me permission to observe the class and have interview with them. This process also took place at the beginning of the Spring Quarter 2014.

## Data Collection

This research included a variety of data, including audio recordings of classes, interviews, and out-of-class activities; classroom observation notes; course syllabi and handouts; as well as students' assignments. The data collection period lasted for the entire Spring Quarter 2014, March-June 2014.

### Observations

The observations were made during students' classes and in informal settings during interviews. In classrooms, I used non-participant-observation, which can fill the gap between what participants say and what they actually do, help to discover different partial realities, as well as other aspects important to the study that participants might not be aware of. For freshman students, I observed their ENG 131 composition class (roughly 45 minutes/class) as well as other courses that they were taking. For students who were sophomores and above, I observed their major/elective classes. For each class, I observed 2-10 sessions depending on the frequency and the length of the class, as well as the willingness of the student and instructor/TA participants.

Before I went to observe a class, I emailed the instructor/TA for permission to observe. Upon instructors/TAs' approval, I would record the class for future reference. During the class, I took detailed notes with regards to the environment, situation, my participants' interaction with people, behavior in the class, and other aspects that emerged during my observation. After the class, if my participants had time to stay and talk, or if they needed to go to the next class and didn't mind my walking along, I would have a very quick chat with them about some specific behaviors of theirs that I noticed in the class. This allowed me to ask questions that emerged

from my observation and get answers right away while the memory was fresh for the participants. The after-class chats with student participants, which typically lasted 5-15 minutes, were very helpful in understanding my participants' behavior and choices, and helped me have a better picture of what was happening in class. It helped that the questions were answered immediately in a relaxing and interactive atmosphere.

I took detailed field notes during the observations. During the data analysis, I applied the strategy of "thick description," which Geertz (1973) defined as "description and interpretation that pays close attention to cultural contexts and insiders' perspectives." By providing enough details and descriptions, it can help researchers give readers a holistic and realistic picture, which helps the latter to make their own decisions about the research's usefulness and applicability in other scenarios. (e.g., Atkinson, Okada & Talmy, 2011; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Glesne, 2005).

### Interviews

Along with observations, it was very helpful to interview student participants about their behavior, their choices within the classes and their reflections on learning. It was also very valuable to interview instructors/TAs on their perspectives on students' learning. As the most commonly used method of data collection in qualitative research in the social sciences (e.g., King & Horrocks, 2010; Baker, 2012), interviewing can surface information about participants' background, reported behavior, opinions, and attitudes (McKay, 2006).

There are three types of interviews that I conducted, all of which were approved by the participants. Before the interview, I asked permission to audio record, which helps coding and allows for detailed transcripts after the interview. For interviews with students whose native language were Chinese, they had the freedom to choose the language they preferred to use, so the

interviews were conducted either in Chinese or English as students wished. Interviews with instructors were all conducted in English.

(1) Semi-structured interviews with students: I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each of my six student participants, in the beginning, middle and the end of the spring quarter. I would prepare pre-designed questions (see appendix) as prompts and followed up their answers by asking for elaboration. I did not strictly stick to those questions I prepared, but paid special attention to themes and examples that surfaced in their answers. The interview typically took place in the library study rooms, and usually lasted from 50-70 minutes. I took detailed notes during the interview which I could refer to later. Informal interviews such as chats took place often throughout the quarter, such as before or after their classes, during lunch or dinner gatherings.

(2) Semi-structured interviews with instructors/TAs: I conducted interviews with students' instructors who were willing to participate. I emailed the instructors in the beginning of the quarter, asking if they would be willing to have interviews with me regarding the student participants' behavior at their class. Upon their approval, these interviews typically took place in the middle and later weeks of the quarter; by then I had already conducted 1-2 interviews with students and had observed them in the class that the interviewee taught. Also the instructors/TAs had a better understanding of my focal students by then as well. These interviews took place at a time of their convenience and most often at their offices.

(3) Upon getting the approval from all student participants, I organized a group gathering at the end of the quarter. I offered a hot-pot dinner to thank all my student participants, and facilitated an informal group discussion while we were eating. The challenge was to find a convenient time that all participants could make. When I talked with each participant separately,

I had the impression that the end-of-the-quarter would be best since they would be done with their classes by then and would like some rest and relaxation. However, when I hosted the hot-pot gathering at my apartment on the Friday evening of the final week of the semester, three students could not make it due to reasons such as catching a flight back to China and a friend's wedding. It was unfortunate that only half of the participants were able to attend.

The rest of us did have a good time eating and talking. There were no specific interview questions to respond to, but the conversation did touch upon topics that appeared in one-to-one interviews that I had had with each student participant. Though it was the first time they had met each other, all of us were able to create an open and safe space of conversation where everyone was encouraged to talk and ask each other questions. It was very interesting that among the four of us, only one was a male student, who was a bit shy. He was also a freshman, while the other two were junior students. The conversation touched topics such as changes and improvement over a period of time, tips and suggestions they would give to newer students, embarrassing moments, and achievements during their studies.

There are many advantages to the use of focus groups, such as identifying cultural norms, understanding participants' opinions of a given topic, identifying factors that influence participants' behaviors, and stimulating discussions about controversial issues (e.g., Angrosino, 2007). The conduct of a focus group interview requires not only smooth logistic coordination, but also good mitigation of the power dynamics among the participants, the creation of a supportive and friendly environment, and the protection of each participant's privacy, which could ease their willingness to share with other people (e.g., Lederman, 1990; McLafferty, 2004; Twinn, 1998).

Besides interviews and observations, I also collected course-related documents, such as the course syllabi; handouts from the dates of observations; as well as, students' assignments. These materials can contribute to triangulation, which uses multiple means to collect data from a variety of sources allowing clarification of meanings (e.g., Angrosino, 2005; Atkinson, Okada & Talmy, 2011; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Glesne, 2005). Triangulation helps researchers get the most accurate picture of multiple realities, therefore helping the researcher to better understand the courses and students' behavior in the class.

### Document Analysis

The data analysis went hand in hand with the process of data collection, starting from the beginning of data collection. I transcribed interviews and coded audio-recordings, course-related documents, and field observation notes. I was not able to finish all transcribing right after the interviews and observations, therefore some notes from the interviews and observation had to sit for a few weeks, I was, however, able to finish transcribing while the memory was still fresh.

For those interviews conducted in English, I transcribed according to what was actually said. When I used those interview data as quotations, the English quotations were by default interviews conducted in English. I make grammatical edits and clarification in brackets when necessary, while keeping the edits to the minimum. For interviews conducted in Chinese, I translated them into English. When I used quotations that originally conveyed in Chinese, I marked "translated from Chinese into English" at the end of each quotation.

When I conducted observations, I took detailed notes of the situation, what I found interesting that might relate to my research questions, and quotations from the students and instructors. When I interviewed students and instructors, I also kept careful notes of key words and sentences I grasped at the moment. Since it would be very time-consuming and less efficient

to transcribe all the interviews and class recordings sentence by sentence, I used my notes as a starting point to look for patterns and themes. I typed all my interview notes in word documents, read them through several times looking for patterns and codes, and used those notes for the first round of coding. I developed several themes after careful consideration, giving each one a definition, typical examples of quotations, and a highlight color. Then I went through my interview notes again using these themes to code the data.

In the meantime, I was able to have peers check my coding. I explained to them what my coding system was and how it should work, I showed them my definition and examples for each code, and then gave them one transcript to work on. I then checked to what extent our coding matched, and if not, what factors led to the discrepancy and how I could improve the codes to make them distinguishable. After several rounds of coding by myself and with the feedback of peers, I was able to adjust and develop a better coding system that is more self-explanatory. I then went back to the recordings and filled the notes with additional information and quotes that my interviewees had shared. With a more complete transcript, I continued coding with the system that I had developed and made further adjustments, changes, and improvements.

I think the strategy I used in coding has several merits: for one thing, my notes comprised key words and sentences I picked up during interviews, which recorded my intuition and understanding as a researcher in those specific moments and situations. These notes reflected my real and unique experience as an interviewer when the interviewees opened up to me and told their stories. One could not replicate those memories and spontaneous feelings as time passed. These notes served as a natural screening process.

What is more, it is time-efficient to work with less complete data as a starting point. The analysis of the full data set was by no means compromised because of my notes of key words

and sentences. In the second pass, I explored the full content, looking for themes and patterns that reoccurred, going back to verify the effectiveness of the initial codes that were first developed, adjusting as necessary to any gaps in the coding system. The advantage was that by working with concentrated and manageable data, I could focus initially on theme-seeking and code development. By the time I added the recordings to the notes and developed them into more complete versions, it was my second time to code similar and highly related materials. As a result, the process of adjustment and improvement was easier and more efficient. It is worthwhile to emphasize that I have been fully aware of the gap between my notes of key words/sentences and the completed version of what the participants said. I paid close attention when going back to the completed transcription with the coding system developed from the previous materials, and I have checked and tested codes with the new materials carefully, making all the necessary changes and modifications to increase the reliability.

The on-going process of transcribing, coding, and analysis went well together. During this laborious process, reoccurring topics appeared and were used to frame my thinking and categorization for the analysis. After having served as starting points and guidance throughout the data analysis process, the list of topics was modified with increasing volumes of data, which improved my understanding of the research.

I tried to explore similarities/differences of each participant's academic behavior in the same classes throughout the quarter as well as in different classes. I tried to find connections, commonalities and differences among the different participants. I asked myself questions such as how their educational background, personality, major, age, and gender might influence their behaviors, and looked for any patterns that exist across the place.

To increase the accuracy and reliability of the data, I chose to use “member checks,” which had the participants review my interview transcripts to check if what I documented fit with what they had tried to express. I also did peer review, asking my graduate peers to read through part of my transcripts, coding and analysis to see if they concurred. I also used triangulation and thick description to capture a better understanding of my participants from historical, cultural, social, and situated contexts. For example, mapping student papers against instructors’ accounts, comparing what the students said in the interview to their instructors’ accounts. In a dissertation that addresses students’ academic strategies, I would be remiss if I did not highlight my own. The frequent visits to the university writing center, along with conversations with peers about this project, the inquiries made to my committee and senior student fellows, and informal writing groups have all made unique contributions to the data analysis and dissertation writing processes.

### Reflections & Limitations

I feel so honored to have conducted this research and to have gotten to know the participants. I recruited these six participants through mainly two different channels. I knew two of them prior to this study; with the remaining four participants, I only started to build a relationship with them from the beginning of the study. They were passionate in their study, volunteered their time and effort for this research, opened up to me so honestly and sincerely, shared highs and lows in their lives, as well as trusted me to listen and offer suggestions.

This has been a mutual learning experience: though I offered them free tutorial service and gave out useful information based on my knowledge, I also have learned much from these student participants, including how traditional assumptions about them could be wrong and misleading. There were many surprises that came up during data collection, from interviews,

class observations, and the casual talks with the participants. These experiences taught me not to assume things before I understand the people/situation well, not to generalize simply because students speak the same language and come from the same country. These experiences taught me to be patient in listening to what my participants had to say about their stories, and wait until they felt comfortable enough to share. I also learned to be more open-minded, to better interpret things from the other person's perspectives and situations.

There are many things that I wish I could have done to add to the data collection. I wish I could have had a group discussion where every member of the study could participate instead of only the half that could make it. I wish I could have observed more of their classes both in the types of class and the frequency. I wish I could have emphasized that interviews could be conducted in either English or Chinese, and it is totally their judgment call without any pressure or concern about my workload of translating the interview from Chinese to English. I wish I could have asked their permission to record our casual talks so that I would not have lost any useful information and would not depend on my memory of those casual talks.

But there also are so many things that I am glad happened: I am glad that I built close interpersonal relationships with my participants and created a secure and relaxing environment for them. I am glad that after a female participant's chemistry class, I was able to sit down with her to ask how she was doing and listened to her for an hour when she really opened up to me. I am glad I invited some student participants separately for a lunch/dinner gathering where we could talk causally without thinking about being interviewed. I am glad I encouraged one male participant when he said that he was being ignored by the teammates and the two-page assignment took him all night. I am glad I walked with some of my student participants after their classes to the library or gym giving them a chance to talk more about the class, current life,

and challenges. I am glad that I was there for them when they needed my help to proofread their articles and assignments, to comfort and encourage them. I am glad that I met with many of professors and TAs who gave me their perspective and understanding of the student participants' performance and offered their explanation of how they design/teach class. They cared so much about their students that we sometimes were able to have deep conversations and think together about how to fill the gap in international students' learning in the U.S. I am glad that I took detailed notes during the interviews and observations which served well as a starting point for my data analysis and coding. I was able to sincerely write down my feelings and observations at those specific moments, where the intuition and interpretation have helped me throughout the dissertation writing process.

## Chapter 3

### Introducing the Students

This chapter introduces the student participants' biographical and educational background, as well as other relevant previous experience. It also includes their future plans and other significant characteristics. This chapter aims to help the reader to understand who these student participants are, where they come from, what previous learning experience they have had, why they came to the U.S. to study and where they want to go after they complete their bachelor's degree.

I am a story teller, retelling what I heard from the student participants through their stories. I listened with my ears and my heart trying to understand not only with logic but also with emotions.

I felt honored to have the privilege of listening to the student participants' stories and being given their permission to share those stories as well.

#### Students' background

I recruited six Chinese undergraduate students for this study using the criteria described in the methodology chapter.

During our first interview, which took place in the beginning of the fall quarter, I asked each student participant about their background, such as place of origin, languages they speak, length of time learning English, age and year in college, previous educational background, their parents' background (educational level, career, etc.), and their reasons for studying in the U.S.

Below is a table that clearly includes brief answers to the above questions. Pseudonyms are used for each participant to protect their privacy. Table 1 presents only a brief summary of some very basic information, detailed descriptions follow.

**Table I**  
**Student Participants' Basic Information**

Name	Gender	Age	Hometown	College year	Major (or plan)	Years of studying English	Parent background	Others
Cathy	Female	21	Shan Dong	Junior (senior by credit)	double major econ and communication, minor statistics	12	Parents: government officials	Learned a little German; loves dancing, DJing, & working out
Chrissy	Female	23	Hu Bei	Junior	accounting and psychology	10	Parents: government officials	Took a year off; student athlete for many years; loves writing in spare time
Johnny	Male	20	Jiang Xi	Sophomore	computer science; English	11	Father: a senior engineer with a master's degree; Mother: press editor with a bachelor's degree	Volunteers in Dream Project; writes for campus newspaper
Shirley	Female	19	He Nan	freshman	chemistry (plan)	11	Father: university professor; Mother: pharmaceutical manager	Three years high school in Singapore
Tina	Female	20	Beijing	Junior (senior by credit)	Economics	15	Father: engineer, professional manager, Mother: accounting, manager	Attended international high school in China; interested in anthropology and the environment
Tom	Male	19	Mongolia	freshman	mathematics and civil engineering (as plan)	9	Mother: politics teacher; Father: engineer	Describes himself as very shy, little lazy and sensitive, hates writing in both Chinese and English

## Chrissy

When I first met Chrissy, she had just returned from China after a one-year leave after having studied at this university for two years. She had made the decision to take the year off on her own and had persuaded her parents to accept it. She used that year to do internships and worked several different jobs in Shanghai, which she believed were wonderful experiences. She told me that she had done this to understand herself better and now felt she was ready to restart her studies in the U.S.

When I first met Chrissy, she was wearing a hat and dress. As time went on I noticed that she always was wearing a hat and preferred to wear a dress as well. I also noticed that she wore some makeup, and apparently she spent time ensuring her appearance was cohesive and that she was presenting her best look. She gave me the feeling of being open and straightforward with her answers. When she talked to people, she would always look them in the eye, even when they had just been introduced. She looked confident and always had a smile on her face. She talked fast with a lot of passion in her expression; she had many tone changes in her speech, and used hand gestures to emphasize her points. It felt like she had a lot to share and was eager to express herself. I asked her why she chose to come to the U.S. to study, and the following is her explanation, which was one of the most detailed and logical answers of all my student participants.

First of all, I did not study a lot during high school. I was so obsessed with dancing, writing and hosting, all kinds of stuff. I made money regularly when I was in high school. None of them would contribute to my GPA. My academic record in high school honestly was horrible. When it comes to college entrance examination, there were universities that would admit me because of extracurricular activities, but their majors were restricted. So I was like, I have to reach a certain amount of score in the exam, I think it is still hard for me. Well, that is one part of the story, like 30%. And the second part of the story 60%, I left my high school and went to some universities, I went to some fascinated [fascinating] universities in China, I went to see their dormitories, bathroom, shower room, their classroom, the way they live, their lifestyle. I was like, no, that is not the life I want. It was

not worth the effort I had to put in [the College Entrance Exam]. When I see college students, I talked to them, I like to talk to people, they were lost, and they don't know why they are here. Maybe it is a random thing. They showed me their dorm, and I felt like no. that is not that place I would not spend 16 hours a day doing something I am not good at, to put myself into that, that life style.... 10% is that I personally believe that something, say my writing, or my other things, making me feel that I am an unique person, makes me feel like, I am, not special but I am who I am. This kind of stuff. Chinese universities do not appreciate these stuff, my uniqueness, like the U.S. universities.

Her choice of studying in the U.S. was not a quick random decision made after getting an impression from a movie or a TV show; neither was it decided by her parents since she emphasized that it was her decision and they respected her decision. What is also impressive is that she had been on her own financially without much support from her parents--not because they did not want to help support her, but she did not want their financial help. She said that from a young age she developed the idea that her parents' money was theirs and any money she made was hers. She started earning money as a writer from a young age. She loved writing and sent her articles to magazines and newspapers. Her work got published which allowed her to earn and save some money. Later she participated in a national composition competition and won an award, from which she was recommended to and accepted by a prestigious writer's association in China. She established good working relationships there, and her work continued to be published through magazines and books. That has been the main channel of her income. She was independent, with practical experience in working and interacting with people. She had not been a student who studied most of the time.

Chrissy's writing had influenced her in many ways, beyond just the income which paid for her tuition abroad. She was able to build self-confidence and a sense of identity from her writing. During our third interview after I had known her about a quarter, she explained the influence of her writing:

One thing that might make me think I might be different, is that I always have, throughout my entire period, I have one thing back there for me, that is my writing, people considered them good. I got into Chinese writer association when I was 7, people treat me differently when I was at school even my academic record sucked, my Writing really make me stand out, I don't know I can't explain the reasons. Sometime people just grab me saying are you Chrissy? And I say I am. For me I don't see myself different, but in that way, that gives me confidence. I control myself all the time, I don't see myself different person. I'm far away from them [stars, celebrities]. people treat me differently not because of my writing, but what my writing brought me, like 10,000 followers in the social media, those social media make me look like a different person. Experience defines who you are.

Because of her writing, Chrissy became somewhat famous, especially under her pen name.

From time to time on campus, she had been stopped by Chinese readers asking if she was that writer they like and follow. She had accounts on two large Chinese social media sites: Weibo and Wechat, which are similar to Facebook and Twitter. On Weibo, she had tens of thousands of followers and she sent updates frequently. She posted photos she took of people/things/activities around the campus, reference books and articles she had read recently, as well as reflections she had towards educational systems and experiences in the U.S. She often checked her phone and iPad in class, sometimes updating her accounts or replying to messages on social media sites through those devices. She admitted that this practice is somewhat distracting in class, but she tried to only check messages when instructors were covering things she was already comfortable and familiar with, and she still paid some attention even when she sent messages. She once was admonished by her TA for playing with her phone in class. She quickly apologized and put it away, but checked it again a few minutes later. It appeared she cared about her social media accounts very much, updating them frequently and interacting with her followers.

To an extent, Chrissy wrote not only for herself, but also for her readers. Though she told me she did not think she was a celebrity or any different from or better than others, she admitted that her writing brought her attention from people who would think highly of her. What's more, she had also been able to transfer the confidence from her writing in Chinese to English. Since

she knew she could write well in Chinese, she convinced herself that she could surely be an accomplished English writer as long as she tried hard and took a lot of time and effort to practice. She believed in herself and her ability in writing, no matter if it were in Chinese or in English. Her writing had also provided her a retreat when she faced challenges and difficulties, where she used her challenges and difficulties as material for her writing. She said,

I have a habit of writing, the hobby really changes me a lot. When I was under some pressure thing. First, I know I would go through, experience taught me. The second I know it will be a treasure, because the harder, more horrible thing I have had, the better thoughts I will come up with. The better thought I come out with the better stories I can write. That is why I appreciate hard things, I even created hardship for my life, barrier for my life. Because if I experience more, I can write more. Writing is really my thing, even though I am not that successful [a] writer, it really keeps me out [of the pressure], I think that is enough and the rest of it is enjoying the learning. I don't see any difference with other people. I don't consider stress as stress, but [as] most treasure in my life. Because I know I can go through it.

She had positive attitudes, or the way her friends put it, “positive energy.” She knew life in the U.S. as a foreign student would be hard, but she had tried to face the difficulties and get the most out of the experience. It had been her practice to use challenges and difficulties as material for her writing. She had the attitude of taking things seriously and never for granted, as well as the spirit of working hard and not easily giving up. Though she was much younger than me, when we talked, I felt that I was talking to a peer who was mature and knew not only what she wanted, but also how to get there. She gave me the impression that if she didn't know how to get there, she would find a way and make the necessary effort to reach her goal. She left me little doubt about her ability to achieve her goals. She explicitly expressed her goal-driven characteristic by saying that

From my perspective, I want to be good. If I do something, I want to be good at things. I want to be good at all the stuff I learned in the class, that means I have to do certain things to achieve this goal. Here is point A and here is point B, if I have to go from point A to point B, sooner or later I have to walk that distance because sooner or later there is always that distance. If I don't walk it right now, I have to walk it anyways. The distance is always

there. So I have to walk, I have to step out. I have to push myself out. Because I want to be the person standing at point B. I figured this out very early in my life. If I want to do this, if not now, then when? So I always push myself out, I had my comfort zone from the time that I rarely remember, I always push myself out. I feel that my comfort zone may not even exist anymore. Because I never stayed there.

Chrissy displayed many characteristics needed to be a successful student: she was goal-oriented and hard-working. She was very positive in many ways as mentioned above. She was not afraid to ask questions in class or speak up during a group discussion. One of her TAs described her as “active, engaging, seems to really like the course, always sits in the first row, engages and interacts with peers... pretty on task all the time.” This TA also noticed that Chrissy needed to receive responses in class quickly; she was eager to get clarification, and it seemed hard for her to wait for the answer. Chrissy often did previews and finished readings before the class and listened to the lecture with questions in mind. She would also go to ask instructors questions after class and introduced herself. One of her professors from a class of 220 students could clearly remember her name and face, even though there were only a few names he could recognize in that large lecture class. He said the reason why he remembered her name is because she came to talk to him after the class with questions and also introduced herself. Not many students do that, no matter whether they are international or domestic students, according to that professor. Chrissy liked to sit in the first row of the class, even though she had good vision. She preferred to sit in front because she could concentrate better, listen more clearly and also have interactions with the instructor. She attributed that habit to her early years of learning dancing where she needed to stand in the front and close to the instructor so that she could see clearly and receive more attention, and that habit from dancing had transferred to her academic studies. She would come to class 5-10 minutes early in order to get a front seat. She sometimes texted her friends at class to save a seat in front for her if she could not come too early. Even if she ran out

of time between classes and showed up late, she would walk all the way to the front and sit in the middle of the first row. That was the seating preference she had according to what she said and what I observed every time in the class.

## Tom

Tom emailed me, when he saw my research participant recruitment notice through the CSSA mailing list. He indicated he was interested in participating and if there was still a spot, could I consider recruiting him. It was not until much later that he told me that he had struggled and thought back and forth if he should contact me to participate. On one hand, he wanted to and felt interested in the topic; he also wanted my free tutorial help for his English composition course during that quarter. On the other hand, he was very afraid of trying new things and this would take him out of his comfort zone.

When we met for the first time at the university cafe, I noticed Tom was a bit shy. I smiled and tried to create an environment that allowed him to relax. He told me that he was from the province of Inner Mongolia, where the minority group of Mongolians live. That raised my interest since I wondered if he was a student from a minority ethnic group and what lifestyle and environment were like in his hometown. While he was talking about his hometown, food, and lifestyle, Tom relaxed and started to talk more and make more eye contact with me.

Tom told me that because he did not go to a highly rated high school, the chance for him to be admitted into a very good Chinese university had been slim. As a result, he decided he would rather study in the U.S. than waste time in an inferior university in China. In addition, he believed educational systems abroad were better. For instance, he felt the attitude of teachers were different. He believed Chinese teachers only wanted to complete their goals, and Chinese students sometimes cheated during exams. He felt this might not be the case at universities in the

U.S. And so far, based on his one-year learning experience in the U.S., he thought studying abroad was totally worth it. Interestingly, Tom said that since his first quarter at the university, he had not been involved in any extra-curricular activities because he was scared. But when being asked about what scared him, he said that he did not know exactly. He explained that if he did not have to do something, then he would not do it. But when he had to do something, such as coming to the U.S. for undergraduate study by himself, he was able to do it by forcing himself to do so. He asked me if I knew of any volunteering opportunities on campus and I gave him several options to look into.

Tom's mother is a teacher of politics in a middle school in China, and wanted him to be an actuary, which he does not have much interest in. His dad is an engineer, who has not explicitly expressed what he wants his son to become. Both of his parents went to college in China and neither of them spoke English, nor had they studied English before. Tom is the only child in his family, just like most of the families in China. Tom started to learn English when he was 10-11 years old. He enjoyed reading most and that was also his best subject in school, while his English listening or oral English were not as good according to what he said. Regarding writing, he "hates writing in general, no matter in Chinese or in English."

Tom was 19 years old and a freshman in his third quarter when he participated in this research. He planned to major in Math, and maybe double major also in Civil Engineering. His main reason for choosing more science-based studies was that majors in science often have fixed answers which he could understand better. He viewed liberal arts as usually having no right-or-wrong answer, but results were generally based on everyone's own interpretation. He had a problem in not having one correct answer and he could not think clearly in ambiguous situations. He indicated that he wanted to go to graduate school after undergraduate study since he believed

“the higher the degree, the better.” Tom could see himself as a professor in the future because he liked the lifestyle of a professor: “relaxing and flexible” and he also felt it would allow “free time and less trouble.”

Tom always carried a big school bag that contained most of his books. He wore a light yellow rain jacket most often. I always saw him arrive about five minutes prior to the class, sit in the same seat in the middle of the classroom. When the class ended, I noticed he would pack everything and leave the classroom quickly for his next class. I also noticed he often walked by himself, carrying that big school bag and wearing that light yellow rain jacket. He looked energetic even though he carried the heavy school bag around which was filled with the materials for his 18-credit-hour course load. In addition, he was auditing a five-credit German language course. Perhaps because of his heavy course load, he seemed to be very careful with his time, which afforded him some flexibility. Whenever I asked him about his preference of interview time and location, as well as the tutorial session’s time and location, he was very flexible about where to meet on campus. He just gave me his class schedule so I knew when he was not available, and then he let the decision of meeting be up to me. I also observed that he was on time for all of our meetings and most of his classes.

Tom described himself as not active in class, neither had he used the office hours provided by his instructors often although, as we’ll see below he did use them. Rather, he preferred to solve problems by reading the textbook on his own. He also chose to study alone partly because commuting to the professor/TA’s office hour or the study center took time. He said that it might be the case that after an entire class, he still had not opened his mouth to speak a single word. He explained that he prefers to just listen to the teacher, thinking about what

he/she was saying. He would not say a word if he didn't have to. During our second interview, he explained his reluctance to ask questions in the class or to go to office hours as following.

First reason is because I am getting used to it, because in the class in China we always just listen to teacher and keep the questions after the class. And the other reason may be, talk[ing] in front of a lot of people makes me nervous, maybe I am afraid of making mistakes, like pronunciation mistakes. I seldom go to office hour, unless the work is due tonight and we don't have classes today then I have to go to office hour to ask questions. I think it is really helpful, sometimes more helpful than asking questions after class, because I have more time to describe my questions and get answers, and answers would be in more details. I might have been to 1-3 office hours since the beginning of the quarter. I am a little afraid and nervous, every time when I go to office hours, I stand outside of the door and not push the door, I would spend a lot of time to prepare the question, the way I would state it, what words I would choose. I don't know why I am just nervous. [The possible factors] I think it is not all about language, I would still be nervous if I ask [questions] in Chinese.

Tom described himself as shy, although he admitted that he had improved a lot compared to when he first arrived in the U.S. However, his shyness had not fully blocked him from answering questions in class or participating in class discussions. Interestingly enough, he once in a while would be the first one to answer the instructor's questions, or be the one who broke the long silence when no one answered the questions. As he told me after class one day, he did this to "solve the embarrassment for the teacher and the class." Neither did his shyness stop him from telling jokes occasionally, a bit more frequently after we got to know each other better. Once I asked him when he would raise his hand and speak up in the English composition class that I was observing, since he might say nothing in one class but answer two questions on another day. He said that it depended on what kind of mood he was in at that time and also how good-looking the instructor was that day. He then laughed at his joke and we both laughed.

Tom would smile, and I later figured out his smile stood for many different meanings in various scenarios. Sometimes in interviews I would ask for details and explanations, and his answers were a few words. I would ask him to add some clarification and details with my hand

gestures suggesting “keep going.” He would smile at this prompting, which I interpreted as a sign that he was a bit embarrassed for the short and abstract answer and signaling that “I got what you mean, I will try.” Sometimes when he was in a group discussion, he didn’t say much but looked at the group mates when they talked, and he smiled, which I interpreted as showing his interest in the topic and attention to the people who were speaking. Sometimes after the class observation I would praise him for the good answers he gave in the class, and he would smile. I interpreted this smile as a sign of his modesty and happiness to be recognized.

Tom used notes to help him study. He preferred no study groups because “talking to strangers made me (him) nervous.” The following is how he described himself as a student and his learning style at our second interview:

I am hard-working, in fact I am just hard working in the classes that I am interested in, and maybe I am passive. I usually listen to the professors, barely talk with my classmates. I think it has nothing to do with good/bad, it just a style of studying. I like to be a bit more active. I will try to be more active if I have to, I think I still talk too less, too little in the discussion session, sometimes we have worksheet for math and physics and we just do our own work and barely talk to each other. [When I say “I have to”] I mean when I am asked to talk, that is what I mean.

## Tina

Among all the participants, I have known Tina the longest. Tina was that female freshman who talked to me backstage after I hosted the “I Sing Beijing” music concert three years ago. She was one of my initial inspirations to conduct research regarding Chinese undergraduate students’ learning in the U.S. After our first meeting, I left her my contact information and promised to answer her questions whenever she needed. We stayed in contact, and we have gotten to know each other better over the last few years. She was one of the two participants in the pilot study for this research that I conducted in my discourse analysis course. She was so excited when I told her that I would continue the research and develop it into my

dissertation that she volunteered to participate without any hesitation. By the time I observed her in class and interviewed her for this research project, I had known her for almost three years. During that time, she had advanced in class standing from a freshman to a junior with senior credits. Actually, the quarter when I collected data was her last quarter before graduation. Since she had enough credits, she decided to graduate in three years, and use the next year to travel to Taiwan and Rome as well as to work in China before applying to graduate school in the U.S. She described that her motivation to participate in my research was “to leave some long-lasting memory for the future and get a chance to spend time with a senior fellow who had witnessed my growth in the past three years,” which was very meaningful in her mind.

Tina usually wore a pair of black framed glasses and carried a black backpack which was big enough for all her books. She would carry a square lunchbox if she did not go home for lunch. She had the look of a serious student and she told me her friends joked that she looked like a “study queen” (she said “xue ba” in Chinese). She talked slowly in a moderate tone, and often used transitions such as *firstly*, *another*, *also*, *last* which made her answers logical and easy to follow. Although she spoke at a moderate volume, I detected confidence and determination in her speech. When there were things she was not sure about, she paused and took her time to think before she responded. She was not afraid to admit if she did not know the answer to questions, and was willing to check answers, then get back to me.

Since the first day I knew Tina, I had felt that she was very genuine and honest. She would look people directly in the eye when she talked to them. She would show up on time for our meetings. I also sensed that she had the eagerness in her to learn, to grow, to improve and to develop. She would ask questions and sincerely look for answers. When something interested her, her eyes would sparkle as if they were saying “how did you do that? How could I do that?”

Will you please tell me how to do so?" I once told her that she was like a sponge in the ocean absorbing water as much as it could, or like a grass growing as fast as possible even if there were stones on top of it. She smiled when hearing those metaphors. During an interview I had with Tina's advisor, who instructed her in an independent study and had taught her two Anthropology courses, he commented that

She is always trying to improve herself. "I want to learn how to do that," she always keeps her eyes very open. And she is also very down-to-earth, which is easier for me to work with. She is toward the top, it is not a 10 because I will not say she is the most brilliant student I have ever had, but she can get an 8/9, close to the top.

The same advisor above described Tina as "a very good student, who submitted things on time, was receptive to feedback and also had her own ideas." He also had a Korean American and an American student doing independent study with him during the same quarter when Tina was doing hers, and he felt Tina was "the best among them. She is easy to work with."

It seemed that in her nature there was nothing that she would not try if she was interested; if there was a way she could improve herself, she would grasp it without much hesitation.

However, she did not do things impulsively, rather she collected enough information then tried at her own pace. She shared some of her ways of getting better during our first interview at the beginning of the quarter:

I get better by observation and study: at first, I just sat there very quietly and shyly, when we had group discussion, I will listen to others how they can express their points, and how other international students can speak out, and act like a native speaker. I just observe how they can do it. And then I studied the way they express themselves. I practiced in real word. At first I just say some single words, it may not be a sentence but other team members can get what I mean, and step by step I can say a few sentences, and then paragraphs. And then I can be part of them...From native speakers I know how they use their own way to express their indigenous way, it is different from what we can learn from a textbook, which is very standard. From international students I learned how they challenge themselves in the past, and they can get improved and express their feelings very successfully.

Tina is from Beijing, China. She started to learn English at the age of 5, so she had been studying English for 15 years. She also spoke some Korean at a communicational level. She recalled that in kindergarten she learned the ABCs and some simple vocabulary. She went to an international school which was composed of 90% Chinese. She did not take math and chemistry classes, instead, she studied AP/TOEFL/SAT courses which prepared her for studying abroad. But before she came to the U.S., just like most other Chinese students, she only practiced English in class. There she had writing/listening class twice a week, but outside the class there was no opportunity to speak English. She described her English writing as good but chances for speaking were seldom.

She chose to come to the U.S. for her undergraduate study because she wanted to study outside of China. During her junior year in high school, she was in the top 5% in English studies, which made her believe that she had enough talent to study in an English-speaking country. Among English-speaking countries, the U.S.'s innovation is very advanced so she decided that the U.S. would be a good choice. She watched a famous movie about the city, where she thought there was a lot of romance, handsome boys and good-looking girls (though later she found out that this was not necessarily true and also that there was too much rain). Tina believed that the East Coast of the U.S. was too crowded and people were not warm-hearted enough. She then checked the ranking of the economics departments, and universities which did not require SAT scores. Factoring all the above information, she decided to study at this large research-centered university in the northwest of the U.S.

After studying in the U.S., Tina said her English had greatly improved, especially her speaking skills. She believed that "practice is the only way to improve your English skills. If you read everyday, speak everyday, you will make progress." But Tina thought her writing skills had

not improved as much because her vocabulary was plain and simple. In China, students had a lot of templates to use in their English compositions, and Tina normally memorized vocabulary and sentence structures. The ENGL131, a required college writing course for undergraduate students, had changed her style of writing from using templates to embracing her real ideas. She learned to write solid and strong essays. However, she was concerned that her critical thinking skills were not fully developed. She felt “90% of people will simply write, but 10% may look through problems,” she wanted to be better in thinking differently with a critical lens.

Tina also reflected on some major differences between educational styles in China and the U.S., as well as their influence on her.

Chinese teachers don't want their students to speak out to explain their feelings in class, it is [an] insult to the teacher, it is rude and not polite in class. But in the U.S. completely differently. You can speak anytime, shout out your feelings, or your view point, and your professors will be very happy about it 'cause you can express own feelings, that is very different. I am now very comfortable to speak out if I am familiar with all my classmates. But in a big class, like the architecture class, I will not speak out very often, 'cause I am still very shy...I am very nervous speaking in front of hundreds of students, or raising up my hands. So I will talk to myself “I can count 1,2,3, I can do it, by 3 I have to raise up my hand.” It is like another me who would encourage myself. That is one of my methods.

Interestingly enough, at our third interview, she told me that she did not need this strategy of counting “1, 2, 3” that she used in her first year of study in the U.S. anymore, because she was able to speak up when she wanted to.

Tina felt language conflicts still played an important role influencing her learning. For example, she could not write the way native speakers do, though she thought she might be able to read as fast as native speakers. Tina recalled in her freshman year, she was embarrassed in front of her team members because she could not read as fast as them. She felt this situation was better and she learned that different points of view were appropriate. However, generally speaking, she still did not understand her American classmates' jokes, some topics about culture,

sports, stars, historical events, etc. She felt that she couldn't speak as fast as they could, and it was hard for her to interact with them or make close friends. So she tried to share some of her culture by making traditional Chinese dishes and giving out traditional Chinese gifts to some of her American classmates. Tina roughly estimated that about 80% of her friends were Chinese/Taiwanese who had similar interests, and it was comfortable to talk to them. The other 20% were Americans/European, Western-country friends. She critically evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of having Chinese friends. On one hand, by socializing with Chinese friends, she would not feel so lonely since she was far away from home. It gave her an opportunity to watch Chinese movies and eat Chinese dishes, things that were in the comfort zone for her with friends who wanted to do these things as well. On the other hand, she knew that she could not improve her speaking/listening in English if she only hung out with Chinese students. Also something that had bothered her, she noticed some Chinese were not always honest, they had cheated on exams. Tina would not like to be friends with those Chinese students.

Tina described her identity as the following during our first interview:

Compared to the identity before I came to the US, I am more like an international person, that means I am not only a Chinese, spending time in my own community, but open my eyes to get a global point [of view], when I encounter an issue, I should be more critical and more creative. On the scale of 0-10, I think I am 8 a Chinese, because I am traditional, and my parents are very traditional, it is not easy to change my Chinese identity. From many perspectives I already changed and it is not a bad thing. Some changes I sensed... I feel more optimistic and open-minded, I feel like I am always happy in my daily life expect [periods of] midterm and final. And when treating people, I will see others' bad and good parts, and I learned how to see some things from other's perspectives.

During our third interview, I noticed there were some changes in her self-recognition. In fact she said "I think I am now 60% Chinese and 40% Americanized, and I want to work on U.S.–China trading, environment, energy... Regarding my identity, I am and I want to be a

bridge connecting that back home pre-overseas students and American universities together, helping them become a part of the university community.” She increased her portion of being Americanized and also saw more critically the role she might play in cross-culture communication in the future.

## Shirley

Shirley is from Henan Province in north China, however, she studied for three-years in a high school in Singapore. She is the only one among the six student participants who studied abroad during high school. Shirley started to learn English in a third grade English class, where she studied basic vocabulary and pronunciation. She felt that she could speak English well and that her listening skill was also okay. She used to have to prepare for a few minutes before speaking compared to native speakers, and now she didn't have to do that; she could speak spontaneously as her thoughts formed. Neither did she have to think about what to say, since the experience “in the international school helped me in learning and speaking English. I'm not afraid of speaking English, although it is not my first language. I don't care [about making mistakes in English].” She further explained this overseas experience, saying that she learned to adapt to a professor's teaching style more actively. When her classmates were still struggling to write English papers, she had been able to write them easily since she had had three years of practice in Singapore. Writing in English was not a difficult task for her since she was used to it. The overseas high school experience also influenced her by shaping her into a “round” personality (“yuan” was the Chinese word she used which means the shape round. That is a philosophy in Chinese that one is sophisticated and tolerant, therefore having no conflict with outside world), the word she chose to use to express a sophisticated and worldly attitude:

We [students who went abroad during high school] have tolerant attitudes towards things, like religion, political views. I would not make any comments about where does Taiwan

belong. It would give a positive perspective. You need to learn to put your head down. We went to international schools or have studied abroad before, we have our own views but we don't express them explicitly. I will say well ok [in a slow and hesitated tone], from my behavior you can see my attitudes, but I don't say out my attitudes. After two years all these Chinese students [who study abroad as undergraduate students in the U.S.] will all become round shape.... I believe all these people will be round.

Shirley said that she is picky about her friends, "I pick my friends to be better than myself so I can learn from them." Most of her friends were from China, and a significant portion of them were from her home province. They did not know each other in person before they came to the U.S., but they created a social media chatting group before they started studying in the university, and the similar cultural background and strong attachment to their hometown made them become friends easily.

Shirley commented that compared to her Chinese friends, her English level was only average. Her Chinese friends who had attended high school in China generally had better vocabulary and grammar than she did, since they prepared very hard for their TOEFL and SAT exams. While she was better in listening since during the three years in Singapore she had no choice but to use English everyday in her academic and social life. She could write emails very quickly without thinking much about how to express her meaning in English, while some of her friends needed much longer to write, because they typically first tried to think in Chinese and then translated to English, the process of which took time. According to Shirley, her friends had the grade of 3.8 in a course they took together, while hers was 3.5. Therefore there was still a lot of things to learn from them. Shirley admitted that she made friends with a purpose in mind and she would like her friends to be stronger and better than her so that she could learn from them. She said that she might not have met academically outstanding American students. She wanted to surround herself with those superior or better than her so that she could ask questions and learn from them, rather than just make friends for pure chatting and hanging out.

Shirley tried to act like her Chinese friends even though sometimes she felt she was different. She shared a little story about a time when she and a Chinese friend went to a TA session. She had planned to just sit back and listen to the questions/explanations. The TA explained something twice to her friend who still did not understand it. The friend's face seemed to freeze, and she very nervously looked at Shirley. Shirley was then in a dilemma because she understood what the TA had said and she was willing to help, however, she did not want to act as showing off in front of her friend. She wanted to be a member of the friend's group, where one was not different from others. In the end, she did help out, but she said in this kind of situation, she would always think twice about whether she should speak out or not. In our other interviews, Shirley said that she offered to help and explain the notes/homework when her friends needed help. Actually, because she explained things well and clearly, many friends would go to ask her questions before exams. She would help out as much as possible, and then found out she ended up with a lower score than many of her friends who asked her for help, which really embarrassed her. Shirley laughed at herself on this issue, but she said she would still help out and explain notes/homework if her friends asked her.

Shirley felt happy and satisfied to have mainly Chinese friends, and she did not feel bad that she had very few American friends; the way she put was "Western friends are kind of zero," that is, even though she was studying in the U.S., she didn't have American friends. She did have an American roommate who was a junior. However, mainly because of cultural differences, it had been hard for her to make American friends. She felt firmly that culture was the root, and language was just the medium to express that culture. For example, she did not feel that she could relate to some of the popular shows and comedies, and she might get lost when Americans were talking about them or using words/slang from them.

When asked about her impression of the American students, Shirley seemed to have negative feelings, which she admitted could be biased and just based on her own assumptions. She held the opinion that 80% of American students are “party animals” or alcohol lovers; even some of her American peers under 21, who were not allowed to drink, would sneak a drink and hide the bottle in the dormitory closet. She does not like to party because the music is too loud and her heart could not bear it. Also she does not like drinking. Her high school experience has something to do with those assumptions about Americans. She said that her American high school classmates gave her the impression that they were “a group of gangsters,” and most of their photos posted on Facebook were about them drinking in the bar. Therefore she saw most of American students as party animals, “unless they really look like nerds,” then “I need to see how nerdy you are. If you can teach me something, then ok, then you pass the test, I would then try to make friends with you.” Some of her friends told her that she might expect too much, the expectations might be impractical. She admitted that too many assumptions were not a good thing, but she did not think of changing. From a student’s perspective, Shirley believed that there was no correlation between the number of American friends one had and his/her academic success. If friends she had made were superior and better than her, who can help her study and answer her questions, who can study together with her and encourage each other, it did not matter if they were Chinese just like her. She did not feel a strong need to make American friends or feel bad about having few American friends, even though she was studying in the U.S.

Throughout our interviews and conversations, Shirley always mentioned her mother and openly talked about how influential her mother had been on her life. Her mother’s undergraduate major was biochemistry. She used to be a biology teacher, then worked as a manager in a pharmaceutical company. She was a “hero and role model” for Shirley and the reason why she

felt pressure to do well in her studies. She attended the same middle school as her mother had, where some old teachers still remembered her mother, which really showed how impressive her mother had been when she was as a student. Shirley sincerely admired her mother and wanted to be as successful as she had been. She planned to claim chemistry as her major, which was influenced by her mother as well. Her mother also made her relax, as she said, “I think I am only middle/lower middle [as a student], but I have a happy life because my mother said I only have to do my best not be the best.” Her dad is a gymnastic teacher in a local university who had been working there for 20 years. She proudly said that her parents both had master’s degrees, and she would like to be praised and be the focus of her family by being a doctoral student one day; she enjoyed being modeled as “other people’s kid” (a Chinese expression means that the kid from other people’s family who had done so well that he/she is always the model and example one’s own child should learn from). As a result, she planned to go to graduate school to pursue a PhD degree after graduation. Then “people will change from addressing me as Miss Li to Doctor Li”, she said in an excited and happy tone.

Partly due to the admiration of her mother and the pressure to catch up, Shirley had very high expectations in regards to her GPA, in her words, “a GPA lower than 3.5 is unacceptable and a failure.” She rated her freshman year as “pretty successful” mainly because her GPA was more than 3.5 and she was on the Dean’s list. She chose friends who could help her maintain her high GPA, saying that “I am a bit selfish. [My Chinese] Friends are earning GPAs of 3.8/3.9, I will probably stay with them [over American students whose GPA I do not know].” She further explained that she did not have/make many American friends partially because “our values are different, such as the goal of earning a GPA of 4.0. I do not understand, why they don’t try to be

the best?” There is a story she told about the different expectations over GPA between her Chinese friends and her American classmates.

Once in a Chemistry class, the quiz scores were given out. One American male student jumped up and ran to his friend yelling “I did awesome, I got a great score, guess what I got?” We four Chinese students sat a bit behind them, we had earned 88 and 89 out of a full score of 100. We had thought we did pretty awfully and we were curious what he had received. When he finally said that he received an 84, we could barely control our laughing. We had to pretend that we were sharing some jokes among ourselves to laugh at to not appear rude in front of him and his friends.

After telling that story, Shirley critically explained these different expectations among students in China and the U.S., which helped to explain the story:

It is really different expectations... For Americans, 20 is a low pass; 40 is fine, 60 is a high pass. GPAs of 2.0 is a pass, not fail, 3.0 is not bad, 3.5 is “oh my god”, and 4.0 is extraordinary. Chinese only have two categories: 50 means failure, and 100 means victory, that is why when a Chinese gets a 3.5 he or she sighs, 4.0 that is normal. Chinese students only aim for a 4.0. Chinese students do not learn as happily as American students, especially middle-level students. The low-level students might not care too much and the high-level ones can easily get 4.0. When they (the middle-levels) think of grades, they only think about whether it is high enough or not, outstanding enough or not, they want better grades but could not really get it.

When we first met at the university cafe, she opened up and told me a terrible personal story that happened to her last Christmas, one I believe worthwhile to put in this section introducing her and her feelings about being in America. Shirley insisted on using Chinese to tell me the story so that people who sat around us speaking English could not understand what she was saying. Last Christmas, four of her friends and she went shopping downtown. When they were in a store run by an African American, she felt someone approach her very closely. When she reached into her pocket, her cellphone was gone. She asked the African American woman who had approached her to give her phone back and promised she would not call the police. One of her friends also stood up to help her. But there were three African American women together. One of them punched her friend really hard and that girl began to bleed immediately. They were

all shocked and did not know what to do, and the robbers ran away. She could not believe that on the day of Christmas, she was robbed, her phone was stolen, and her friend was beaten to the point of bleeding because of trying to help her. That incident left a very negative impression on her, such that when it was dark (even at 7 or 8pm) and she walked down the street by herself, she felt that someone could be watching and following her. As a result, she chose to always stay in the library to study with her friends so that she could walk home with them to be safe. That incident also left her some negative feelings even though she tried hard not to stereotype African Americans or discriminate against them; she could not forget those three African American women who hurt her and her friend. Even after almost a year had passed since the incident, when she recalled it to me in Chinese, I could sense her anger, shock, confusion, sadness, helplessness, and many other complicated emotions.

### Johnny

Johnny was very busy during the spring quarter he participated in the research. He seemed to run after class most of the time, and he also rushed to meetings/classes/volunteering activities after our interviews. From time to time, he would give me updates and tell me that he had interviewed for internships for the summer, but he was not sure if he would accept them; or that he had applied to be a journalist for the university newspaper and they were training him; or he had applied for a TA position in his department but it might be hard for him to get it; or he could continue looking for a lab position since the current one he had could not meet his needs anymore. There were so many different titles/opportunities that he was pursuing that I needed to keep detailed notes so as not to confuse them with each other.

Johnny was a sophomore majoring in Computer Science and English. After he declared his first major in computer science, he thought about adding another major, and considered

several options in business/communication/English. He believed that business might be too hard to get accepted into so he looked at communication and English possibilities. He assumed a communication degree would not require that much writing and reading, therefore he chose English since he believed that would involve more writing and also was not so hard as to compete with his efforts in Computer Science. One of the reasons he decided to participate in my research was that we were both in the field of English, and he felt the topic was relatable, and he was genuinely interested in the study. When we met for the first time in the university cafe, he chose to speak English, which was different from most of the other student participants, who due to the fact that we all were Chinese had started casually conversing in Chinese. In fact, as I recall, we had exchanged less than three Chinese sentences throughout the quarter. He seemed to be very comfortable using English and strongly preferred it to Chinese, in both formal interviews and casual chatting settings. He also wrote me emails in English, including the ones at the beginning of the study where he introduced himself and the courses he would take for the quarter.

Johnny came from Jiangxi Province, which is located in the Southern China. Since his 4th grade required English, he started to study English at an early age. However, he didn't feel he was taught very well since the instruction had been using a "Chinese model" of teaching, emphasizing things less interesting to him such as grammar. Among all his skills in English, he believed he was best at writing. For example, in the writing portion of his SAT exam, he earned 700/800. He also liked his style of writing and was happy to have been admitted to the English major. He commented on his style of writing and structures during our first interview:

[As for the structure of my writing] Before I did not structure my writing, I would just write as I think, I did not have a specific plan for my writing. Now before my writing, I do [plan] structure, trying to find some evidence, sometimes I spent hours finding supporting evidence. [As for the style of my writing] I was using simple English, maybe

not that simple, trying not to confuse the readers. Some people try to use academic words, I try to avoid this. The first thing I focus on is to make readers understand, the second is to make my style less dry. I used simple English before taking the ENGL 131 [a first-year composition course required for undergraduate students]. Before it was too simple, but after [that course], 131 added a bit of complexity and some complex sentence structure/words. The most important thing is to make my readers understand me. If my readers cannot understand what I am actually saying, I am not writing in difficult words.

During our third interview, when he had finished a class presentation and a public presentation on astronomy, he made some comparison between writing and giving presentations. By then he had been accepted as a journalist for the university newspaper, and five articles of his had been published.

Public speaking is to make the public understand what's academic, I was going to make them understand. [The presentation I gave in class went] better than I expected, I made it clear and answered questions well. I can see similarity between English writing for the daily newspaper and presentations. The connections: simple English writing for the public. We [university newspaper] have 50,000 readers, so my article is not too complicated, but qualified enough for publication. My presentation in astronomy also used simple English in the common sense. If I devoted myself to using academic and complicated terminologies, people may not understand what I mean, they have to learn more; simple English is easier and it is effective.

He said that reading was pretty easy for him, because most of his classes were in the science field where textbooks were straight-forward and easy to understand since they were written in simple English. For his literature major, he read about five books per quarter, of which many were older literature that were not easy to understand. However, modern books were much easier for him to read. Johnny said that if the vocabulary was not too complicated, reading would not be difficult for him. However, his reading speed had been an issue and he would continue working on it. He would try to improve his reading speed by reading more, which he believed was a simple and effective way to improve.

Johnny was satisfied with his learning experience in the U.S. and life at the university. He said the “overall experience is wonderful” because he had tried to adopt an independent lifestyle

and communicate with different groups. He pointed out that the most important thing was that he had made progress in every aspect, such as grades, the way of thinking, speaking methods, understanding Western language and culture. He recalled that when he was a freshman, he had almost no extra-curricular activity. He also did nothing about education or research that he was actually enthusiastic about. He defined that as a “great failure,” and he decided to change the situation. As a result, he began to participate in many extracurricular activities, he pursued many opportunities and positions in and out of the campus, all of which made his life very busy. For example, he participated in a local educational program helping high school students apply for college. He was helping a sophomore in high school who came from the Middle East to “get him on the right track.” This volunteering work required around 6 hours per week, which did not earn him any college credit, neither was it related to his profession, but as he put it, this volunteering work was “important.” When I asked how he felt as an international student helping American students in their education, Johnny said, “absolutely [proud of myself] because I am supporting local education, I am doing things for the betterment of the most poor group. If I don’t mentor them, they might lose their opportunities for a higher education. Sometimes it is a circle: people in property, because they have no education; with no education, people are in poverty.”

As a sophomore, Johnny was in a very different situation compared to his freshman year with no extracurricular activities. He was busy with many volunteer commitments, research opportunities, and extracurricular activities. He emphasized that he was not just studying for a grade any more, and that was a significant change he noticed in himself.

Over the year as for the change, I’m not studying for a grade any more. I have my career, I have my graduate school [in my plan], I have the pressure of applying for grad school. If somebody ask will you suffer dream project/volunteer opportunities? Will you suffer your physics research because those are not that directly related to your profession? I will say no. I will not suffer them. If my grades are going to suffer, if I am feeling that was not good, I would not struggle with the foolish question of should I spend 20 hours to

study to raise my grade from 3.8 to 4.0. I will say if I have volunteer work, I will not stick to grades any more. I have tried to get more involved in the community, and not study for academics all the time. I have to do something like career planning, 'cause you know some undergraduate students are still confused in their senior or junior year. Some say I want to do this, I want to do that, but they never implemented them. For me, if I suffer from many difficulties in my sophomore year, making these tough decisions [are certainly my difficulties].

Because of his heavy course load and extracurricular activities, Johnny emphasized time management and balance as the things he needed to improve the most. He thought his time management skills had improved tremendously, but he was still working on improving them. He admitted that he had faced challenges with time management this quarter and it was not because he was lazy. Sometimes he could not balance things well; from time to time, he had doubts of whether he should do something which would take more of his time from his studies. He attributed his frequent tardiness to his Wednesday class to the heavy workload the night before. He also struggled with the time conflicts, for example, newspaper meetings conflicted with his high school visits. As a result, he felt that "everybody was not happy with him" because he could not make some meetings for this program and some other meetings for that project. He said several times that this was not because he was lazy, but sometimes he had to miss meetings because of scheduling conflicts.

Johnny's plan after graduation was to go to graduate school. During our interviews and informal chats, he always brought up graduate school in one way or another, which revealed that he was really deeply committed to this idea. He had conducted detailed research about graduate school applications and shared his thoughts with me. He asked me how important a GPA is for graduate school applications, and told me he believed the GPA mattered but not that much, that graduate school would look more into a student's experience and academic potential. He discussed the significance of research experience for a Ph.D. application. He once showed me a

“Graduate School Application Handbook” which was about 100 pages. He found the handbook online which was written by an experienced admission office director, so he printed it out and read it carefully. He gave that copy to me since I showed some interest when he showed me the handbook. Johnny emphasized that since the author was so experienced and the higher education institution the author worked for was so prestigious, the handbook could definitely serve as a valid source providing some useful information. However, he would not take things the author said for granted. After careful online research, he would integrate it with other sources and make judgments on his own. He also went to the advisor’s office to talk about his plans for graduate school.

All of these actions convinced me that he was very serious about going to graduate school, and that he had put the idea into practice by actively collecting information, doing research, and talking to people with experience. He also did not just copy and follow what an authority said without any of his own thinking, instead, he claimed he would critically read the handbook, and also he would think about my answers to his questions and would continue to consult with others to get the best answer by integrating all sources.

## Cathy

I met Cathy while volunteering at a local radio station, where we were both DJs one night a week. She was very fit and wore fashionable clothing. She was easy-going and it was easy to communicate with her. After I had known her for about six months, I told her that I would start my Ph.D. research project on Chinese undergraduate students’ learning in U.S. universities and asked if she would be interested in participating. She immediately asked “do I need to write anything for this project?” After she understood that no specific writing would be requested from participants, rather there would be three interviews throughout the quarter and in-class

observation as the major methods of data collecting, she was relieved and agreed to participate. She explained that she did not enjoy writing and would not be willing to participate if she would have been required to write a lot.

Cathy came from Qingdao, a beautiful coastal city in the northeast of China. She had studied a little bit of German in China for only three weeks as well as at the university for three quarters. She described her level of proficiency in German as “simple communication.” She started to study English from the fourth grade in elementary school. She had received 7 out of 9 on the ILETS (International English Language Testing System). With regards to her English proficiency, she believed she was good at listening, could understand and felt okay about daily conversation. However, she could not grasp many idioms and jokes in the U.S. When she didn’t understand, she did not often ask the people who were talking to stop and explain because she did not want to interrupt them. She just tried to connect the context and guess the meaning. Cathy said she did not feel she was very good at speaking, as people in China don’t speak English often. Still, she described writing as her weakness. The way she put it is that “we are not native speakers or majoring in English. Sometimes grammar [causes me] problems. Something I can think in Chinese, but to translate into English, it is a little bit hard.” Cathy said the major academic challenges for her were probably language issues, sometimes she could explain things in Chinese but it was hard for her to explain them in English.

Cathy had never studied in an English-speaking country before coming to the U.S. as an undergraduate. When asked about reasons for undergraduate study in the U.S., she said,

You know we heard U.S. education is the greatest in the world, and life here is easier than China, and people are more simple [much simpler and more direct] than those in China. Also my parents have friends here that told them it is a good place to go and they can take care of me. So I decided to come here. It was more my idea to come here, and my parents agreed with me.

She chose this university among five offers she received largely due to the location with its mild and pleasant weather. At the time of my research, she was 21, a junior with senior credits, double majoring in economics and communication with a minor in statistics. When asked whether she was happy about her choice to come to the U.S. to study, Cathy said calmly,

I have not regretted coming to the U.S. for college, and I would not change that if I got to choose again. It is quite different here, people have more voice, you have different views. In the U.S. you can be brave and speak up, no-one blames you and says you are stupid. In China you should not speak up, here [people are] more open-minded and free speaking. Here you have more opportunities and room to realize your dreams. In China, because of the political system, it is hard for you to succeed only by yourself. The U.S. is more fair by comparison.

At the same time, Cathy saw the precious and advantageous aspects of China. She said:

Though part of me is Americanized, I think of myself as Chinese. I am proud of it. The Chinese have many good qualities, I do not have to be integrated into America to be a part of it. Although in the U.S. the environment is good, the food is healthy, and there are advantages as well, I will not forget who I am.

She appreciated traditional Chinese culture and thought it was elegant, such as the tea culture and temple culture; if one took the time to get deep into understanding it, one could feel the charm. She wanted to promote Chinese culture. She did not think that way before she came to the U.S. Now she felt that she should make more of an effort to promote the traditional Chinese culture. In addition, before she went abroad, she thought Chinese people were not good in many ways (such as corruption and taking shortcuts). Now she had changed her perspective and believed that she should be a better self, rather than just find fault with other people. She also believed that if the Chinese had things to learn from others, then “we should just correct and learn.” I could sense that she was trying to use a critical way of thinking towards her own identity, towards the country she was from, and the one she was currently studying in. She tried to pull together the positive sides of both her home country and host country, on one hand, maintaining the good part of her home country and contributing to spread the valid part of her

traditional culture, on the other hand, admitting and learning from the positive aspects of the host country.

Cathy planned to graduate in a year and then attend graduate school. She wanted to major in Public Affairs for her graduate education, and her dream was to attend an Ivy League school on the East Coast. She considered this major because it required extensive knowledge in the liberal arts as well as some understanding of quantitative analysis of economic data. It also required a second language besides English. Cathy felt this would be a great fit for her since her mathematic skills were good even though it was not her major focus, also she had a broad knowledge base though she did not have a specific focus. Her long-term goal was to find a job in corporate marketing or planning.

Cathy paid a lot of attention to her physical well-being. She told me that she would frequently work out at the university gym running and using the equipment. She would only miss going there when she felt poorly or if the school work was too overwhelming, but she felt bad for not going. She said that “working out is very important for me and I go to the gym at least six times a week.” As a student myself, I understood how hard it is to keep such a commitment of going to the gym when there was so much pressure from coursework, extracurricular activities, as well as the laziness in people’s nature. I admired her very much for her commitment and wondered how she was able to stick to such a schedule. She felt that her commitment to her workout routine was something that showed part of her being Americanized. She noticed that people in the U.S. had many healthy living habits such as working out, also the way of appreciating beauty as “healthy is sexy,” and not to be as thin as possible. She really liked those ideas and wanted to make herself as healthy and fit as possible. She would watch some exercise videos online and collect pictures of females with the fittest body appearance; both the video and

pictures served as stimulus and motivation for her to keep working out since she believed her body shape was not in the fittest state and there was lots of room for improvement. She said it was her way of approaching things: if she really wanted to do something, she would pledge to giving it her all and doing it the best she could. And she believed that if she had not achieved something, it mainly was because she had not made up her mind to do it, rather than being incapable of doing so. She needed to find the driving force so that she would be motivated to do things.

Besides workouts, Cathy also liked dancing, and she had been an active member of a female Chinese dancing group on campus. They practiced dancing together, performed on stage at local community events, such as the Chinese New Year Celebration. In addition to dancing, the young women often hung-out in their spare time. Cathy made many good friends through the dancing group, and she treasured the friendships with members, who treated each other as sisters. She, together with seven other young women served as bridesmaids for the dancing group's leader, which showed how close their relationship was.

Cathy told me her friends are mainly Chinese. She thought it was a pity that most of her friends were Chinese, without many Americans. As a result, she did not have a lot of opportunities to really use English in her daily life, only in her classes. She said it was her fault that she had few American friends since she never went out of her way to make friends with Americans. Her several American friends were those who were in her classes and in the same project work groups. She further explained this as follows:

When I finish a class, I need to rush to the next class, I don't have time to chat with American students. In my heart I do feel [it is] a bit pitiful, and I would like to have American friends to chat with. I am mainly friends with Chinese. I don't have much time and energy [to pursue American friendships]. I like to communicate with people who are older than me, such as the leader from my dancing group. I have a lot of Chinese friends. Some of them are from Qingdao, my home city that I knew from my freshman year.

Some are from class, and some live in the dorms, or from the radio station. My dorm is now all Chinese.

However, Cathy was not sure if she needed to get to know American students: in her heart she would love to get to know more, but she also felt it was unnecessary. She summarized her thoughts about making American friends and integrating into the U.S. culture during our third interview:

For my personality, I do not integrate with American society that well, I would prefer Chinese style. I can be quiet and noisy, I would not show my part of noisiness until my laughing point was touched... I have few American friends. In this city, the Americans are not that nice, they [are] doing their own things that keep them busy. I have friends [who are studying] in Wisconsin, they [people there] would explain things carefully to her, and her English improved very quickly. Here you have to make an active effort to become their friends, you have to earn other people's respect. When making American friends, I don't want to cater to them simply because I want to learn English, I need to win their respect as well.

Maybe because she was also a DJ in the radio station where I volunteered, or maybe because of her personality, Cathy also liked to ask me questions during our interviews. Sometimes when I raised a question to her, she would ask me about my answer to that question before or after she provided her answer. For example, after she told me about her interaction with American students, she was very curious to know how many American friends I had made and how I was able to make those friends. When she answered my question on how language might promote/inhibit her learning, she asked me how I feel my language level influenced my learning. She turned her role of an interviewee to an interviewer, following up with detailed questions of how I improved my English and adapted to the U.S. higher education system. She was also curious to learn from me about graduate school. After she told me about her plan for graduate study in Public Affairs, she asked several questions about the graduate school application process, for example, was the GRE hard to prepare for, how important was the GRE in the committee's decision for admittance into graduate school, what did I feel about her plan, etc.

When she asked all these questions, I could feel her eagerness to know more about other people's experiences and strategies, and I was happy to answer them.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to familiarize the reader with the six research participants of this study with basic demographic information about each, as well as what they are like, and some of their opinions/attitudes. The six participants majored or planned to major in different fields, had studied in this university for different lengths of time, demonstrated different personalities, and revealed different patterns and ways of dealing with people and situations. For example, Chrissy would go and pursue what she wanted in a brave and straight-forward manner, such as asking questions in class when she was confused, with little hesitation or concern for how she would appear in front of her classmates. In contrast, Tina would prefer to answer questions and participate in class only if she was certain about what she would say and also if she was familiar with the classmates. When she was confused, she preferred to wait until after the class to discuss her questions with the instructor in private. Tom wanted to contribute to the class, but sometimes he felt nervous, and it was hard for him to participate in the group discussions, so he chose to take on the role of note-taker and sometimes summarized the outcome for the group. Tom was not involved in many activities outside of the classroom and his studying. Johnny decided that he needed to increase his community involvement after his freshmen year, during which he had not been active in extracurricular activities; therefore, he kept himself extremely busy by getting involved with on-campus jobs, volunteering work, and extra-curricular activities. With regards to their reactions and adaptations to the American college life, some of the participants seemed to have had a higher level of adjustment than others, and self-evaluated at a higher degree of adaptation compared to others.

There were several common traits among the participants. For instance, they all planned to further their education in the U.S. after graduating with their bachelor's degree, even though some preferred to take gap years while some did not want to do that. They all encountered a certain degree of difficulty with their English skills, especially with understanding jokes and slang related to the culture and background of the U.S. What's more, they all had a limited number of American friends; some deliberately chose to make friends with their Chinese peers, while others had the intention to make American friends but failed to do so. In addition, since the student participants had started to study in the U.S., they had begun, consciously or subconsciously, to compare the Chinese educational system that they grew up with to the American educational system they were currently in, trying to figure out what is encouraged and discouraged in the new system/learning community. They had thought about what they liked and what they did not like about each educational system. Furthermore, since their entry into the university, they all had made an effort to work out how to adjust to the U.S. educational system, though some demonstrated it more explicitly than others. Over time, the student participants had all exhibited a spectrum of improvements and adjustments to their host institution and its culture. In the next chapters, I will analyze data collected for this study with the purpose of developing a deeper understanding of the themes and patterns mentioned above.

## Chapter 4

### Academic Behaviors of Student Participants and Their Reasons

The findings of this study are detailed in two chapters. The first chapter analyzes academic performance-related themes as observed in classrooms and explained by the student participants. The second finding chapter analyzes other factors that influenced students' academic behavior, factors that are hard to observe in the classroom setting.

This chapter summarizes the findings from the data of the first kind, related to students' language learning, attitudes towards academic issues, as well as their academic performance in class. Data were integrated from interviews with student participants, interviews with instructor participants, my observational notes, and the collected course work. This chapter not only identifies the emerging themes related to the academic performance of these undergraduate Chinese nationals studying in the U.S., but also why these themes are important, what behavioral patterns are exhibited by the students, and their accounts related to these themes.

First, issues centered on language are reported, such as each students' understanding of their own English level, strategies they have tried to improve their English, and the most challenging parts of their language learning. Two freshman participants took English 131, a mandatory English writing course for this university's students. The rest of the student participants had previously taken this course, and several mentioned its influence on them. As a result, the theme of ENGL 131 is discussed at the end of this language section. Students' comments and reflections, together with two of the ENGL 131 instructors' feedback are integrated to give a picture of this course and its impact on individual students.

Second, students' perspectives on differences between the Chinese and American educational systems are compared. Important themes under this section included students'

interactions with professors and TAs, motivation for learning, and the students' learning experience. In a subsequent section, each student participant's academic performance is described and analyzed. Data concerning the student participants' asking and answering questions in class, interacting with classmates, and using instructors' office hours are reviewed. Also included are the students' understanding of these issues and accounts of their own behavior, together with some of their instructors' comments and understanding.

The last section addresses an important issue raised during one interview—plagiarism. Although the topic is an outlier raised by only one student participant, due to the importance of the issue and the broad influence it might have on Chinese international students, it is discussed as a separate section at the end of this chapter.

## Language

Chinese undergraduate students' proficiency of English played an important role in their study and life in the hosting countries. Zhang (2007) claimed that language difficulties influenced respondents' goal and level of satisfaction about their education experience in their host country, New Zealand. Zheng and Berry's (1991) study found that Chinese students in Canada reported lower English fluency, challenges in making friends, and more adaptation and communication problems for Chinese compared to non-Chinese Canadian students.

In this study, it was not language proficiency per se that proved an obstacle, but certain cultural elements of language use.

### Challenge: English jokes

When asked about the most challenging aspect of learning/using English, several of my student participants mentioned that understanding English jokes was very difficult for them.

Sometimes during group meetings and teamwork sessions, American students would share jokes, comments or stories they thought were funny. However, the meaning could be lost on the student participants; they did not always understand why the comment or story was funny or why others were laughing. Some were too embarrassed to ask for an explanation so would often pretend they understood the meaning of the joke, comment, or story and laugh with the American students.

For example, when Cathy and her group members did a video project together, she noticed that

Sometimes I failed to catch things that made them laugh, like when they talked about tennis or something. I could not join the conversation and then I stood by the side and watched... Idioms in the U.S., jokes, I could not catch much. Daily conversation I could understand and I felt ok with. When I don't understand, I don't plan to interrupt them, I can connect the content and guess the meaning. Because my asking them will interrupt them (Translated from Chinese).

Similarly, Tom had an embarrassing time when he did not get teammates' jokes, something which, he reported, happened "a lot."

Embarrassing moment? There is actually a lot. Like group discussion. My teammates they talk very quickly and I can not understand what they talk about. Or they say something funny and I don't know, so I did not laugh. That was a group of 4-5 students and only I am the international student. I think this is my problem, I should be powerful enough to understand. I will try to talk to them, try to listen more carefully. Before I nod and agree, now I can express my own opinion.

At the end of our first interview, Tom sincerely commented that "I hope I can easily understand my American friends' jokes." He said he suggested Chinese students studying in the U.S. spend more time with American friends, though it had been hard for him to do so and "it is hard to make friends" since he was shy.

Cathy and Tom, in different classes, both experienced the difficulty of not understanding something funny that their teammates shared. They both kept quiet and did not interrupt,

attributing their inability to understand jokes or funny things to their limited English proficiency, and aimed to improve their English so that they could understand better in the future.

Norton (1995) analyzed second language learners' self-confidence, anxiety, struggles and challenges interacting with native speakers, given the role of power in the interactions between target language speakers and second language learners. One site of the reproduction of power was during culturally saturated joke telling, which excluded the language learner. Hsin's research asserted that despite the general fact that Chinese EFL learners have difficulty recognizing and understanding English jokes, cultural jokes are more difficult than linguistic jokes by Chinese EFL learners. Habib (2008) claimed that in the process of understanding English jokes, knowledge and cultural awareness are interchanged. Davies (2003) suggested that jokes can be jointly constructed among English learners and native speakers, thus achieving cross-cultural communication, on the condition that native speakers provide rapport. She acknowledged the complexity of humorous communication and general powerlessness of English learners in front of English native speakers. Their research help explain the power imbalance the student participants felt when they did not understand their American classmates' jokes.

#### Challenge: Specific topics involving cultural knowledge

Several of my student participants reflected that they didn't have trouble with common topics, but struggled with topics in specific fields. For example, Shirley sometimes failed to communicate with her American classmates about movies. She believed that language is surely a problem that contributed to the failure in communication, but it is not the biggest obstacle.

The language factor surely plays a role, but the biggest obstacle is our background. We grew up in different backgrounds, then who should cater to whom? I have not seen movies you grew up with. Sure, you can tell me about them, then I am always a passive recipient, and you don't have so much fun just telling me things, because it is narration instead of conversation, or chatting. (Translated from Chinese)

In Tom's written reflection on his English (which he offered to write for this research even though it was not requested), he wrote about a conversation on music he had had with his roommate.

A year ago, I thought my speaking and listening skill[s] will make great progress. I hope that after a year, I can easily communicate with my friends about the common topics. Even when I meet some strange words, I am able to understand and memorize them by my friends' explanation and apply them in the conversation afterwards. Definitely I made some progress, but still not enough even to satisfy myself. I can handle the simple conversation with strangers and some new friends about common topics, like the weather as well as the difference between Chinese and American food. However, once the topic becomes more specific, like the different types of music, it becomes really hard. I have had a conversation for about half an hour with my roommate about the American music, singers, and bands. Every time I came across a new word or a strange person, he tried to explain to me. He showed me the songs of that singer and played it for me, and talked something about that song and the singer, but I never got it, neither to understand the word nor to remember the singer's name. It seemed that I just couldn't concentrate on his words, no matter how slowly and how many times he speaks. Therefore, all I could do was just to nod and to pretend that I understand it. After half an hour's chat, the only thing I knew was that there were about 1,000 songs in his smartphone...

As Norton (1995) claims, English learners with less of the cultural knowledge that is common among native English speakers, might be considered "illegitimate receivers" of the latter groups' utterances and are positioned in a less powerful position. Tom's difficulty in understanding and negative feeling about his English are related to special topics that integrate social contexts and take time for English learners to accumulate. He made an interesting metaphor of this situation, saying "I don't know why in the class I understand a lot but in my free time, I feel I don't understand much. English seems to be two languages for me, in and out of class." These "two languages" refer to one which relies heavily on unfamiliar cultural knowledge and one which doesn't. The one with lots of cultural knowledge and understanding of social contexts, such as used in discussions on culturally loaded topics, have been very challenging for him to understand.

Cultural knowledge of particular topics have been challenging for Tom not only in speaking, but also in reading. Tom compared his way of reading with his American classmates, and the strategy he used to catch up. He admitted the challenge and planned to catch up on cultural knowledge such as historical figures “little by little”, one by one.

Reading material might be a bit more challenging for us. American students read a lot before, they get familiar with language. International students is often English as their second language, not so comfortable [reading in English] Sometimes a historical person maybe very famous in their culture, but I don't know. I have to look them up in order to understand, that cost me a lot of time. Not so easy. If I skip, that might be hard to understand the article, this person is an examples that help you to learn [the point]. I need to learn little by little. Today I know this person, tomorrow I know another person, little by little.

### Strategies of improving English

The six student participants shared strategies that they have used to improve their English. Some strategies have worked better for them than others; some worked better for some students than others; some strategies they are continuing to use while others have been abandoned.

Chrissy, in particular, worked to develop a range of strategies. These seemed to grow out of her sense that she needed to work harder than her domestic classmates. Chrissy identified her English as a disadvantage compared to native students,

My English is not good enough. When I speak, the words that come out of my mouth are not as fluent as my thoughts, I am a quick thinker, if I say stuff in Chinese, I can address things very well, and I am confident about that. I have so much speaking experience, I am confident with my verbal competency in language. But when it comes to English, I know for sure sometimes I just can not say things clearly, I just couldn't address myself clearly. That is a big drawback.

On the opposite side, Chrissy believed her hard working attitude was her advantage, which made her read things in advance and reread things afterwards. She felt that she had really come a long way since getting into college. Based on her experience of trying all different types

of study methods, she was fairly confident that she knew how to study now and what are the best ways to study well. Chrissy opened up and shared many different techniques she used to improve her English and academic skills.

I go to talk to people, I keep trying different ways to study: flash cards, translating, remember in Chinese first and reread, I am always on my way to find a better way to study, even now. I read thing and take notes, I read a title on the textbook, write in my own words in English, I figure out what I am going to learn in the chapter: how many branches, sub-branches, bullet points, and I put things in the correct box - the way I remember not let me confused with other things, that is the most important thing for me. I rewrite in my own word, reread my words, figuring out all the questions I have for during the class and right after the class. I always did all I could do. I am still figuring out better ways, but so far I am using all the best ways [I've come up with].

## ENGL 131 Course and Writing Beyond It

The ENGL 131 course has been typically taught by the English Department PhD students, who were individual instructors for their own courses. There were usually more than 20 sessions offered during a quarter due to the large demand. New instructors of that course were required to participate in a six-day intensive training session prior to the beginning of the quarter, during which they developed their course syllabus and modified materials for their purposes. Course topics and schedules varied based on the instructors' background and expertise; language and identity had been popular topics used in this course.

Over the span of an 11-week quarter, students were typically asked to submit four short essays and two long essays. Their papers were not graded immediately, rather they would be given feedback so that they could incorporate the instructor's suggestions and make corresponding changes prior to final submission. Students would have conferences with the instructor twice during the quarter. Their final grade was based on their portfolio of written submissions at the end of the quarter, which included all of their work and the choice of their

essays that they believed showed the best example of their writing skills. General feedback about this course from students, not necessarily the student participants, is that the course is demanding, involving a lot of writing under a tight time frame, and also that some of the concepts are hard to understand.

During the quarter when the data were collected, four student participants had taken this course in a prior term, while two freshman participants was taking English 131 that quarter. This first-year composition course looms large for Chinese students, who can feel insecure about their writing. In hindsight, most of the students can be seen to have become a good deal more comfortable in their English writing, but their reactions and strategies can be seen to be quite different.

#### Students' Attitudes towards ENGL 131

The student participants had different feelings about this course and its influence. For example, Cathy did not think highly of it. She said,

English 131 was not that much improvement. Topic is weird, it is about feminism and some fairy tales. Some of them [the assignments] are really far from daily life and something about normal writing, I think just weird topics so it was just not that helpful for me. The topics are not familiar to me and I was not interested in them.

On the other hand, Tina was very glad she took ENGL 131 the first quarter of her studies in the U.S. and felt that the course had provided a good foundation for her academic writing.

I took it first quarter with my FIG (freshman interest group) with two other classes... I did not know it is a bit hard even for juniors/seniors. I think it is very important to take during the first year, it builds up your ability/skills to write formal academic essays, so I very [strongly] encourage students to take it first year/first quarter, you know how to write in MLA, Chicago style, you know how to find your thesis/main point. ENGL 131 changed my style from using templates to writing real ideas/what you are thinking about, build up my solid structures for the essay. What is not achieved is critical thinking, it is hard to change your thinking style.... I think I did not get the ability to think differently from another view point. Maybe it is not completely uncritical. But it is not enough I think.

From the above quotes one can tell that Tina looked critically at how ENGL 131 benefited her and what she still needed to work on. She gained knowledge and appreciated the exercises on writing style, organizing her structure, and expressing her real ideas, which she believed would benefit her throughout her college experience. Granted, she still wanted to improve her critical thinking skills and felt that it took longer to develop than is available in an 11-week course.

Tom took ENGL 131 during the quarter he was participating in this research. Therefore, I was able to observe him in the class, interview him about the course, interview his ENGL131 instructor about his performance, as well as read some of his writing assignments for that course.

During our first interview, Tom admitted that he did not like writing, either in English or in Chinese. He considered this a “hard” course.

Regards to writing, I hate writing, even in Chinese, because I need to come up with what to write about. My plan is just to write more. Hope ENGL 131 will be helpful for my future classes like philosophy class. My expectation is to understand the criterion of good writing and apply them to produce some standard writing.

Tom described his thinking about academic writing before and after this class. Before, he would say, “oh my god, I need to write two pages!” At that time, a two-page essay might seem too long for him to complete. But after the class, his attitude switched to “oh my god, only five pages!” He could not believe how short the writing assignment needed to be. The ability to write longer essays improved for him throughout the class. Tom also laughed at himself that sometimes he felt that he wrote everything necessary to include but his reviewers and readers still did not get his point. He put himself in their shoes and joked that they must think “what a terrible writer.”

It has been said that Chinese is a reader-responsible language, while English is a writer-responsible language (Hinds, 1987), that is, English places the responsibility primarily on the

writer for the success of a message. Putting himself in their shoes, Tom came to understand, through English 131, an important contrasting aspect of English and Chinese writing.

Chrissy: From ENGL 131 to Writing Beyond

Chrissy admitted that ENGL 131 was “an interesting course” even though she had been frustrated with it. She believed that English writing is hard to improve but she was on her way.

She walked me through her experience in that course in detail:

ENGL 131 very interesting class, I enjoyed it a lot. At first I felt a little bit frustrated, I was pretty good at writing class since elementary school. I got used to being pretty good in writing class, I have to be the best. But when it comes to ENGL 131, I was like, shit, I don't even know the MLA. When everybody talks about MLA, you have to write in MLA, I don't even know what the MLA is. I was like, what the heck? I remember the first paper you read something and you have to compare them, I have never learned how to write an essay, and I have no idea how to write a paper academically, and I did not know MLA, but I had no idea how to start my writing.

At that moment she felt she was falling behind in her first English writing class, so Chrissy went to the instructor for help with tears in her eyes. She had once been confident in her writing, but then she felt she could not write in the proper style after she arrived in the U.S. She was very sad that she couldn't do something she felt she was good at.

He asked “what do you want to know?” I said, I want to be super familiar [with] MLA, I want to know how to initiate every single paragraph, how to outline a paper in a professional way. He did not really teach me how to do it. But he gave me Purdue internet stuff, and he also introduced me to some reading. Then I started to study them on my own. And wrote and brought them to writing center, and ask them again and again. I wrote papers, print out, brought them to writing center, and asked a bunch of questions. And then I made all the [necessary] changes, and printed them out and brought it back to the writing center again and ask them questions again. That is how I wrote my paper in my very first English class. I did not go to party, I did not write novels for periodicals, I can't be good. I have to do well. I do that for myself. I define myself as a writer that is why I have to be very good at it.

Chrissy survived the course and greatly improved her academic writing, though from the above quote, one could tell she had to expend tremendous effort, spend a significant amount of time, and find her own way. After successfully finishing the ENGL 131 course, she made a

comment that everyone who really tries hard and puts forth good effort could learn the basic academic writing skills, such as vocabulary and grammar, in three months. She felt that it is disappointing, however, that Chinese students spend seven years studying English writing in high school, while “everyone can finish all the content in three month.”

Chrissy continued talking about her experience after taking the ENGL 131 academic writing course. She still had a huge obstacle to overcome with her writing, which was the Writing Skills Assessment (WSA) for the Business School, where she wanted to apply. Since it is a highly competitive school to get into, student applicants need to take the WSA, which requires them to complete two essays in 90 minutes (one is a persuasive essay, and the other is a position essay). They are scored on a six-point scale and the scores are averaged to create a WSA score. Their WSA scores have significant impact on the admission decisions.

Chrissy personally believed it was unfair to have international students compete with domestic students under the same timeline. The test is “a sign of racial discrimination.” She explained this with strong emotions,

I heard international [students] keep failing the test, they give you 90 minutes to finish 2 essays. They give you scenarios to read. You need tons of time to read it, it is like 1 page/2 pages to read, then you have to write two essays with high quality in 90 minutes. People who are participating in that test are people who are good in writing, academically strong, and determined. You send those international students to compare with this group of white people, domestic students, I mean ABCs (American-born Chinese) also did pretty well, I mean domestic people, and barely international student can compete [with] them in terms of essay writing skills in this 90 minute test.

However, Chrissy made up her mind to accept the reality of the situation and take the test. She asked, from an international student perspective, “Why don’t you study hard to make yourself competitive enough to be a business major? They are not saying we are not recruiting international students, anyone with F1 visa, they are saying we want people who have a high enough GPA, and pass a writing skills test.” So, her goal was to pass that test no matter what she

had to do. She told herself that even though the test was really hard for her, the only way she could make it happen was to keep taking the test until she passed it. She had to take the test three times before she finally passed it. Moreover, it was interesting that her view of the difficulty of the test changed over time. “You feel [it is] hard the first time, it is getting easier as long as you are prepared and keep practicing. Everything is going to get easier, it is getting easier for me then I passed it.”

One important thing to highlight is that despite the above feelings, Chrissy also appreciated the value of the WSA test and described it as “a great test.”

I feel like this is a great test: especially after you get in, when you sit in the classroom, B-school have so many presentations, and I appreciate that the B-school helps me filter so many people who are not eligible and competitive enough to be there. All my friends in B-school, they are very determined, they are creative, they work pretty hard, and they have so many gorgeous ideas. I feel that if it not that filter [WSA], I can not make so many great friends at one time. I love the test. Even though [when] I am on my way to pass that test. A lot who fail say B-school is for people who are as determined as you, that makes me think that all my friends in B-school, even white people, they are determined, and especially the international students, those who graduate from Chinese high schools, they are super determined, they own my biggest respect.

It was not easy to overcome the hurdle of the WSA test for Chrissy, but she was able to accomplish it through hard work and determination. She was rewarded for her efforts by being accepted into the Business School. Out of her personal experience with the test, she extended her appreciation and respect to all the Chinese students who passed the WSA since she felt that meant they had determination. After passing this written test and getting into the Business School, she started to appreciate the filtering function of the WSA and appreciated that she was studying with determined and qualified Business students. Having taken English 131 some time before, Chrissy was able to see a longer trajectory of her development as a writer.

## The Writing Center

The university has a writing center at the undergraduate library that is free for all its registered students. Students can book appointments online with a maximum of three times per week. Several student participants had used the service of the writing center to polish their writing assignments, although to be clear, the center helps students clarify ideas; it does not edit. Besides the writing center at the library, the university also has an academic tutoring center where students can drop in to receive free tutoring services for many subjects, one of which is academic writing. In the extracts below, it is clear that different students achieve different levels of success in gaining what they perceive they need from the center.

Chrissy said that she had used the writing center often. She first started to describe what students generally do when they go to the writing center:

It just how you use it: some people just grab a paper and tell the tutor, could help me edit the paper/check the grammar, etc, this very broad and general question. Think about if someone give you a paper and ask you to take a look at it, what will you do? You will just skim. You would not go to details. So if you bring your paper without specific questions, then you don't treat your paper seriously. Then why do you expect them to treat your paper seriously?

She then compared and explained how she used the writing center differently, with specific questions and specific writing goals in mind.

Every time I go there, I read through my paper first, then underline sentences that I want to have a native way to express. I circled words I don't think very good. I take the paper to them with all my questions. I asked specific questions, about word choice, awkwardness, grammar, these are about very basic things. After this, I ask them if you have a better way to say it, how would you try to express this sentence? This kind of questions to help my English writing skills grow, to make my English sentences be a little more well-written. After this, is "how do you organize your paper." I will ask do you think my first sentence is good enough to show the essay statement? I feel from my writing experience, this is too Chinese/Asian, do you have a better way to say it in an American style? I edited my papers a lot. When they say "hey, that is not the way we write a paper in America," then I will ask them how would you arrange your sentence, how would you put supporting details and examples after. Then I will think about it by

myself, and it is like, this makes a lot of sense to me, and I am gonna rewrite it. I do rewrite my papers a lot.

Tom went to the library writing center with the expectation of receiving specific and detailed suggestions on his writing, but felt rather disappointed with the experience.

In fact I would say it is not that helpful because I expect they give me advice on, like how could I improve, some specific advice, like for this paragraph, how should I arrange them [the ideas], maybe rearrangement the order of the article, but they did not give me what I wanted.

Presumably, Tom did not do the preparation that Chrissy did to assure that he received targeted support. That might influenced how helpful Tom felt about the writing center.

## Differences between educational systems

Students' Perceptions about Instructors in China and in the U.S.

Johnny compared teaching styles of the teachers in the U.S. and in China, summarizing that “the teaching method here is more about motivating, [professors] don't actually tell us everything, they do not administrate us so hard, try to use their passion to motivate us.”

Tom expressed a similar thought about teachers' attitudes. He said that both his family and he chose for him to study in the U.S. because “abroad is better, the attitude of teachers. Chinese teachers complete their goals, Chinese students cheat in exams sometimes. I feel it might not be so in the U.S.” In saying that, I believe Tom meant that Chinese teachers have assigned teaching tasks to finish, they have quotas and are judged on how well their students perform; therefore less attention has been given to students' actual development with more emphasis on their scores. As a result, some students would cheat on exams in order to get high grades, as long as they didn't get caught. Tom did not like this type of teaching and learning, and he expected something different in the U.S.; he wanted to see teaching and learning not for just grades but for the knowledge that was acquired.

Chrissy made a related comment about how in her experience, teachers in China mainly focused on finishing the content they planned to rather than engaging students and encouraging questions. She felt that there was little emphasis on students' participation while in the U.S., participation in the class is strongly encouraged.

When I was in China, I get accustomed to this: as long as I have questions I ask, I keep asking, asking, asking, that's just who I am. But in my junior high, teachers do not want me to do that. In high school, instructors they like me but they still stop me [from asking questions]. "There are so many others in the class, and you can't just stop my lessons and my instruction because you have questions." So the culture is very different. I never study well in China, even in English. I just could not feel like, I don't know, high school and junior school in China, especially I am from a small town, they don't want me to participate, they do not want me to get involved, to engage in the class, and they don't need to, they just want to finish their instruction. Even though after the class we had a lot of communication, they say you are doing good, this is a good way to study, this is the right way to learn, but they can't let me be as active as I want to be in the class. I am always like this. And I feel like American is way much suitable for me.

Chrissy described that, with her personality, she liked to actively participate in class although that was not much appreciated back home. She had always been stopped from participating, even though teachers liked her and agreed that asking questions was a good way of studying. She felt that this part of her personality was inhibited while studying in China. When she started to study in the U.S., however, she was actually very happy to just be herself and actively participate as much as she wanted to.

When I got here, I feel like that I finally can study in an environment that fit my personality. And I think America is a place that everyone can find a place to fit their personality, but China is not, you can only be one personality to be good.

#### TA as Resource

Some of the student participants were good at using their TAs as resources for their studies and to get their questions answered. For example, Tina took a 200-level Economics class which turned out to be more challenging than she had thought it would be, so she went to both the professor's and the TA's office hours for help.

This office hour I could go to, so I went to the professor's office hour, and then I went to look for the TA. He or she is our age, so if there were questions that I didn't ask the professor, and I still didn't understand the material, I could ask the TA. He or she pointed out some things and then I totally got it. Both are professional and gave me lots of help, but the TA's office hour is very relaxed, like chatting with friends, and so is better for me. He answered from an undergraduate's perspective even though he is a graduate student, he showed me diagrams of the models. As a result, I would stay longer and ask more questions, this was very helpful to me for both my homework and preparing for the exam. I would go for about half an hour. I would only go when I had questions.  
(Translated from Chinese)

In another interview, Tina said similar things about going to TAs' office hours.

“Sometimes TAs are more helpful than professors, ‘cause TAs are students themselves; they know what we need.”

Shirley also liked to go to her TA's office hour, which fit her communication style better. She liked the TA's office hour because it was a one-on-one meeting, which she felt helped her understand better since she is nervous speaking in front of many people.

It is a habit, my first reaction is to avoid [speaking to a large group of people], I would dodge it. If I don't want you to call my name in class to speak up, I will try to bury my head. I don't like that many eyes looking at me. I feel there are so many eyes looking at me. I tried to look at different body parts but it did not work. If it is just 4-5 people, I am ok. If more than 5, I am like, oookkk? (“ok” expressed in a slow and hesitated tone)  
(Translated from Chinese)

Partly because she was not comfortable being looked at by others while speaking up, she would save some of her questions for the TA instead of asking the professor questions in class. She also felt that because of her very limited time in the U.S. so far, her language skill ability was not advanced enough to allow her to fully organize her thoughts and express herself in public. She worried that she might ask a question without being fully understood and then might not understand the answer. Shirley believed that one-on-one with a TA, he or she would try to understand her and give her answers that could actually help her.

Shirley also mentioned another reason for going to TA sessions. She needed to practice the knowledge she learned in class. In the class when the instructor's pace was fast and some terminologies were complicated, she would choose not to look them up immediately and just let them go, so that her efficiency would not decrease, and she could still keep up with the instructor. Then during the office hours, she could practice with the TA and catch-up on knowledge she did not have a chance to understand in detail in class.

### Learning Experience

Several of the student participants made comments that they had more freedom in the U.S. to learn things that they were interested in, instead of being pushed to learn things that were required, or things that teachers/parents choose for them as was the case in China.

Chrissy first described her learning experience in China, where she had to follow a tight schedule just the same as everybody else without a choice:

When I was in high school I did nothing with respect to choosing courses. In my hometown, a small city in Hu Bei Province, they don't have it, what they did is they just let you just sit there without a weekend. We were dismissed after 6pm Saturday and went back to school 7:20 the next morning. That is how we lived our life in high school, and we had no any other choices but follow the instructions and follow everyone else.

She compared this to her initial experience in the university in the U.S. where she had the freedom to do many new things, this first caused her to have a period of confusion and then be happy:

But when I first came to the U.S., they don't have [your] course schedule and you have to fill it in on your own. I was really lost and I felt that I could not get used to the way they do academics here. And after a few weeks of being lost, I figured out that I can go to ask about it, it is really unfamiliar for me to go to general advising center to ask about my courses, it is really new for me. I have to do a lot of new things. After that period of time, I was like this is very good actually, I get to choose whatever I want to learn and figure out my own way on my own. That is awesome! I would hate my college life if I didn't have these choices. Then I was like, I am going to take a bunch of courses I like and choose whatever major I want. This is a very happy period of time.

What's more, Chrissy treated her chance of studying in the U.S. as a second chance to do well in school, since her grades in China were not that good.

Before I got to college [in the U.S.], I had chance to study but I didn't do it pretty well. I basically came to college without a strong academic background. Everything was so new for me, so new. It is not like I am being exploited at all. I had great visions, which is very strange among Chinese students, the reason why I had great vision is because I did not study.

Chrissy explained that before she started in the university program, she did not know anything about U.S. colleges. All she had was the impression from American TV dramas such as *Gossip Girl*. She did not have the resources to get to know the U.S. higher educational system, which led to a "super struggle" in the beginning of studying in the U.S. She just felt that Chinese universities do not appreciate students' uniqueness, like the U.S. universities do, so she believed her uniqueness would be treated in a better way in the U.S. universities. She formed this impression mainly from media and press information, and she admitted that that is just her personal hypothesis, which to her knowledge, has not been validated with research.

Johnny originally did not want to come to the U.S. to study, but his parents, who had colleagues that had sent their children to the U.S. and really felt it was beneficial, insisted on sending him to the U.S. for higher education. Johnny said at the interview that he was glad that they had and that it had been the right decision for him. He compared the American students' learning he observed to Chinese students' learning he experienced in China. He concluded that the main difference was that the Americans were interested in what they were learning instead of being forced to learn things they didn't want to, as was generally the case with the Chinese students.

For learning, most U.S. citizens are learning because they are interested. If the class is really really fun, the average will be super high. Because it is undergraduate level, you know, students are widely spread, some people get into the school with SAT scores close

to 2000 or maybe 2200, while some students only got 1600, so students are widely spread. So if the class is really fun, the average will be very high because all students are really interested in it and study hard, but some classes are dry, students don't even show up.

He continued to explain reasons why he was happy about studying in the U.S. and the comparison of the learning atmosphere:

[In the U.S. university, it is] thinking free, speaking free, and studying free, and it is motivating education, not pushing us so hard. Also the academic atmosphere is better than China, because in China institutions are combined with political agency, too much interference with academics. And also back in China, some people study /research for their titles/jobs but not for their interest. I would say the same thing is happening in the U.S., but it is not that common. Back in China, some students/postdocs/professors they are publishing their papers for promotion. Sometimes when a lecturer wants to be promoted to maybe associate professor or some title like that, they have to do research, and they are maybe too ambitious, so that increases the chance of plagiarism, or other stuff. Too much pressure back in mainland China. I would say here the [research/academic] atmosphere is more pure, but actually they are constrained by funding.

Johnny wanted to do research in his future so he really cared about research opportunities and the research environment. He told me his plan after graduating with his BA degree was to apply to Ph.D. programs in the U.S. He seemed to enjoy the learning atmosphere where he had the freedom to study subjects he was interested in and do research mainly for his love of it, instead of other complicated reasons or due to outside pressure.

Similarly, Tina felt that she changed from her role as passive learner in China, who was directed what to learn by her teachers and the chosen textbooks, to an active learner in the U.S., who could decide what to study and how to learn. She enjoyed the autonomy in learning and felt happy about her progress:

Before I just sat there to learn what teachers wanted us to learn or what the textbook said about the knowledge, but now I am very active learning, I want to learn what I really like/love, like the independent study; it is my favorite topic so I want to learn deeply and profoundly. This is not what I would do if I am still in China. I love what I am learning, and I feel very happy/joyful when I learn something from my professor. I will even speak

to my mom and dad of what I learned today and share information with them, because it is not easy to get information in China.

Tina told me that before she came to attend this university in the U.S., she thought that studying was not “something fun”. But after studying in the U.S. these past three year, she had changed her mind and felt that learning things she was interested in is the same as eating good food she loved to eat; one can get “the same utility out of learning and eating.” Her use of this metaphor was interesting, not only because she actively applied terminology learned in her economics class to a real life situation, but also because it was a creative way of describing her feelings. Tina said that when choosing her classes, she took only the ones that she was very interested in, like economics and anthropology. She usually went to see what topics the professors would cover in the class and if the professors appeared to care about the students, before making her decision on whether to take the course. She seemed to enjoy the courses she chose to take and admired the professors who taught them. She recommended her favorite courses to her fellow classmates with excitement; in addition, she built good working relationships with the professors she admired.

During our end-of-the-quarter interview, Tina summarized the choice of studying anthropology as one of the best choices she had made in college. She said,

The most correct choice was to study anthropology as a minor. Every professor in the Anthropology Department is modest, knowledgeable, and it is a beautiful subject and I love all my professors in the Anthropology Department. For the Economics Department professors, if I am familiar with 90% of the anthropology professors, I only know about 75% of the econ professors (Translated from Chinese).

## Academic behaviors

In the following section, students' academic behaviors are described, including their participation in asking and answering questions in class, interactions with professors, interactions

with classmates (especially group discussions and assigned group work), presentations, and independent study. Their accounts of their behaviors and my observations are also given.

One important finding is that, though cultural differences play a certain role in individual student participants' academic behaviors, the Chinese student participants degree of speaking up in class and their attitudes towards active class participation was not much different from that of their American counterparts, who also range from very talkative to almost completely silent. It appears that an individual's personality differences contribute more to explaining differences in their degree of class participation than cultural components. It will be helpful for readers to refer to the previous chapter of “introducing students” where each student's personality and background was described, to fully understand these student participants' behaviors and the choices they made.

### *Asking/answering questions*

Asking questions in class is something that is advocated in American universities. One can ask for clarification, express one's own thoughts, make connections between the points covered in the class and one's own experience, and share personal opinions with the class. Instructors generally view students' asking and answering questions positively, as a way to get feedback from students' learning and a way of interaction and active participation.

This is in contrast to the normal Chinese practice where passing down knowledge to students is highly advocated without active participation from the students themselves. In a culture where authority is highly respected, Chinese students expect that information and answers to questions coming from the professors are correct (Huang, 1997). Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) reported that Chinese respondents tended to treat instructors and texts as highly authoritative sources of knowledge and students were expected to “copy, drill and memorize” the

“foundational knowledge” presented by these sources. Durkin (2004) claimed that in Chinese schools, Chinese students were always presented with the correct perspective of the essay questions and they did not have to analyze and debate as they are required in the Western universities. Ku & Ho (2010) claimed Chinese students’ tendency is to look for answers from preconceptions, authorities or other people, rather than training individual judgment based on truth, evidence, and reasoning.

Among the student participants, there is a wide disparity among their comfort levels for asking/answering questions in class, as well as their views on the importance of doing so. Also, depending on the students’ major and the year of their study, their class sessions varied in size from 25 to 300 participants (with the exception of the one independent study class with a student size of one). As such, the dynamics of the class, as well as the class size should be considered as an influence when evaluating the impact of class participation and asking/answering questions in class on students’ performances. Below I describe student participation in terms of three categories: Very Active, Somewhat Active, and Inactive.

#### [Very active student category](#)

##### Chrissy

Only one student fell within the Very Active category. Chrissy was very active in answering and asking questions in class. For instance, at the Psychology TA session with 25 students, she was always responsive and actively participated. She quickly replied to her TA’s questions, often explaining a concept, summarizing an article, and sharing challenges she had with the reading. She would also quickly jump to ask questions at points where she had gotten lost in the assignment. Chrissy described herself as a confident person, and she felt comfortable in the group discussion.

Her TA in that session commented on her active participation:

She is a very active student in class, I would say she is really engaged in the course, she seems to like it. In addition to being a pretty active participant in discussion, quiz and lab sessions, she usually sits in the first couple of rows in the lecture, she seemed pretty engaged. She interacts well with, I do not see her interact too much with peers but she has at least one or two friends in the lab or discussion section she seemed to be close with. She interacts well with groups and she is again usually pretty on task... When she understands, she is very collaborative, she is good with her peers, explaining things, working with them.

Besides giving recognition to Chrissy's active participation, however, the TA pointed out that Chrissy's major challenge is that she can be difficult in terms of needing an answer right away, and that can be frustrating. "If she does not know something, she often wants to know the answer immediately, and often needs someone to help her pretty quickly." So sometimes Chrissy ended up dominating the class, talking over other students, as well as frequently asking the TA questions, which may have been a bit disruptive for the class.

She can become very anxious at things, like she can get a bit anxious about the course material and when that happens, she often needs a response very quickly, I have noticed that sometimes it is a little hard for her to wait for a response... the class tutor who is an undergraduate who helped out with the class, actually came up and spoke with me and said that she had a little bit of a hard time with her because she was talking over other students a bit, and talking over her [the tutor] a bit as well.

I have noticed that a bit in class as well and I think that is coming from the respect that she wants to learn, she wants to get clarification on things you know, it is coming from a place of not disrespect or anything, I think she just really tries to get clarification on things, but that can be difficult for the other students because she is dominating more of the conversation and really needing a response, but again I think she likes the class, she told me that she enjoyed the class.

While pointing out this major challenge of Chrissy's, the TA emphasized several times that she fully understood Chrissy acted this way because of the eagerness to learn; she understood that wanting an immediate answer without waiting was not only Chrissy's problem as a student, but other students' as well. The TA also wondered if some of Chrissy's anxiety was

coming from “any kind of comprehensive issue on the language level,” though Chrissy had not articulated any of these things to her, and that was just her guess.

In a large lecture with more than 200 people, it is generally more difficult to ask and answer questions, however, Chrissy still tried to participate in this type of setting as well. She chose to sit in the first row in the large lecture hall as part of her routine.

I feel comfortable [sitting in the very front row], making me concentrate more, I don't even sit in the back. Because I communicate with him [the professor] no matter how big the class size is. If he mentioned something I can talk about, I am just gonna say it, like the golf players' name. And I can talk to him afterwards. If I don't [have something to say about what he said], I say something interesting but not disrupting.

The example she highlighted happened in one of her “Sports and Sociology” class sessions. The professor was talking about an increasing number of international sports players in the U.S. She quickly raised her hand adding that even the university had more and more international student athletes, in fact, one of her friends was an international student playing golf for the university. Since she had sat in the middle of the first row, the professor had been able to hear her clearly. As her comment was highly related to the point the professor was making, he repeated it so that the whole class could hear. Chrissy told me after the class that she just wanted to share with the class information that she knew. She felt that this was a way for her to contribute to the class and participate actively.

Chrissy was careful evaluating feedback concerning whether instructors approved of her participation or not; in the rare case that her participation was not appreciated, she would tend to stop. Following is an example she recalled:

I actually had a professor came to me saying that something I had said in class was disturbing. Somebody did not like it. If I find out him [the professor] is somebody who doesn't appreciate people talking in class, then I'm going to stop. It is very rare, happened once in the U.S. but a lot in China. He [This professor] doesn't like people to talk in class, he only wanted to give instructions. He is an American professor, I appreciate I respected

him, I still learned pretty well. I went to his office hour to talk to him, and he said to me thanks for my cooperation.

### Somewhat-active student category

#### Johnny

When Johnny reflected on his performance in asking/answering questions in class, he seemed satisfied and animated about it. He believed his points were worth mentioning; that's why he spoke up in class. He was proud of himself since not many international students speak up in class but at least he was one that did.

As an observer of one of the information technology classes Johnny was enrolled in, I took notes on the class dynamics and atmosphere. Even though it was a class of more than 160, students were generally talkative and actively engaged, especially the ones who sat in the front and middle of the room. Johnny usually sat in the third or the fourth row of the class, which could be considered the front of a large lecture hall like the one used for this class. Many students were very active in the class, quickly answering the professors' questions and bringing up interesting points. The class discussion was always heated. Most students who raised their hands and asked/answered questions seemed to speak English as their native language.

The instructor explained that it was very competitive for students who sought to major in Information Technology. His course served as a prerequisite to the major. Many students believed it was important not only to get a good grade, but also to leave a positive impression so that the instructor might be able to recommend the students during the ranking process that would impact their acceptance into the program. The instructor's explanation of the background of this class helped me understand the students' behavior during the class. When asked about Johnny's participation in class, the instructor answered he was "average," he did not feel that Johnny was either more active than average or less so.

From an observer's perspective, in a competitive class environment where many wanted to contribute and leave a good impression, a student whose native language is not English could be at a disadvantage. One thing that is noteworthy is that Johnny felt that he should actively participate in class not because of extrinsic motivation (at least he did not say so), such as leaving a good impression and getting accepted into the major program (by then Johnny had already declared his major of Computer Science so he did not need to be accepted into the program), but because he believed that his points were valid and worth sharing with the class. He explained,

Info 200 lecture was really good. I am the one among not many international students who answer questions, because most people who answered questions are native speakers or immigrants. I do think it is progress for me: because sometimes answering questions in a small seminar is easy, but answering question before 200 people is kind of hard, especially the time when the instructor doesn't understand you... I answered the questions in front of 200 people because I have something to say.

Johnny made the comment about this information course saying "the class was not that hard. We ask questions because we are curious, not to prepare for the quiz, because the assignments were not that hard."

### Tina

Like Johnny, Tina showed a moderate level of class participation through answering questions. She preferred to participate when she was familiar with the class members and she felt comfortable. And like Johnny, she would also prefer to contribute when she felt the point she was about to make was meaningful and strong enough.

In an economics elective course "Population and Development," she felt that she had something to contribute to the class as an international student, which encouraged her to speak up in the class to offer a different perspective.

Other people talk which stimulate you to talk in class, because I feel I could not be worse than them. Many international students talk in this class, and we have the right to speak up: China is a populous country that is developing at a fast speed, so the topic of population and development are all covered in China and we have a lot to say. For example, exams included China's One Child Policy, if she [the professor] has something not understandable, we can help her to explain. (Translated from Chinese)

As mentioned by several student participants, when topics covered in class related to them and if they actually knew something about it, they were more likely to speak up in the class. Their cultural background helped them participate and contribute to some classes. In the case of Tina, the high relevance between the course content and her personal background, as well as her familiarity with the topic, gave Tina confidence to speak up in class, as one of her ways to contribute to the class and help the instructor.

We studied China's One-Child policy in the economic development class. This policy was initially criticized harshly, but nowadays people understand it deeper, it becomes an influential example for people to learn from. If I know the answer or can add to the discussion, I will speak up. If no one else answers, I will also try to say something that I feel contributes. (Translated from Chinese)

### Inactive student category

#### Shirley

Shirley preferred not to speak up in class. She believed that if she learned better by listening, what was wrong with that? When asked if she felt there was any relationship between speaking in class and the course outcome, Shirley believed there was no correlation. To support her thoughts on the subject, she gave the example of a female student in her junior high class who would always speak up in class and the teacher would pay special attention to her as a result. However, that female student still did not do well in the class despite that level of active participation. Shirley felt that her experience in college confirmed her opinion. When she had a good question to ask, she just held on to it, her questions would always be asked by someone

else. Therefore she could get the answer without asking it herself. She used the example of a chemistry class review session to illustrate her point:

I didn't ask questions [in that session]. When I was doing my review practice questions, I underlined some questions that I felt were problematic. I knew for sure some classmates would ask about them. Also, I have taken classes with Americans for long enough to know that if there are some complicated questions that I do not want to work on, very likely, they would want the instructor to go over them as well, I know someone else will ask about them. So in either case, I don't need to speak up, I just need to listen and learn from it. (Translated from Chinese)

Shirley described herself as “not an active student in the class”, and her preferred learning style is to “listen and observe what other students say, and take notes.” Shirley said she seldom speaks up in class or expresses her opinions, no matter whether she is studying at home (China) or abroad, whether in her first language or English. She only spoke up when she had to. Her teachers in her high school knew this about her and, consequently, would not call on her to answer questions.

Shirley explained that she would be very nervous and not comfortable when being put in the spotlight, she simply didn't like other people looking at her. Language plays only a minor role in her unwillingness to speak up in class since even in her first language, she would still preferred not to speak up.

If I can finish all the work, then it is good enough for me, and I don't need to speak up. I sometimes wish I can be invisible, that people could hear my voice but not see me, so that no one would stare at me, I don't like people to look at me. Even if I get recognition, I know I'm not the only one who can do well, others can do as well too. I would be proud but I still feel nervous. It is my problem that I am nervous when speaking up, thinking about only me facing the whole class, I think it is not a problem of English. I once presented, and my hands shook so much. I could share my stories but not with me sharing it, the instructor can tell my stories without mentioning me. If the whole class is outside sitting on the lawn, people do not look at me when I talk, and also I am not the first one or two to speak up, I think that will be less pressure. But in the classroom and I need to speak up, I can hear my own heartbeat. (Translated from Chinese)

Shirley's English instructor confirmed her reluctance and anxiety to speak up in the class. The instructor noticed that when Shirley talked with her classmates in a small group, she had

good ideas and gave feedback to people she worked with. Some people were shyer than her and she was able to draw them out. Once when Shirley made some insightful comments during an office hour visit, her instructor asked if she could share this with the class, Shirley hesitated and was reluctant to do so. The instructor claimed that Shirley was shyer when speaking up in the classroom compared to talking one to one. She shared a story about Shirley's speaking up in class.

She would be more shy in class. I did that [asking her to speak up in class] to her once. I saw her feel shy and embarrassed, and then I didn't do it anymore. But I would say "a student came to me and said this," so she is anonymous and still gave her credit. I didn't know if it was modesty that "I don't want people to know I am this intelligent" or something like that, but she was kind of shy to come out so I didn't do this to her.

But I did email her one time before class, along with four/five other students and I said that "do you mind sharing for about two or three minutes how you went through the process of developing your claim for your major paper One?" And then they can say yes or no. And once I got their answer, in the next class, I just said that "we will hear from this student, this student." And Shirley shared during that time. But her voice was trembling, her voice was shaking, her hands were shaking, and I thought it is not easy for her to speak in front of the class like it was one on one. I asked her on the weekend, and I told her no pressure and you can totally say no. She did it! And I said thanks and it is really helpful to hear different people's process, I could just tell it was not easy for her.

According to Shirley, listening to others rather than speaking up in the class is partially a learning strategy and partially not. She agreed it is a learning strategy because she can listen to more people's ideas and integrate them into her own, therefore, she will be more well-rounded in the end. But on the other hand, she also does not speak up in class because she does not want to speak up in class. Shirley further explained,

In situations when the instructors call your name and ask for your answer, it is not that you wanted to answer, but that you have to do so. Or your group has to present. We stare at each other in the group, and the member who gets the most scared will have to volunteer. I feel that the more you talk, the more likely you will make mistakes. Of course in the class, making mistakes is no big deal, but in the future, who knows how talking a lot might impact you and in what way. Plus, I don't want to be the one in the spot light. It is like, you again, always you, still you [who is talking]? I hate this situation.

I don't want to force myself to show off, I don't want to show off. (Translated from Chinese)

To some extent this is consistent with an Asian stereotype of students who are silent in order to avoid making mistakes, losing face, standing out. But Shirley had additional reasons for silence. She also critically analyzed other students' questions, claiming that some students' questions could easily be answered if they had read the book carefully. Their questions showed that they did not study hard enough, which she considered was a discredit to them. It was unfair for the whole class to spend time listening to things that they already knew, since they had read the book and studied on their own. Class time should be considered very precious and should not be wasted in answering meaningless questions.

Also, Shirley felt that some students spoke up in class only because they wanted to speak in the class and impress their instructor and fellow classmates. She did not feel their questions were closely related to the class and the reading material; rather, those questions sometimes became a distraction for the class, since the instructors were always agreeable and responded positively to the students. Shirley felt that no matter what type of question was asked, the first thing the instructors would usually say was "That is a very good question."

When the class size is large, many times American classmates like to ask broad and general questions, and professors would respond always saying "good question." But how helpful and targeted are those questions? I do not think those contributed to the class much. For example, in chemistry class, when we learn a new reaction, usually on the exam you will be asked about the application, it is not how much you understand the concept but how fast you learn the concept and apply it. If someone asked a good question, that question should be somewhere similar to the ones that show up on the exams. Students are all practical and want to do well in exams. But most questions they ask cannot be turned into information that will help for the exam and therefore are not useful questions. Professors will say "good" to all the questions, but 50-60% of the grade in classes depends on the exam result, therefore the exam still matters. (Translated from Chinese)

Unlike Johnny's comments that stressed asking questions because he was curious, the above quotation fits well with Shirley's attitude about learning and her eagerness to earn a high GPA. As someone who cared very much for doing well on exams and maintaining a high GPA, as well as making friends with people who have higher GPAs than her own so that she could learn from them, Shirley's standard for a good question in class is one that might be included on the exam and could contribute to a higher grade. From this perspective, many of her American classmates' question which related to understanding a concept failed to become good questions in her opinion. Interestingly, Shirley claims that "80% of the time, students in the class could not come up with a good question." She explained carefully,

Professors want to finish the content of the class on time, and our quarter system is extremely tight. Instructors have to hurry to cover everything in his or her power point slides, they have only 50 minutes to finish the condensed knowledge in one class. It is not easy just to follow closely in class, let alone ask good questions in a limited time; I feel that is very challenging, even impossible. You should review and deepen the understanding after the class and digest the material. Students ask questions because they made connections with their previous knowledge; for me concepts are like history you tell me, I just need to know how to apply them. (Translated from Chinese)

### Cathy

During an interview with Cathy's TA from her communication class, he indicated that he made an effort to create a friendly environment for everyone to speak up and make sure there is no right/wrong answer in his class. He explained that he deliberately tried to "hold off those who tend to speak a lot, since international students need time to translate back and forth, organize their thoughts, they need extra time." The TA viewed the role of international students in the session as "definitely not negative," since they can provide different perspectives by discussing topics with the other American students. He admitted that international students in his session might tend to be more shy, so he tried to take pressure off them. He also said that he understood

that international students might participate in class discussion depending on how proficient they are in English, as well as if they feel safe to talk.

He recalled that Cathy did occasionally show up for his office hours, and generally talked a little less (comparing to the rest of the class), which might have something to do with her English proficiency and if she felt comfortable. He described her class participation as “a bit more reserved... reluctant to speak.” He also recalled some details about interacting with Cathy.

She was concerned and talked to me after the class that this coming exam is more short answers (5 sentences) and long essay questions (3/4 paragraphs), it is a writing-only exam. Her concern is that she is not used to this type of exam, but more multiple-choice and true/false questions. I asked her if she has done the reading, and read the notes, if so that should be fine. She said that if she had any questions, she will come to my office hour.

When I observed Cathy in the class, I saw her ask the TA questions after the class, but did not often ask or answer questions during the class or in front of the whole class. She rarely did so. When there was group discussions and group games in the TA session, she would participate though not so actively. I also saw that she often sat with another female Chinese student, whom she later introduced as having taken the same class with her in the previous and current quarters, and they had thus become friends. The TA also noticed it, saying “the research participant comes in together with another international student and sit next to each other...I understand it and I think it is a good thing: so they do not feel so isolated. I see it as a good thing.”

Regarding Cathy’s participation in the communication course’s TA session, the TA made the following suggestion:

[Things] she needs to improve most is to participate a little bit more... better sharing of where she is at. Her major challenges are her grasp of the material, understanding of the material, and participation--a little bit more. She feels a bit uncomfortable speaking up in the class, but speaking up can help us know who she is and for us to be able to help her a bit.

## Tom

Tom described himself as “shy” and “introverted.” He usually did not speak up much in class, sometimes he would go through a class session without saying anything; he sometimes would be disappointed and sad that during the group discussion, he could not participate much. He described what he felt in a small class:

In the very small classroom, I feel the atmosphere is depressed, I am not sure why, maybe when people ask questions and nobody answers, they look around the classroom, and the small classroom, she [the instructor] might ask me to answer. Sometimes if I am very sure about the answer, I will answer the question. If I am not that sure, I just keep silent.

Tom further explained that the reason that he is usually “not so active” is because he usually just listens to the teacher, thinking about what they say in his mind, which was influenced by the teaching style and class interaction in China. He would choose not to say a word if he did not have to (for example, if teachers did not call his name to answer questions). If he had questions, he would prefer to ask teachers question after the class, and occasionally during office hours.

Reasons that I do not ask questions in the class: first reason is because I am getting used to it, because in the class in China we always just listen to the teacher and keep the questions after the class. And the other reason maybe talk in front of a lot of people makes me nervous, maybe I am afraid of making mistakes, like pronunciation mistakes.

## *Interactions with professors during their office hours*

Several student participants talked about their experiences with professors’ office hours.

## Chrissy

Chrissy went to professors’ office hours very often. She added that she would go to professor’s office hour for every single class and that is just her personality:

That just is who I am. I ask tons of questions in every single class, and I go to office hours to talk to the instructor, for every course, even for Sociology of Sport that has 358 students and only two lectures per week, but I still go to talk to the instructor.

During the interview I had with the professor of the Sociology of Sport course, he apparently remembered Chrissy's name, adding that he could not remember many students' names. He told me that in such a large class, not many students, including American students, would go to introduce themselves after the class or go to his office hour. When Chrissy did so, she distinguished herself from others.

### Tina

In the quarter when I collected data with Tina, she took a 200-level Economics course, which she thought would be easy since she had already taken 400-level courses in that field, but it turned out to be more challenging than she expected since it involved the use of substantial math and logic skills. As a result of the challenging material, Tina attended the office hour of her professor for additional information. She described her experience going to that professor's office hour as follows:

During the professor's office hour I would be a bit scared maybe because of the Chinese educational system, I would not be that relaxed since I respected him so much. Sometimes my questions turned out not to be the one I really wanted to ask and he answered in a strange way too, and then the office hour ended. I would go for around 20 minutes... It would be embarrassing because of my vocabulary mistakes, he would help by asking me "do you want to ask a, or b, or c?", then I would choose one. It happened once before an exam... I had gone to the professor's office hour 3 times so far. I would bring my notes to check, I would have liked to look into the professor's eyes and face, so I could understand better. The eyes are the windows of soul, but with this professor I was not able to look him in the eyes. (Translated from Chinese)

Tina felt "a bit scared" and "not that relaxed" for that Econ-200 professor's office hour.

In another interview, she described her overall feeling of going to professors' office hours.

[I go to professors'] office hour if I really need to know more. I know what I need to learn, and I already know about it, I know all the materials, I don't need to go. I am not afraid to go, because my professors are very helpful. If I don't have that lecture notes,

they will provide me, they will explain to me carefully and patiently, what is going on, what are the main points.

Though at first glance, these two different feelings about going to professor's office hours seemed opposite, I believe they did not necessarily conflict with each other. When Tina attended a course she was not very confident about and she was less familiar with the material, she would be intimidated, scared and therefore not relaxed in front of the professor. The second quotation describes when she seemed to have a good idea of what she needed to know, and demonstrated learner's autonomy over course material and learning choices. In this example she was just looking for material that might be missing, not to be explained material that she had already been introduced to. This might be why she was intimidated attending some office hours but not all of them.

Since besides professors' office hours, there were also TA's office hours and free on-campus tutoring services, Tina developed a learning preference specific to each resource.

If I am too lazy to go to office hours, I would go to the drop-in free tutoring econ sessions, which will be helpful, too, twice a week 7-12pm. I would stay there for an hour, I would ask all kinds of questions. I think the combination of professor, TA's office hour and tutoring session are all helpful. The most challenging questions I ask the professor, intermediate ones are for the TA, and the easy ones are saved for the tutor (translated from Chinese).

Tina also shared a strategy her junior high school Chinese teacher had taught her regarding communicating with people that she felt had benefited her greatly. The teacher taught the students to listen carefully, and as a result, she learned to listen well and look into people's eyes. When she communicated with Americans, she was respectful and very serious about what they had to say. She tried to use this skill when interacting with professors, and it often worked though not with the professor of her Econ 200 class. Tina listed her positive interactions with professors as one of her three biggest achievements at the university. She explained:

Secondly [referencing her achievements], I can communicate with professors in more depth, about studies, about life, and other details. As international students, we have friends, we have mentors, and we have someone more senior than us, who can provide deep thoughts and advice. Opinions from peers might be naive, but when you know someone older, you might have more opportunities, such as to be a part of the research team, share his or her networking, which can provide deep understanding and help. (Translated from Chinese)

### Shirley

Shirley went to the English instructor's office hour the most frequently. For math and chemistry, she went about once a month. She explained that "I would check my answer on my own. Most of the time I would try to figure [things] out on my own."

Similarly to Tina, Shirley also recognized the value of going to professors' office hours. Among the benefits of having her questions answered, making full use of professors' time, and practicing her English in academic topics, she emphasized the importance of using office hour to practice her academic English for the purpose of preparing for future advanced classes and communicating with people from similar fields.

If I do not understand something, then I want to figure it out. During my English instructor's office hours, sometimes she is like a friend to me, my opinions can be heard by her and she would give me feedback. Going to office hours can help me practice English expressions. This is an hour every week that the professor reserved for students, so we need to make full use of it. First of all, if we go there, professors won't be so bored in the case of no one showing up. In addition, I can practice my organizational ability in speaking, pronunciation, in vocabulary, and the ability to give narration. Subjects like chemistry and mathematics, there are so many terminologies and 99% would not be used in our daily life. In higher level classes, we will need to give presentations. Of course one can just choose a Chinese professor. But if you do not practice now, you will become less and less confident in the future. If you choose a major, then you need to be responsible for it, how would you communicate with people who are in the field of organic chemistry [if you do not practice it at all]? (Translated from Chinese)

It is interesting to notice that besides admitting students benefited by going to office hours, she seemed to also see it as a favor to the professors, so that professors would not be bored during the hour reserved for students.

## Tom

Compared to the aforementioned students, Tom went to professors' office hours much less frequently. He explained, "I do not need extra help session, and I prefer to solve problems by myself. I seldom go to those office hours, I prefer ask questions after the class. It will be a waste of time since I have to find them." In the case where he had a question on homework which would be due before exams, Tom would then make the trip to the professor's office hour. He thought "it is really helpful," sometimes more helpful than asking questions after class, because he would have more time to ask questions and get answers, and the answers would be in more detail. However, he admitted that he was also nervous and afraid when going to professors' office hours.

I am a little afraid and nervous, every time when I go to office hours, I stand outside of the door and not push the door, I would spend a lot of time to prepare the questions, the way I would state it, what words I would choose. I don't know why I am so nervous. I think it is not all about language, I would still be nervous if I ask in Chinese.

So Tom saw the value of going to professors' office hours, he felt he had more time to ask specific questions; however, he felt nervous when going and so he did not use this resource regularly unless he had a homework assignment due and no other option.

## *Interactions with classmates*

Student participants' interactions with classmates are also very important and a significant part of a students' academic socialization. How often they interact with classmates, what they communicate about, how they communicate, and how close their relationships are are all dimensions of the interactions with classmates.

Johnny: "This is a failure of my quarter"

Johnny had a very negative experience with his group in the computer science class he took during the quarter I observed him. The group was assigned by the instructor and students in the group were required to work together on group projects and presentations. From my observation, Johnny seemed to be out of the loop with his team. For example, when his group was about to present to the class, Johnny was not sure who would be the presenter, what was the exact plan. He sometimes volunteered to present, but was not sure if his teammates accepted his offer. When I asked about why he and his team did not act together and why he did not know the presentation plan even though the group presentation was scheduled in just a few days, he looked rather puzzled and lost. He described the relationship with his team as “not that bad, not so closely related.” He explained how things became the way they were:

I contacted them by email on Canvas [an open-source website instructors use to post notices and students can use to contact each other], I didn't meet with them physically. They met twice but I can not make it. The first meeting three of them were there and harder to catch them. It was the primary issue. I lost my passion, I uploaded my notes, I was waiting, no one replied. I reply email, I was so lost they didn't reply. If you don't ask me I don't show up, if you need me I would do [what is needed]. It is my fault not to show up for the first time.

The second time they didn't let me know what to do for the presentation. I tried to catch up with them, I didn't know anything about the second meeting. I guess the reason maybe they met for the first time, exchanged information, and I was kind of left behind, I replied I was not able to reach them. I uploaded some notes, I made announcements, no one actually check, maybe they do not have good access. No one actually checks it, they may reach out to each other.

And during lab session it's way too early before the presentation, anything has not be decided, no one said anything specifically, they do not know, I don't know. And during that week.. I think... For the debate session, we do not need to make PowerPoint. No one sent me a personal email. I would say they are not familiar with me, they didn't known me. I made an announcement, I was not there during the first meeting.

Johnny assumed that not being able to make the first meeting and get to know his teammates was the primary reason he was left behind by the group. He explained that he had so many obligations, such as volunteering work and his writing job for the university newspaper,

that he sometimes needed to sacrifice his academic obligations and could not participate in some class meetings. He missed the first team meeting because of his extracurricular activities. Johnny said he tried to reach out to the group by uploading notes, sending emails, offering to present, but no one in the team replied. The second team meeting took place without his being notifying through personal email, so he again missed the meeting. After several attempts trying to reach out to the team, he gave up feeling if the team needed him to do something, they would just let him know. Unfortunately things turned worse and worse, and his relationship with his teammates drifted further and further. Johnny summarized the problem and admitted his mistake:

If I made the first meeting they would know my contact, they can reach me. I do not sit together with them also. I will make an adjustment in the future. 4 percentage of presentation, debate I was late, I got four out of 10. Overall engagements, I got 90%. If I was not much absent, I could get 100% as I answered the question in the class. I tried to be a good team member, if I try hard enough, but I was so busy that I tried once, twice, three times [and it didn't work], I will just give up. I made announcements through Canvas. I guess I was a bad teammate. It's a communication issue, it's mainly my fault.

When interviewing the TA in that course, she also brought the teamwork issue up as part of the discussion on Johnny's performance in the class. She was concerned about the issue and heard his teammates' complain about his absence and lack of contribution to the team.

He did not seem to engage with the class. His group has talked to me also, they talked to me once, they said that they do not really know him, and he has not helped that much in their lab. So every other week, they give a presentation. On the days they do not give presentation, they just work together on their next presentation as a group. It is week 9 and his group last week told me that they barely know him and he had not done that much work. That was concerning to me.

The TA tried to come up with some explanations for Johnny's team working problem, admitting that in fact, Johnny seemed a little distant to her compared to the rest of the class. She also felt that she had not gotten to know him that well either, since Johnny had been absent a lot in her lab session or he would be late. The way she put it was "sometimes he did not show up, a

couple of times. Most of the time he has been late, a couple of times he has been really late, like 30 minutes late [out of 50 minutes]”.

I kind of noticed it anyway, ‘cause when he is working in the group, he does not really communicate with his team members. Part of it could be his team has become really close, a couple of people on the team are really close friends. And so it could be he feels excluded from that, it could be all his team members are from here, they are native speakers, and they are also older, so it could be he feels excluded. However, they said he has not done much work for the team, so I assume they have their own method of communicating as a team, and he is not cooperating, not adding much input, so they felt like, they told me that they barely know him, they have not seen him that much, I don’t know what that means, they just do not see him in team meetings? But maybe class too. One time he came to class on time, they made a joke, they said, “oh, who are you?” as a joke, even though it is funny, it is also kind of mean. He did not say anything, he just sat down.

The TA’s quotations partially echoed what Johnny had said himself, that he and his teammates did not know each other well and did not work much together on team projects. The TA’s words also reflected Johnny’s struggle to make team meetings and attend classes on time. However, the TA did not know Johnny’s personal life, such as his heavy study and work load, extensive volunteering and extracurricular activities. The TA’s perspective also did not reflect Johnny’s continuous effort to contact his teammates or knowledge of his reflection of this problem – “I guess I was a bad teammate. It's a communication issue, it's mainly my fault”.

The absence in participating and the distant relationship with his teammates in the information class negatively influenced Johnny. When asked about his high and low of the quarter at the end of the third interview, he said “my lows are in my absence, I always slept late, do not participate well and also don't [have] passion.” Besides his personal feeling, his grade in that course was also negatively impacted. He told me, “I got a 3.6 for Information 200, which was just really lucky. I did not participate much for the lab presentation, class discussion, and I thought I might lose a lot in my grade for my absence, I was super lucky that I got a 3.6.” Based on his reflection about this unpleasant working relationship with his team, one could tell that he

suffered and paid the price for it. He also learned a lesson, and he admitted that he needed to work hard on his teamwork and communication skills.

Fortunately, the negative teamwork experience in his information class was not always the case. Johnny was able to enjoy a good working relationship with his classmates in some other classes. For example, in astronomy, he enjoyed working with his classmates. He commented, “They are all nice in every class, when you need help, they will help. And also for discussion session: we discuss quite happily, comfortable discussions especially for the info lecture...”

Tom: “There are actually a lot [of embarrassing moments].”

Just as he described and I observed, Tom is shy and introverted, even though according to his reflection, “compared with my image last year before I came to UW, there are many things similar [to what I thought it would be]. For example, I made some foreign friends, and became a little more extroverted, although not as much as I previously thought.”

Tom seemed to always sit in the same seat in the ENGL 131 course and talked to the same several people around him for group discussion. There were times in the ENGL 131 course, he ended up not saying a word during the class. Sometimes he participated in the group discussion, not saying much. There were also a few times he took the initiative and talked first in the group discussion to break the ice. Besides speaking up, he often volunteered to take notes of the discussion, since sometimes the group needed to submit their discussion result and/or had to summarize their discussion.

Generally speaking, Tom seemed a bit passive and quiet during group discussion. He certainly showed great respect for the people who were talking by smiling, nodding, taking

notes, and looking at them; nonetheless, he usually would not say much. Tom described his normal status of participation in group discussion:

I just say what I know, when I know nothing, I just smile and nod, and agree with them. When they talk a lot, I will wait and say whatever he or she does not say. I just hope I can talk a lot like them. I am a little shy, I am very passive in friendship. In the discussion, I always listen to them and talk not that much.

Tom believed the content they discussed and his reading speed influenced his participation, which explained why he “always listened”:

Sometimes at first of the discussion, talking about the article, I read slower than they do. After they finish reading and my partners started to talk to each other, I am still reading, they start to talk. They just continue the discussion. I know it is a little hard to jump into their discussion, the usual case is that I listen to them, just listen.

During interviews Tom would tell me his previous negative experience interacting with teammates. Sometimes he would look sad and disappointed, because in the stories he shared, he was ignored and mistreated. A typical example would be,

[Once in] architecture class when the professor asked us to discuss a question, I forgot what the question was, my partner he sat next to me and talked very fast. I can hardly understand him, he was like “En, yeah.” He knew the girl who sat the other side of me, just ignored me and talked to the other girl, it was embarrassing. And I just listened.

Similarly, he mentioned another experience, “Astronomy class I had a presentation in a group of three, two are Americans. It is hard for me to participate so I just let it go.” Tom’s “let it go” generally meant that he would sit on the side, listen and nod, maybe smile, but not utter anything to interrupt or participate. He felt helpless and embarrassed in those scenarios, but there was nothing much that he felt he could do but remain silent.

Tom evaluated his inactive participation in the group discussion critically. On one side, he believed the degree of speaking up in the class had nothing to do with good or bad but more a style of learning that each individual chose. On the other side, he wished that he could participate more, being more active and contributing more. A strategy he had come up with to compensate

for his “passive” (his own word) participation with speaking up during group discussion, which turned out to be effective for him, was to be the recorder of the group discussion. He chose to record what other teammates said during the discussion because he felt that even though he was not as good at expressing himself, he still needed to “find something to do.” Writing the summary of what others said was another way of contributing instead of participating by talking, and was also easier for him. Since it is natural for the recorder to give the summary of the discussion when requested by the instructors, Tom would do this but since he had some notes in hand, he felt more confident and comfortable speaking up.

Tom also did not participate in study groups because he chose not to. “[I study my] notes, no study groups because talking to strangers makes me nervous. I choose to study alone.”

Shirley: “I was really pissed off.”

Shirley frankly admitted that for her, she approached everything associated with learning with a purpose. For example, she expected a good grade from every class; when making friends in class, she would choose the ones who she felt could help her with getting good grades in group tasks. She preferred someone who was superior to her in terms of academic performance to be partner with rather than just a friend to hang out with. Since she could not tell how academically strong a person was by their looks, she tried to notice the results of their quizzes and class participation to judge.

As a result of her purpose-oriented attitude and previous experience, Shirley generally made the choice of working with Chinese students rather than Americans. She explained,

I like working together with Chinese classmates, it saves time, especially in the lab, it's very obvious. You have had a similar educational background, you know what you talk about. If I have American classmates, when you do one step, I need to explain three steps. Now there are not so many group projects, personally, I don't like group projects, I think I

am a jack of all trades. I don't trust other people, when they do their part, I have to see what they done to be comfortable with it. So then sometimes I do a lot of work filling in teammates portions and I was like, why should I do all the work? It's a dilemma.  
(Translated from Chinese)

Shirley described her experience working with different lab mates. Previously she had the same Taiwanese lab mate for two classes, who had done labs before and knew how to do things correctly in the lab. Shirley was really happy that she could feel secure working with him: she helped as an assistant and he did the main tasks; they worked well together. The Taiwanese lab mate really met her expectations, as she explained below:

If I can choose, I want somebody I know, we sit together, go to class together. This brings me a sense of security because for somebody new, I don't know his or her ability, their ability to deal with the situations... I want to be friends with somebody stronger than me, if I think they are stronger than me, that is good. (Translated from Chinese)

However, during the quarter she participated in this research, the instructor assigned lab mates using the class roster, and she was assigned an Asian American that she did not know. The partners were to work together for a quarter and could not be changed. That was the first time she had to work with an American in a lab environment. She described this experience as “awkward in a hard-to-explain way” (Her words translated from Chinese). Shirley said in the lab she tried to control herself, and that the American lab mate she had was “really so-so.”

This girl had not had lab experience, she wanted to do the main tasks but she did not know how to. We got a really low concentration number in the results and it was bad. She kept saying “it doesn't matter, it is just an experiment.” I replied to her directly “it matters a lot” and then I did the experiment on my own ... When we came to the half-way point of the class, we still had a lot left to do, I was really anxious. I did not hang my hopes on her, I just told her to record some numbers. I think she could sense that I was not happy then. Also for the lab report, she did not write much and always looked at mine and asked me tons of questions. She was very slow understanding my answers and I am not a very patient person... When I heard she said “I think I did really well in the lab sessions, why are my grades not very high?” I almost cried. I just kept working to carry on my responsibilities, because if I did not do so, then no one in my group would do it.  
(Translated from Chinese)

Shirley admitted honestly that she did not feel positively about working with this lab mate from the very beginning, since she always thought negatively of people until they could prove they were better than she had thought. This Asian American lab mate failed to do anything to change Shirley's initial negative impression, and things did not turn significantly better throughout the class. From the quote above, one can sense the conflicts they had in their working style and the distribution of responsibility. However, Shirley was upset most with this lab mate's attitude.

It is in fact a problem of attitude and making effort. She said "it is just lab, it does not matter." She said three times things like "it is just an experiment," which really pissed me off. If she did not help me, it is fine, but she should not get me so angry. I honestly don't know where Americans' confidence is coming from. (Translated from Chinese)

It was very unfortunate that within Shirley's limited experience working with American classmates that this lab experience did not turn out well. As a result, this experience further confirmed her opinion that working with strong Chinese students was preferable to working with assigned American students.

Chrissy: "I want you to learn something well, too."

Chrissy put forth good effort when working together with her classmates. She contributed to the group discussion by offering her opinion/answers, taking notes, giving summary remarks, raising ideas and suggestions, and so on. She explained that "I really wanted to contribute to the class. I do not know why. If we happen to be in a part of group together, that is wonderful. If I learn something well, I want you to learn something well, too." From the above one can tell that Chrissy cares about contributing to the class, as well as her own and her classmates' learning. Based on my observation, she had no problem initiating discussion, jumping into conversations,

asking classmates for clarification, and raising questions to the instructor. She seemed comfortable speaking up in group discussions and in front of the whole class.

In a group, I feel pretty comfortable and could say whatever I want to say. I feel every question assigned, I always have an idea, I got so used to being the first one to talk in small groups, I don't really like to speak in the large lectures, unless I have questions. But for small group, I got used to it.

There were times in her group when some members were very knowledgeable about the topic and active in speaking up. They had taken basic-level courses, therefore, they were very familiar with the material and concepts. Chrissy expressed her feelings towards those students:

I feel pressured. But I am glad we have this kind of person in the section that makes me study harder, because I don't want to be worse than anyone else. I think language is a barrier, but whatever going on, I have a way to express myself clearly, just say more, or take longer [when speaking] than other students.

In another interview, she expressed her appreciation of people who are better than her.

In general, I am confident but I know there are so many things and so much stuff that I need to work on, and I need to get myself improve. I see how people are better than me, and I learn from them, and I respect them, but that doesn't hurt my confidence. I have known all the time that I am not one of the best. But that does not hurt me.

She was not afraid or overwhelmed in front of the more active or experienced students; just the opposite, she still tried to participate as much as she could and learn from those student as much as she could. That is a valuable quality for a good student to possess, which contributed to her learning and active participation in the class. Chrissy believed there was no strategy that explained her active participation in the group discussion, rather just her personality:

There is no strategy, just my personality: I don't think it is a language problem, I feel people who don't want to talk, they don't talk, no matter English speakers or not, people who like to talk, language will not stop them, like I am so talkative. It slows me but it will not stop me from saying whatever I want to say. I just feel it is personality: it is just who you are and what you want to be, I don't see it as drawback for people. I feel that for learning, different people have different fashions, as long as it is efficient, it doesn't matter what way you use to study.

In contrast to Tom, who preferred to study alone, Chrissy enjoyed studying in groups. She mentioned several benefits of a study group. Besides helping each other and studying together, Chrissy enjoyed that her group mates would save her a seat in the front row when she was late.

The best way to study is always you have a very small group, you guys study together and do homework together. I am always late, sometimes I am not. No matter in a 300-people or a 20-people session, I always sitting the front row. I have my friends to get the seat for me, no matter what. I feel that I can't listen if I sit in the second row, it is just my habit, no matter what class, I have to sit in the front row to listen better.

Chrissy took the initiative to form study groups. At the very beginning of the quarter, I observed that in several courses, Chrissy introduced herself to some Chinese students in her class and asked them if they were interested in studying together with her in a small study group. I was curious why she only approached Chinese students; was that a coincidence or her conscious choice? She explained the changes that had taken place regarding her attitude toward Chinese group mates:

I always have 2-3 people, basically Chinese, studying with me all the time for the quarter. Actually in my first year of college, I hated to do that, I felt that I really wanted to speak better English, I really want to get involved on campus, and I don't want to hang out together only with Chinese. But I feel like my opinion changed, now I am always purposely looking for 1-2 Chinese students who can study with me. I don't know why but it is easier to tell who is good at study, who is smart, we can help each other. If they are Chinese, it is just easier to find out because I know what smart Chinese students look like and act like.

It is interesting to see the different motivations for having Chinese group mates between Shirley and Chrissy: one deliberately chose Chinese students while the other did so out of convenience; one thought rather negatively of American students while the other did not have the same negative feeling; one started working with Chinese students from the very beginning while the other switched from American students in her study groups to mainly Chinese.

Cathy: “details in cooperation”

In Cathy’s communication class, there was also group work. For instance, students needed to work together to make a video that reflected the topic of the week. Cathy reflected on her working experience in the video group:

For our video group the project title was “Better Computer Types?” In the video, PCs and Macs are fighting to see which is better. In the video, I am a random customer, going outside to ask why people choose either one. I helped editing. We came up with the idea together and picked the clips and put them together. It was apple software that we used. There are six of us, two females and four males. Some are very academic, some are very active and it felt good. I am not that active... We did the video group work together, I spoke up my ideas and was not so nervous. I feel that it is easier than writing papers and it was relaxed, and I would prefer this style of project over a group paper (Translated from Chinese).

Based on her reflection, it seemed that Cathy participated enough in the group project to contribute her part and get the work completed. She also commented that though her group did not make the best video among the whole class because some of the other teams put more time into their project, their product was still fairly good and received positive feedback from the class. From the experience of working with the team, Cathy summarized what she had learned from this group project:

[I learned] details in cooperation, like for the same scene, we will shoot several times and then choose the best clip. When shooting, it is kind of complicated since one scene we would shoot several times. When we choose, we fill the list and the one that received the most votes gets chosen, that worked well. One person’s choice might not be so accurate. We went to the library editing room and worked there for 8-9 hours. (Translated from Chinese)

Team work is an important component in many of the courses in American universities. Cathy and her team’s dedication to shooting a scene several times, editing the footage for 8-9 hours, sharing the responsibility in decisions making, and the experience of majority voting, all contributed positively to her learning regarding teamwork and cooperation. From her reflections, one can perceive that Cathy used this experience to build her team working skills and confidence

to contribute in future team environments. The TA for that session also recognized their team's camaraderie saying that "for the group video project, they were really friendly."

Tina: "I benefitted from Freshman Interest Group (FIG)"

When talking to Tina, I could sense that she not only enjoyed every course she was taking but also enjoyed the good working relationship she had with her classmates. She seemed to be comfortable in the class. She seemed to be very used to the teaching style, evaluation style, reading, testing, etc. To get to that level of comfort with an educational system usually takes time, and I believe her level of comfort is highly related to her academic status (she is a junior with senior credit). She has taken a number of courses, and developed study methods and a working style that has proven effective for her. During our first interview, Tina's reflections confirmed my assumptions. She compared her interactions with classmates during her first year and now:

Freshman year I felt so embarrassed and ignored by my team members, 'cause I am an international student, I can't write or speak as fluently as they can, so sometimes they might explicitly ignore me or my point of view. But much better now: because I can give good suggestions for our projects, and I have different point of view, from an international perspective, that is appreciated in the group discussion.

Tina had progressed from being an uncomfortable novice to an experienced participant of the class. What is equally important to notice is that, even during her freshman year, when academic tasks were challenging for her, Tina was able to make use of campus resources and worked to ease the transition by building working relationships and sometimes friendships with her classmates.

[When I took ENGL 131], I took it first quarter with my FIG (freshman interest group) with two other classes. The FIG choose 3 classes together, the same people like a combo. You spend 2.5 months with those people, 25-30 of them. It is a good way to meet new people and make friends, I benefit from that and part of my friends are, I met there.

Tina admitted that being a part of the university Freshman Interest Group helped her a great deal in getting started in the courses she took. She had the same people in different classes, and spent a significant portion of time studying with them and building up relationships and friendships. She found this was also an important channel for making American friends. Additionally, she tried to join study groups, and a further benefit of this was that she could practice her English. “[In] every class we had study groups, we had study groups in different subject. Speaking everyday with my study buddies, but it is only simple English, it is still hard to use academic words, but it is still better than one year before.” Even though Tina had initially felt “embarrassed and ignored” by her teammates because she was an international student whose English proficiency level was lower, one cannot ignore the fact that her active participation in study groups and the Freshman Interest Group helped her gain support and confidence as well as adjust to her new academic environment.

This reminds me of an interview I had with Cathy, where she tried to explain what made it difficult to answer questions in the U.S.: “When I was in China, I answered questions a lot. Here, I listened to the instructor and I thought on my own at the same time. I don’t know. When I came here, I started with a large class with so many people, I didn't have any desire to speak up. And then every 2-3 months the whole class changed, that is very quick.” Apparently the quick turnover rate of class members and large class size inhibited Cathy from speaking up in class as well as getting to know the people in the class. Cathy did not participate in a program similar to the one Tina had during her freshman year where the same 25-30 people took the same classes together as well as studied together and got to know each other. I wondered if Cathy had chosen to participate in the FIG program, whether her experience speaking up in class and interacting with fellow classmates would have been different.

### *Outlier: Independent study*

One of the student participants, Tina, chose to take an independent study class from one of her most admired professors in the Anthropology Department. Though this study format is an outlier with only one student participant involved, the impact of the independent study was substantial and deserves attention. Independent study allows students to conduct research in an area they are interested in under the direct supervision of an expert. As such, it allows students the opportunity to work closely with professors and receive their instruction. Therefore, I am including the independent study example as an outlier topic in this chapter regarding the findings on academic performance.

Tina chose to conduct an independent study because she wanted to learn more on a topic that interested her. In the independent study, Tina chose to investigate the nexus of economy, environment, and anthropology. Since those are her favorite topics, she felt the desire to study aspects of them deeply. She took the independent study for 5 credit hours and met with the professor for an hour every other week. She explained the format of this independent study during the first interview:

I will have to write a 20-page research paper for my independent study. That is my first time doing that, the topic is my favorite about atmosphere controlling which deals with air pollution. I participated in a business plan competition [on this topic]. This professor is also my most admirable [admired] professor, he can speak mandarin, [is] an author on the environment, has studied the Chinese environment. This time I need to prepare by myself.

From the first interview, I sensed that she was very excited about the independent study because the topic truly interested her and the professor was one of her favorites. However, she seemed a bit nervous and unsure whether she could do well in the independent study because it was the first time she would be working so much on her own. It required her to take initiative in

preparing the topic and collecting materials for the research, and staying on target to complete the assignment by the end of the term.

The professor who agreed to work with Tina on this independent study admitted that he was “a little skeptical” in general of students that are too willing to follow the “rules.” Independent study required independent thought and “it is not for everyone, but more the upper-class of undergraduate students.” Also the professor had only known Tina for 6 months at the time she requested to do the independent study with him. As a result, he did not agree right away, but rather met with Tina to talk about her idea in detail. It took a little while for him to overcome his skepticism and he finally agreed to take her on as an independent study student.

One can see her academic development through the changes in her attitudes towards the independent study throughout the quarter. When she was at our second interview in the middle of the quarter, she talked about the progress of her independent study and her feelings about the work:

Anthropology independent research, it was my first time taking it, and it is very different from what I thought. At first, I thought it was so hard, as if I am a professor and I am preparing for a lesson. This is a new field to me that I am interested in but not sure about the direction and detail. We had a rough plan that every two weeks we will meet, with a draft due every other Sunday, then we meet. In the beginning I felt it is a huge project. Up to this point, I feel easy and interested. Though different than I expected before (more research focused as if I am going to discover some new product) but now it is more historically focused. I explained what happened in two other countries previously and then what is the situation in China to make a comparison.

I discuss this with him every time we meet, this change of direction is the result of our negotiation, this aspect focused more on anthropology and economics while the previous one focused more on environmental engineering, which is a direction that I am not that good at either. After doing research, I found it is a good transition of direction, since there are a lot of empirical studies that I can reference. I did not spend that much time on this project, but I stayed very focused, and the result is good. What I am working on is not so common in China, neither is it so in the U.S., not that many people know about it. The denaturation from exhausted gas, high tech. Also it is my first time doing this kind of high tech research, also it is kind of subjective (translated from Chinese).

Tina's opinion of effort required for the independent study transformed from something that was "very hard" and as if she was "a professor preparing for a lesson" to feeling it was "easy." Even though the independent study topic did not develop in the exact direction she had originally planned, as a result of her negotiation with the professor, they both agreed to the new direction and felt that "it was a good shift of direction."

The professor who guided her through the independent study also echoed the change of direction of the study and the joint effort of their negotiation. He explained how they typically worked over a section of her writing and negotiated the direction of the study. He gave credit to Tina for bringing her own ideas to add some content and adjusting the study plan according to the updated situation. The professor also thought highly of Tina's "being receptive to suggestions".

We went through methodically, a section, I read it, I gave written comments, she reads then and rewrites the section sometimes. She was very receptive to suggestions. Originally she wants to do something about pollution mitigation technology, maybe because her father is an environmental engineer and started his own company. Had something to do with that. I suggested to her to include a section about prevention rather than curing pollution. She included that section, it was also her idea to add a section of the new environmental law in China which came out this April/May. Some say the new law can really protect the environment while others say it will be another decoration. She wrote a paragraph about it, and that was her own idea. Originally [the study planned to] talk about the process, using examples of LA and London in the 1950s, their most polluted time, and Tokyo in 1960s. But she could not find much [on Tokyo in 1960s] so we gave up on that.

During multiple interviews throughout the quarter, both Tina and her professor showed satisfaction towards the working pattern they developed for the independent study. They both seemed happy about the arrangement that Tina would write and submit a new section she had completed before the meeting, and the professor would read through it before their meeting. Then they set up a regular time to meet for an hour every two weeks to discuss the important aspects of the new portion. The professor was impressed that Tina "submitted things on time,

was receptive to feedback, and also had her own ideas.” Tina appreciated the professor’s timely feedback, in-depth knowledge, as well as the references he recommended that she use. Thanks to the mutually-agreed-upon working pattern and smooth interaction they developed together, the independent study turned out to be a success. Tina commented on and rated her final product for the independent study:

The article direction I have changed three times and developed from 20 pages to 41 pages by accident. In the beginning I listed three topics from my three courses, synthesizing all the knowledge from each: the environment, economics, politics and cultural aspects. At first I want to develop some equipment to deal with the polluted air, then I added many more aspects, like population and development: mortality rate, environmental history in China, U.K., U.S. If the full score is 10, I will give myself eight. In the independent study article, I cited more than 30 sources from journal articles in and out of Chinese, including an American view of China and a Chinese view of the American’s environment situation (translated from Chinese).

She continued to say that her most significant accomplishment for the quarter was to learn how to conduct a research project. She enjoyed probing topics to great depth, “from the whole large view aspect to a part of that aspect, to a little point that is very deep.” She also liked to see the connections between economics and the environment. Tina particularly enjoyed the positive working relationship with the professor and the support he provided, which assisted her not only in this independent study but in developing skills which would benefit her for the rest of her academic future. Lastly, Tina emphasized that her confidence improved throughout this independent study:

At the beginning of the quarter when I thought about independent study, I thought it would be too hard to be practical. But I really wanted to learn from that professor, to do research on one question, one that I am also interested in, such as the environment. He is so knowledgeable! I did not study that hard in my senior high school, I came here and practiced, I reached a level that I did not know that I could. I think encouragement is very important and I did very well in my exams. (translated from Chinese)

The professor recognized Tina’s good work in the independent study by giving her a 4.0 as the final grade, something he does not do that often. The professor commented that “she

finished it, it was a long paper, one of the longer ones. It was very good...She took on an important question, [integrating] different kinds of resources, incorporating information into her argument, [demonstrating] pretty well writing, as well as making some nice interesting comments. For example, she said most people in Beijing talk about pm 2.5, while few know what that stands for.” The professor further explained his standard of giving grades and their working relationship:

I gave the grade just for the paper not based on the effort. She can think for herself. During the learning process she did some interesting things. Her father grew up in the countryside, she shared stories from her grandmother. In a class, [there was] no opportunity to turn in a paper draft [since it requires] too much time from me. She still needs a little help, like during this quarter where we scheduled meetings, we talked and arranged it ahead of time.... I talked to her every two weeks, for 6 meetings, one hour per time. She became a bit more familiar with me. Chinese students are a bit intimidated by the status differences, but she also emailed me 2-3 times, knows me a bit [more now].

As a result of her effort on this independent study paper, as well as the positive working relationship she developed, the professor offered to write Tina letters of recommendation if she planned to apply for a master’s degree program in the future. Tina greatly appreciated the professor’s offer. She told me “the independent advisor said that if I want to apply for a Ph.D. program, he might not write me the recommendation letter since I am not there yet, but if I want to apply for a Master’s degree, he will surely do that.”

Besides the offer to write the letter, the professor also sincerely recommended good master’s programs for Tina to consider that are not only at very competitive universities in the U.S., but also would be a good fit for her background, interests, personality, and academic potential. For example, the professor pointed out that Tina is “more practical-minded rather than an intellectual,” therefore she needs “breadth rather than depth.” Even though the professor believed a Ph.D. program “is not too far off for her,” he encouraged her to get more preparation and training by completing an MA program. He believed that “she can do that. She surely has

that ability [for the MA degree, but] not the personality for a PhD, [program which requires a] desire to endure a lot, to overlook pressures and humiliation and discouragement.” Without the degree of one-on-one time working together on the independent study, the professor could not have understood Tina’s skills and personality enough to make and give the honest assessment of her current long-term capabilities.

## Outlier: Plagiarism

Plagiarism was not a common theme that I identified among the participants. However, since it is a serious issue and impacted one of the student participants in a very unpleasant way, I feel it is worth mentioning as an outlier.

Cathy listed plagiarism as one of her academic challenges, and sometimes she felt it was really hard to tell what actually would be considered plagiarism. She said that

Sometimes I feel I just want to get some ideas from other authors/text, but they thought it is cheating, but I did not. You know in China, people, teachers... it is not a big issue to get people’s ideas. Sometimes you quote, quote correctly. But here, I just made [a mistake] once, I experienced once. The teacher thought I was cheating, but actually I was not. Info 101 course, it was with a topic about “is Facebook good or bad,” I wrote the first two reasons why Facebook is bad stuff but I don’t know how to get the 3rd idea, so I searched on Google for what other people thought. I just get his idea and put in my essays. I used my own words but there were some of his words, but just a few words. Just a few of them to explain what I wanted to say. The professor she said it was cheating, and I said it was not, she gave me a zero for it. She said I should write all the stuff using my own words. I did not put the author’s name. It is allowed to use other’s ideas. I used just two sentences-original sentences of his. I should quote them right? Nobody in the class told me what plagiarism is, the TA/professors just said “no plagiarism” in the class, without explaining what it is. If I knew it is bad, I wouldn't do it.

Cathy was visibly shaking when she told me about this experience, and she emphasized that she had only used “a few,” “very few words” from the author online, and she had not known that what she did was considered plagiarism. She also said vey sincerely that she would definitely not have done it had she known what she did was considered plagiarism. It was just

that nobody had explained it to her clearly, and she had no idea she was making a serious mistake related to her academic integrity, which resulted in a zero on that assignment she had submitted and ultimately a much lower grade for that course than she had expected, dragging her GPA down. She tried very hard to persuade me that she did not mean to do anything that was cheating and dishonest. She looked rather helpless and innocent when she told this story. I continued to ask, what was the lesson she learned from that experience, and if there was anything she would like to say about that incident, Cathy paused a while and said slowly,

I will never copy and paste anything, I will write my stuff. I hope that, they should tell me earlier, specifically what is plagiarism, what I thought cheating is just pasting the whole essay/stuff not two sentences, That is too harsh, too strict. I just feel sad about [the plagiarism]. First time [students] hear this word, [they] may not know what it means. That is the most embarrassing stuff happened to me.

I sensed from Cathy's description how deeply this incident had affected her. She just wished someone would have told her clearly what plagiarism was and what behavior would be considered plagiarism at a university in the U.S. Using writers' words without appropriate citation is considered academic misconduct and dishonesty on North American campuses. However, the definition of "plagiarism" varies greatly across cultures. As Pennycook (1996) asserts, the way ownership is understood within the U.S. context needs to be seen as a very particular cultural and historical development, which differs greatly from the Chinese context. In China, borrowing others' ideas in one's own writing is encouraged, while the strict rules of citation, quotation, and the means of giving credit to authors have not been adequately emphasized or strongly addressed. Cultures influence writing not only in the rhetorical organization of language (e.g., Cahill, 2003; Kaplan, 1972; Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Mohan & Lo, 1985), but in the definition of plagiarism.

It is unfair to assume that students from different cultures and educational backgrounds know exactly what the meaning and standard of plagiarism is on North American campuses. Assuming everyone has a full understanding of what constitutes plagiarism is evidence of a lack of understanding of the impact of international students' different backgrounds and specific situations. As students might lack prior training and experience dealing with plagiarism, it is likely that they will make this type of mistake even though they did not mean to violate the rules. Furthermore, for students with limited English and basic vocabulary, the word "plagiarism" is complicated and infrequently encountered. Some English learners might come across it for the first time without fully understanding the meaning of this word, let alone knowing how to follow the rules associated with no plagiarism in their writings.

Even though severe consequences such as giving a zero on an assignment and reducing a students' grade presumably make students realize the importance of the no plagiarism policy, as well as push them to obey this academic regulation, it still may be considered harsh and unfair. The diminishing of student confidence and their negative feelings associated with incidents of plagiarism could influence them for a long period. Such was the case when Cathy told the story; her whole body shook and her voice cracked while reliving the incident. She listed her experience with plagiarism as "the most embarrassing stuff" that has happened to her. It was hard to believe her actions had been intentional. She had not intended to do anything wrong, she had only been guilty of a lack of knowledge and awareness of the rules and the consequences of violating them.

Considering the negative impact on students who are just unaware, it is strongly encouraged that professors and TAs give clear explanations and examples of plagiarism in their classes, especially to students with different cultural and educational background, instead of

simply punishing students after the fact. No matter whether the course subject is related to English writing or other major disciplines, background information and examples of plagiarism should be provided for students to learn from at the start of the course. In that way, students have sufficient understanding and enough exposure to this terminology, so that they can pay enough attention to avoid this in their writing. Students should not be punished for their misbehavior if they were not adequately informed what is and is not allowed in the classroom. They should not be punished for not knowing academic regulations if those rules were not explained clearly and carefully.

Fortunately, in some of classes that I observed, some of the TAs and professors were providing detailed explanations of plagiarism. For example, the TA for Chrissy's Psychology class and the instructor for Tom's ENGL 131 class explained the concept of plagiarism very clearly, gave a handout on plagiarism to students, and also provided several examples to help student understand. I am by no means suggesting that instructors have to do it in every single class, especially if the students are mostly upper-level undergraduates, but for the lower-level undergraduates and also students in Introductory Academic Writing classes, giving detailed explanations and examples of plagiarism will be helpful and necessary.

In addition, I recommend there should be mandatory and detailed workshops about academic rules for international students during their orientations to North American higher education system.

## Conclusion

Researching the six student participants' various academic behaviors and reading their academic stories, it becomes clear that there are aspects of their academic behaviors (such as whether they talk in class and how they interact with their classmates) where the range of

personality differences among the Chinese students is just as great as among American students. These Chinese students showed a wide disparity in their levels for participation in class and their interaction with professors, TAs, and classmates, just as much as the disparity among American students, ranging from the most talkative to the quietest. Because the group is so diverse, one can not simply generalize or stereotype these student participants although they come from the same country. Even behaviors which may look similar at first glance (such as not asking questions in class, or choosing to attend the instructor's office hours) may stem from quite different motivations. These behaviors turn out to be condition/situation-based and not to lend themselves to easy generalization.

By contrast, there are other areas where cultural differences can be seen to play a significant role, such as in the case of understanding culturally specific jokes and topics, and the concept of plagiarism. At times cultural differences are important for understanding Chinese students' adaptations, and at other times they are not, for example, when factors like personality prevail. There is no easy yardstick for knowing when to attribute student differences to culture and when to acknowledge individual differences. The findings of this chapter recommend caution. It is too easy to fall into cultural stereotypes when thinking about quiet Chinese students, when we see so clearly that temperament and experience can have such large effects. At the same time, it is also too easy to overlook the cultural importance of growing up with different academic customs and norms.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Beyond Classrooms**

The previous chapter focused on the student participants' academic behavior in the classroom and their explanations for those behaviors, for example, their attitudes towards educational differences between China and the U.S. and their interactions with instructors and classmates. The majority of those academic behaviors were identified through observation. This chapter focuses on themes that were not necessarily observable in a classroom setting, but rather surfaced during interviews and informal discussions. These themes will be presented in three sections in this chapter.

The first section focuses on factors that significantly influenced student participants. They mentioned these factors repeatedly and were impacted significantly by these factors, such as past educational experiences, previous extra-curricular activities, and family influences.

The next section summarizes student participants' giving back to the community via different means. Though those behaviors were not observed in the class by instructors and TAs, nor would most of those behaviors impact their grades, the student participants felt that those activities were meaningful and demonstrated a full picture of who they truly are. Consequently, it is important to include this information to fully understand the student participants. An important message is that student participants not only utilized resources and support from others, but also tried to contribute with their efforts and give back to the community. This is an aspect of international student life that has remained largely invisible in previous studies. Student participants showed a different degree of involvement in volunteering activities and giving back to communities; the comparison demonstrates the variety of their behaviors and reasons or

motivations behind them. Quotations from interviews explained not only what students had done, but also why they chose to do so and what outcomes they expected from those activities.

Finally, the third section explicates students' changes and their understanding of their identities over time, through the tool of narrative. Students shared their understanding of where they see themselves now, what paths they have gone through, and what future they foresee. Students' expression of their own identity, their reflections over learning in the U.S., and important changes they recognized in themselves show the interactive, generative relation between identity and learning. Quotations from interviews throughout the quarter are used to help exhibit students' identities over time.

## Significant factors

### Previous experiences

Some students reflected that their previous learning experience and knowledge have shaped the way they behaved in the U.S. Though it is likely that all student participants experience knowledge and experience transfer of some kind, the following descriptions were the ones made explicitly by students during interviews.

#### Shirley's high school experience in Singapore

When I first met Shirley before she formally agreed to participate in the study, we chatted casually in the university café. We started using Chinese but then changed to English, and it seemed very natural and spontaneous for her to switch. She seemed to be quite fluent and comfortable in expressing herself in English, and when she talks, she uses a lot of description and gestures. She has an open attitude when talking, and she even laughed at herself and joked that she always talks too much.

Unlike other participants in the study, Shirley studied abroad during high school. She spent three-years in Singapore at an international high school starting in grade 10, where everything was taught in English. During her three years in Singapore, she had no choice but to use English every day in her study and daily life. Shirley admitted that she had a hard time in the beginning when studying in Singapore.

I was actually freaked out and actually frustrated for my first month in Singapore. I don't even understand the math. That is really really frustrating. For math, I know I am not in a strong part even in China; but in Singapore, I did not even understand the wording of problems. The first year in Singapore, I don't even understand math.

However, she also reflected "In Singapore, I was not fearless. I thought it is not different not far from China." Through great effort, Shirley was able to make the transition from China to Singapore. Since she had to use English intensively during high school, her listening and speaking skills became quite good. Shirley commented on the influence of studying in Singapore on her English:

It helps me in listening and speaking. It is not saying that I can speak very well, but I am not afraid of speaking. I know it is not my first language. So I don't care about, whether something I said wrong, it is just for my level, I would say that comparing to English people, I am still in primary school.

I was freaked out when the first day in Singapore, because I still need to learn vocabulary to describe things more precisely. To a limited extend, I just learned basic sayings, no more than 1000 English word before I went to Singapore, I can talk and my listening it's okay. But it is not I don't have to think about what I have to say. Before, I need to prepare what I am going to talk four/five minutes before I met my teacher, comparing to native speakers and now I don't have to do it. The international school helps me in learning and speaking. I'm not afraid of speaking. It's not my first language, but I don't care.

In addition to not being afraid of making mistakes in speaking, Shirley also found she was able to write in English very quickly, without thinking too much about how to organize her meaning in Chinese first and then translating the meaning between the two languages. She later

noticed that some of her Chinese friends who did not study overseas during high school needed much longer to write compared to her.

Besides her proficiency in English, Shirley also actively made use of her familiarity with a foreign educational system when she came to the U.S. to study. She felt “Transitioning now is easier and there is no real big difference [between Singapore and the U.S].” Some things, such as studying in English, the quarter system and science class, she described as “no big difference. I studied in an international school. Like this quarter I have math, English, and chemistry, back to Singapore, I had a quarter like the same, in English, math, and chemistry.”

At the same time, she tried to compare cultural differences between Singapore and the U.S.

In Singapore, they still have Asian thoughts. If I did something really Asian, it would not be that weird. Like my Western, Canadian teacher, they had to understand Asian thoughts. Here, if I do something really Asian, like I want 4.0 in all my classes, it is weird, and sometimes difficult for Americans [to understand], and especially for my roommate, she would say, well, that is typical Chinese and typical Asian, like everything perfect.

She also discovered higher academic requirements and a more demanding study schedule in the U.S. university compared to high school in Singapore, which she summarize as a “speed up” to what she had gotten used to:

In English, I understand the genre which she told in class, but is more deep here compared to high school. I know the way to do essays, to do citation, to do research for my essays. I actually did one of the papers related to the book “The Children of Man” in comparative literature. I learned those already in high school. Here make me feel “speed up”, everything, because it was a slightly longer semester in Singapore, slightly longer than this, I still do not get used to it that 1st day of the quarter I have to go to library to finish my homework, that is not fun. And I have not done that in Singapore. In Singapore I had three classes just like here, but I feel really busy after class here, comparing to there.

Because of her high school experience in Singapore, Shirley was more proficient in her English skills compared to many of her Chinese peers, and this helped her academic study in the

U.S. What's more, her exposure to an English-only environment, her experience in English essays, the quarter systems, and interacting with Western teachers could be transferred to her study in the U.S. From the above quote, one can tell that Shirley made connections and comparisons between her first overseas educational experience in Singapore to her current one, studying in the U.S., trying to build on her previous learning experiences and also prepare for the cultural and academic differences.

#### Chrissy's sport and dancing experience

Chrissy used to be a student athlete and dancer, she transferred her experience of training hard and never giving up to her academic learning in the U.S. When she encountered difficulties and thought she might want to give up, she would remind herself of the hard training she went through and miles of running she thought she could not do but was able to finish.

She once shared a story from her running training when she was young. Her group was required to finish a training of 30 laps which she thought impossible to finish. As they were running, she started to feel like giving up, but no one in her group was quitting so she had to stick with the group and keep running. At one point, she even felt as though she would throw up. She kept running, then she felt that her brain did not control her legs, and she was just like a robot that kept running. Chrissy only remembered her coach yelling loudly, "faster," "keep up," "hang in there," "only 5 laps left," etc. In the end, she was able to finish running the 30 laps with her team. Afterward, she sat on the ground for what felt like "forever" and her legs felt sore for a few days, but after that experience, she told herself no matter what happened to her and how much she wanted to give up, if she could finish the 30 laps which she thought impossible, she would also be able to conquer those challenges and difficulties. Chrissy transferred her experiences from being a student athlete to her academic learning in the U.S. She established the

habit to keeping trying and not giving up in all aspects of her life. When she wrote her very first ENGL 131 essays, when she had a hard time understanding professors' lessons, when she prepared for the Writing Skills Assessment exams for the Business School admission several times, she demonstrated her persistence and endurance again and again. And as a result, she conquered all the challenges she has faced.

Another interesting observation worth mentioning is that because of her dancing experience, Chrissy formed a habit of standing/sitting in the very front of class close to the instructor, where she could see most clearly and listen intently. Though it started as a dancing habit for her so she could better observe the instructor and be the most noticed dancer by the instructor for the purpose of having her moves corrected. Chrissy maintained that habit and always sat in the very front and center of the classroom, no matter what class she took or how large the classroom was. Chrissy explained her behavior:

I always sit in the front, I have to sit in front, in dancing I have to stand close to the instructor. This is a habit I got from my dance class. I started the dancing class when I was very little, I have to stand in a place that is closest to the dance instructor, everyone was doing that, when I was in dancing class as a little girl, those who wanted to be a better dancers, people would rush to get the closest spot, show up early to get it. I feel comfortable, making me concentrate more. I don't even sit in the back. Because I communicate with him [the instructor] no matter how big the class size is.

Her words explained the reason behind what I observed about her behavior in class, where she was always the one who sat in the middle of the first row, nodded frequently at what instructors said, trying to maintain eye contact, in addition to raising her hand to answer questions frequently. She transferred the habit she formed from dancing at an early age to her academic life in the U.S.

Tina's habit and comfort zone

A comparison can be drawn based on the habit of sitting in the front of the class between Chrissy and another student participant, Tina, who also preferred to sit in the front row. Tina, however, had some different reasons for doing that.

It is personal preference. One reason is that my eyeglasses are not in the right degree, so sitting in the front would help me see the whiteboard/blackboard clearly. Another reason is that, sitting close to the professor makes me consistently focusing on the material, rather than distracted by phone or other students.

When I am listening to lectures, almost nothing can distract me unless I am bored by the professor's talk. I am also a good note-taker, which helps me a lot when preparing for exams and papers. My suggestion is to sit in front of the professor, so that you can listen to the professor very carefully with every single detail they mentioned in lecture. What's more, when you are sitting in the back, all your classmates may be a potential distraction.

Tina used the word “habit” and “comfort zone” to explain her behaviors. Though she did not specify during which period of her learning she started to form those habits, they seemed to relate to her previous learning experience that also shaped her current learning skills. With regards to her comfort zone, Tina gave the example and explained reasons she did not speak up very frequently in class:

Normally I don't like to answer questions in a class that is larger than 30 people. To some extent it is because I don't think I know the answer; plus, I prefer to stay in my comfort zone when it is the first time to meet someone or take some class.

She also used the word “habit” to explain why she would actively talk to a girl and sit next to her even though they did not know each other:

It was the first time I have ever see her. But I feel pretty comfortable talking with her. My habit in a new class is to talk to a person actively, which is also a way to make friends. During our group discussion, some of her responses to the professor's questions are quite impressed, which I personally learned a lot.

Out of a similar habit and comfort zone, Tina preferred to talk to female students rather than male students:

Comfort zone again. Most of my friends in the university are girls. This makes me more likely to have conversations with girls if possible. I know this is a problem I have to deal

with, but I just can't at this stage. Besides, I am kinda of afraid I cannot understand what he is talking about, so I didn't talk with him anything beyond that question [that the male student asked her]. I always feel guilty and self-condemned when situations like this happened to me.

## Students' personalities

When some student participants explained their behaviors, they used their personalities as part of the reason why they behaved the way they did. Their expressions included “I was born this way,” “this is who I am,” “this part of me and my personality,” and so on. Only students who explicitly attributed their personalities and characteristics to their behaviors are represented here. Others who might have been influenced by their personalities but did not explicitly mention those factors are not included in this section.

### Chrissy: Ride a horse instead of being drawn by the horse

Chrissy seemed to become very comfortable with the American educational system, even though she described her academic record in China as poor and she did not do well in high school in China. Besides her identity as a student, she was also a writer who started to write at a young age and had published several of her articles. As a writer, she published her stories about studying in the U.S. in books and magazines in China, her stories about working hard to fit in inspired many readers and their parents. According to her, many wrote her letters asking for suggestions, advice, and her opinions. A lot of questions focused on her personality characteristics, which are persistent, hard-working, not afraid of making mistakes, always willing to try, and optimistic, to name just a few.

Many people wrote me long mails/emails asking how to become my personality. I never replied. It is just my personality that luckily fit into the culture, the culture appreciated my personality. But it is not my personality is good or not. If personalities like me makes someone unhappy, then do not have personality like mine.

She also explained that she did things according to her feelings, which helped explain why she took a leave from school and then returned:

I'm the kind of person go with the feelings, it doesn't mean that I am a bad student you have a lot of things to consider. If school is a better place for you to be, go to school...

You are what your experience. Before I took a break I found my life was like, I do reading, I wanted to go to the team meetings, everything pushed me, like a horse keep running and I am being drawn by it. But it is not comfortable, people put things in my hand, I'm not becoming what I want to, but I have to, I need to. I don't see myself being in school if I don't enjoy it, I know that there are so many fun things, I can't even control [what is happening], what's the point to study in school? You should ride the horse, ride at your own pace, not be drawn by the horse. And I am riding the horse, I do not know how much longer I will [take to] finish school.

Chrissy attributed her eagerness to ask questions in class and communicate with professors to her personality:

When I was in China, I got accustomed to this: as long as I have questions I ask, I keep asking, asking, asking, that just who I am... I am always like this... That just is who I am. I ask tons of questions in every single class, and I go to office hour to talk to instructor for every course.

She also attributed her habit of previewing the class material to her personality:

I have to do preview before go to class. I have to read through all the pages in order to know what is going on during the lecture. And I spent a hell lot of time on the reading. Always. This just who I am, my personality makes me do all these, not only for my academic, but things like writing, dancing, anything I do I prepare in advance, I am this type of person.

Besides, Chrissy attributed her confident personality in driving her to not be afraid to try new things or make mistakes:

I am a very confident person, I feel my confidence might come from other aspects of my life. Generally I am a very confident person, I don't think things in that way: am I feel embarrassed speaking in front of people, ashamed when I say something wrong, or that people will look down upon me.

Chrissy described herself as someone who wanted to control her own life, make her own decisions, do things because she wanted to rather than because she had to. Throughout all our

interviews and conversations, she never hid her desire to be a better person and her willingness to become one. It seemed to be a part of her nature to survive, then thrive no matter how new or how difficult the environment would be. She seemed to never be satisfied with where she was and what she has achieved, but set herself higher goals for her next step and prepared to move on.

My definition of success: (are you successful?) No, you would never be successful. I feel that people think I'm successful, I know what is behind it, and the reason why they think I am successful is because they are standing in different places. They were taking things for sure. I don't even think about it, but I know there's always room to improve, and think there's a lot of things...

How you perceive your experience? Everyone can choose but they don't chose it. Your experience are who you are. None of the experience is bad. I make myself better to be one of the better person. I have a friend who is studying in UCLA who also write articles. He said "I drive a used car, I don't use an iPhone, but I got into UCLA, and I have a 3.8 GPA." I don't want myself to be 99%, I am on my way to be 1%. 1% elite and 99% the rest. All depend on you. I am going to somewhere. I choose on the way to be 1%.

As a researcher, I was moved by her attitude of trying hard to survive, then thrive, and always looking for improvement and becoming a better person. I believe those qualities are part of who she is as an individual and a student, and these characteristics contribute to her academic success and socialization in the U.S.

Shirley: I just don't want to [speak up in class]

Shirley usually did not express her opinions much in class, nor would she raise her hand to ask questions in class. She said that she would only speak if she had to, and it is the same case for her both in her home country and abroad. She attributed this to a part of her personality: "I just don't want to, even if it was in my first language."

Shirley continued to emphasize that she just did not feel comfortable speaking in front of other people because she did not like to be watched. "I will be very nervous and not comfortable.

Language problems exists but it is only a minor issue not a major issue. I don't like other people looking at me." (Translated from Chinese) Shirley sometimes wished she could be invisible in the classroom, so that people could only hear her voice but no one could see her or stare at her. She attributed her nervousness with speaking in front of people as her own problem, and not a language problem.

However, Shirley reflected that though she could be negative at times, she had been working on being more positive. She believed that becoming more positive would help her in her life in the U.S.

I am very tired just as anybody else, but I can't be negative, because if I am negative, people around me will be even more negative. My own mood will influence me, and if I am pessimistic, I will become negative. I see things from a negative view, I am pretty accurate in my own judgment. I am sarcastic towards myself. I think being positive is not bad at all, but I feel if I am negative, I would feel unhappy. It is not a competition of who has less negativity. (Translated from Chinese)

She also tried to bring this positive outlook to evaluation of her English learning. The following is how she viewed the process of her English improvement over time:

With time going on, things will be better. I have written in English for three years and I have to write English composition. It used to take very long. My language now is more precise, and I have experienced a process of transition. My head teacher in my senior year of high school once told me it took seven years to fully master a foreign language. I have already had four years, three years in Singapore and one year in the U.S., then I will need three more. Now if I speak English with my friends back home, I am already more confident and calm. I believe the cumulative changes in quantity will lead to the changes in the quality. Now I can listen better, no matter if it is a soap opera or lectures in major courses. I just sometimes do not want to listen to the chemistry terminologies. I have been watching the TV show *Doctor* since senior high, it involved many biology and chemistry terminologies. I want to know a bit more than other people just in case. (Translated from Chinese)

#### Tom: I am a bit shy

Unlike Chrissy who is very persistent and seldom gives up, Tom admitted that he is not persistent. He explained with some embarrassment:

I am not persistent. In the beginning of the quarter during the first week, I made a goal for myself that I will work very hard, not to play video games and not to watch animations. I wanted to read all the books and commit to that for a quarter. I felt a sense of satisfaction when I did so in the first few days, but then I lacked motivation. After I finished an article I wanted to relax, that was a very bad start... Something I felt very regretful that I did not keep my original promise to myself. I planned to go swimming three or four days a week, but I only did that for a week. I'm just too lazy! (Translated from Chinese)

Similar to Shirley, Tom also did not speak up much in class, and he partly attributed it to his shy personality. He explained

I am a little shy, I am very passive in friendships. During a discussion, I always listen to them and talk not that much... I think the pair discussion is good for me. In fact I do enjoy the discussion if I could understand my partner clearly. Unfortunately that rarely happens...

He also said talking in front of a lot of people makes him nervous, maybe he was afraid of making mistakes, such as pronunciation mistakes. When he hesitated, deciding if he should speak up or not, he often lost the opportunity:

There was one thing that made me a little sad. During the English class on Thursday, we read a sample of our short assignment 3 and discussed it to answer several questions. However, I didn't say even a single word in the discussion! This also happened once before... Maybe because the questions were easy and my partners just kept talking really quickly, so they said everything I wanted to say ahead of me. In fact, towards the end of the discussion, I could have said something if I hadn't hesitated to do so...

Tom hesitated before making commitments. Besides the aforementioned example where he had hesitated and as a result had missed the chance to speak up and contribute to the group discussion, Tom told me several times that he would hesitate and think over and over before he committed to do many things. He summarized it as his being “scared to try new things” was part of his personality. For example, he wanted to apply and become part of my research project, but he was afraid (he found it hard to explain what exactly he was afraid of), he debated with himself for a while before he deciding to contact me about participating in the research. Another time he saw a dinner opportunity with American students, with whom he could speak English and

Chinese. He really wanted to go, but he was also afraid of not fitting in, so he postponed making a decision for a day, deciding at the last minute to participate in the event. “It ended up really well, I don’t know what I was afraid of, but before, I really hesitated to join in the activities and tried to drop it once, twice, until the last minute I think I should face it. I don’t know why exactly I behaved this way, but it is just a part of me and who I am,” (translated from Chinese) Tom explained.

Tom has realized his weakness and is actively trying to work around it. He became aware of “push myself to become brave” and he felt that he had become braver than he was before. For example, even though he is shy, at times he purposely pushes himself to participate in some social events and extracurricular activities, such as the fencing club. Tom seems to understand himself and his tendency for hesitating and his fear of new situations, so he is working to overcome these issues and take action, such as when he applied to be a participant of this study, as well as showing up at the dinner social event. Though he did not push himself all of the time, he had started to do some and as a result had moved himself a bit further down the continuum than where he used to be.

Tom also developed some strategies to compensate for his personality. For instance, he was nervous when speaking in front of people, including doing presentations, so he started to prepare in advance and write down exactly what he would say, then memorized it.

I feel like if I can fully prepare for the presentation, then speaking English in front of the class became not so challenging. I wrote word-by-word what I am going to say in the presentation and it was helpful. After I finished writing, I recorded myself and listened to it again and again. I memorize almost all the words that I will say in the presentation. When I gave the presentation it was still challenging as I was nervous. When I am on the stage and talk, I focus on the memory I just talk I don't look at anybody. (Translated from Chinese)

He also tried to use his imagination to gain more strength and think less of other people's opinions of him:

What I am scared of is ridicule from other people and them making fun of me. I found a great method to deal with it. I just imagine that they are just jealous of me and then I have a sense of superiority. For example, I went to fencing and I was embarrassed to tell other people. I just think he/she is jealous because I have the courage to participate and then they are just very evil to laugh at me, so my imagination in my brain helps me cope with the situation. I am a sensitive person so I have to control my thoughts to make up for other people's hurtful words, whatever they say I try not to care. (Translated from Chinese)

#### Cathy: Personality's influence on my study habits and life

When explaining the way she did things, Cathy was someone used the word "personality" frequently as one of the influences. She openly claimed that her personality influenced her study habits and life in general. For example, she did not network with American students often, even though she believed it would be beneficial for her to do so. She said, "For my personality, I do not integrate with American society that well, I prefer a Chinese style. I can be quiet at times and noisy at others, but I don't show my noisy part until my laughing point is reached." (Translated from Chinese)

On the other hand, Cathy also found positive energy in her personality, the part which made her willing to put pressure on herself to do things well:

One of my characteristics, I think, is how I have positive energy, I have the desire to fight, it is like fuel. In my heart I feel some sense of achievement. There is a Chinese saying, that kids who grow up in the family pool understand things earlier. I grew up with no worries about food and clothing, without much pressure on me. But I want to give myself pressure, so I will try hard when I am young, and in five years I will have accomplished a lot. I frequently reflect on myself and then think about my reflection to improve. When I do one thing, I want to do it well. (Translated from Chinese)

Cathy believed if she committed to do something, she could make it happen. She thought that if she did not get a good result it was because she did not believe those things were worth

doing, therefore she did not give them her best effort. Conversely, for those things that she was seriously committed to, such as dancing and exercise, she dedicated herself to them and practiced very regularly and seldom broke her routine. These were the examples she listed to demonstrate how she could commit to do something really well if she really wanted to.

## Parental Influence

Among the six participants, Shirley was the only student participant who frequently mentioned the influence of her parents. During the interviews, she would from time to time attribute her behavior to her parents' influence. Additionally, she also had great admiration towards her mother, who she had set as her role model with one of her goals to achieve the same type of success as her mother, which she thought would be hard to do.

Shirley attributed her lack of social personality to her parents' influence.

I have been influenced a lot by my parents and they do not like to gather together with their classmates, no matter if an elementary school, middle school or university classmates' gathering. They are low key people... I really think relationships and friends come from destiny and fate, one can live without anyone. I am definitely influenced by my parents and they do not socialize a lot. I think this earth will always rotate, no matter who is here or not here. I am a little bit isolated... My little bit of "isolation" is inherited from my parents who never join their classmates' gathering. (Translated from Chinese)

Partly due to her parents' influence, Shirley was not very sociable, nor did she actively reach out to make American friends; as a result, she did not have many American friends. Most friends she hung out with were not only Chinese, but also from her hometown. They got to know each other through QQ, an online chatting tool. Students from her hometown going to this university created an online chat room, and she became friends with those students, largely because of their shared background and culture. Shirley shared her feeling towards this issue:

I don't feel pitiful that I don't make many American friends, I am satisfied with my current situation. If we are destined to know each other, we will definitely know each other in one way or another. I am not a party animal. In the U.S., people's relationships

are simple and you don't think that you have to win over someone, the university does not put pressure on you. (Translated from Chinese)

In addition, Shirley's plan to pursue a Ph.D. degree in the future was also strongly influenced by her parents:

Why not (go for a Ph.D.)? The reason why the answer may be yes is that my parents don't expect me to earn money to support them, they just want me to learn a lot. In regards to the Ph.D., not everyone pursues a Ph.D. If I can accomplish something special like this for myself, if I can learn more things, that is not bad at all. (Translated from Chinese)

Shirley especially held admiration towards her mother. She explicitly admitted that.

I have been influenced a lot by my mom: I chose to study science, the way I talk, the ways I treat things are all related to my mother. My mother does not necessarily want me to become too mature, just not so naive, while keeping a pure view towards the world. She just does not want me to do stupid things. (Translated from Chinese)

She listened closely to her mother, asked her mother for suggestions when encountering situations in the U.S., and would take her mother's advice seriously. For example, she said that she enjoyed a happy life in the U.S. even though her GPA was in the middle range "because my mother said I don't need to learn all that well." Shirley also did not feel too negatively about her limited number of close friends because her mother told her that not everyone can become her friend in this world. If they have common interests and feel good to be with each other, then they will become friends. If not, they may not become friends.

Shirley planned to declare a major similar to her mother's.

Next year I will try to apply for the biochemistry major. It will be easy to find a job like my mom's, she is in the field of biochemistry working for a pharmaceutical company. Her work is related to blood testing, she is really busy. (Translated from Chinese)

Based on the frequency of mentioning her parents and the specific details Shirley provided, one can ascertain that her parents', especially her mother's influence has been a significant factor responsible for Shirley's studying in the U.S. and her attitude towards life and

her future. Shirley's case was unique among the six student participants, since the other five students mentioned their parents much less frequently. For example, Tina explicitly referred to her parents in influencing her behaviors once, saying "I have always been a confident person because of my parents. They always encourage me, they say 'you did a good job' and 'you are a super star in class.' Parents are very important, my parents are middle class and intellectuals." While the other five student participants still mentioned whether the choice to study in the U.S. was mainly their parents' or their own, the frequency of their mentioning their behavior as their parents' decision was much less. This finding contrasts with the stereotype of Chinese students as strictly following their parents' wishes rather than their own.

#### Strategies for Adapting to the University

The student participants experienced the process of academic socialization at an individual pace, moving down the road of transforming themselves from outsiders to insiders in specific academic communities. Along the journey, they employed different strategies. For example, some actively searched for available resources on campus, such as in Chrissy's case, where she had proactively used existed services and resources including the writing center, an undergraduate advisor, the departmental secretary, and her professors/TAs. She kept an open mind towards available resources for international students, for undergraduate students, for her home department's students, and so on.

Some student participants purposefully created their own support networks, such as Shirley who deliberately chose to befriend Chinese students who had higher GPAs than hers so that she could learn from and get help from her friends. Cathy had developed sister-like friendships with girls in her dancing group. Tina maintained the adviser/advising relationship

with her professors beyond just one class or one quarter, she purposefully looked for faculty in her field who were senior and borrowed from their experiences and expertise to serve her in her academic study and personal life.

Conversely, some students decided to depend on themselves, without asking for much outside help. For instance, Johnny chose to work independently on his coursework and some of the extracurricular activities, even though he was aware of available campus resources he could use. Instead, he embraced the internet as a primary tool for research and information he needed and to identify lectures he was interested in attending. He wanted to develop his independence and problem-solving skills since he believed those skills were essential to his studies and future success. Therefore, he felt he should improve on those skills sooner rather than later. Tom chose to read his textbook and solve the problem sets on his own most of the time, instead of going to the professor/TA's office hours, partially because he would get nervous in front of the professors, but also because of the time he would invest in commuting back and forth to their offices.

One should bear in mind that these students also used several/multiple strategies according to their needs and specific situations. For example, Tom chose to work on his own most of the time, but when his homework would be due and there was no class scheduled before the due date, he would then go to a professor's office hour to ask questions. Also, although Tina purposefully built up her relationship with senior professors who could serve as her mentors, she was also very interested in on-campus resources. She listened to some of her instructors' suggestion about using the resources at the writing center, and she also used the services at the International Student Service Center. There might be some dominant strategies that student participants choose to adopt, however, there was not an exclusive connection between student

and strategy rather students made conscious choices of which strategy to use dependent on the situation and circumstances.

## Giving back to the community

Though these student participants employed different strategies, they all demonstrated an interest in giving back to the community to different degrees. They did this in mainly two ways: volunteering and acting as a resource.

### Volunteer Work

Though these student participants employed different strategies as mentioned earlier, they all demonstrated an interest in giving back to the community to different degrees. One form of giving back was to participate in volunteering projects. For example, Johnny did very little related to education or scientific research during his freshman year, he decided to consciously change this situation since he found research interesting and he cared to contribute. Therefore, he did his own fact-finding about volunteer opportunities, and was able to volunteer in a local educational project he found. He spent about six hours per week taking buses to a local high school so he could help low-income students there apply for college admissions. He knew clearly that this volunteer work did not contribute to his major, neither would it improve his grades. Nevertheless, he was very proud to contribute to the local educational system as an international student. He felt that he should contribute his part in breaking the vicious cycle where underprivileged students who did not have access to higher education end up continuing to make lower incomes. He would not give up this volunteering opportunity even at the cost of his study time and his GPA.

The way he put it was “I will say if I have volunteer work, I will not stick to grades any more. I have tried to get more involved in the community, and not study for academics all the time.” One thing that is noteworthy is that Johnny came from a privileged background himself: he is from a middle-class family, his father is a senior engineer with a master’s degree and his mother is a press editor with a bachelor’s degree. It is thoughtful of him considering his family background and personal experience, to help the less privileged population in pursuing their opportunity for equal education. As an international student from China, Johnny has demonstrated his care for the people of different nationalities, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and background, even at the cost of sacrificing his own time and grades.

Similarly, Tina started her volunteer work during her freshman year. She participated in many different types of volunteer work and when she reflected on those experiences, she said that “I do have lots of volunteer experience, but they are very separate, not focused on one main goal or one main area. So that is what I want to improve on, and I still have time.” It showed that she had not only been volunteering, but also thought about what she wanted to achieve and what was still missing. Tina volunteered in the community helping prepare dishes in the kitchen which provided food for the poor. Later she volunteered for a non-profit organization in the city’s downtown area and had been doing this for four quarters by the time of this research project. Her responsibility was to serve as a math/reading teacher/tutor to help Chinese immigrant children after school. She would take the bus between downtown and the university twice a week, so she was devoting considerable time to this effort. She enjoyed this volunteer opportunity and felt that she had learned from the children she taught as well as helping them. Tina described her experience during this volunteer work:

I have been at a tutor in this organization downtown for four quarters. I help Chinese immigrants learn English and how to use the computer, and I have gotten to know the

Chinese students who are growing up here: what it looks like, what are their experiences, and usually they don't speak Chinese, they also feel proud of their cultural heritage. There are a lot of lovely children. Also I taught them how to do paper cutting, how to do some Chinese arts. I think no matter where you are if you want to learn things, you always can. (Translated from Chinese)

Besides these activities, Tina also helped during events hosted by an organization which aimed to promote Chinese language and culture in the U.S. She volunteered by working as an event coordinator for this group. So while these volunteer activities were very different, they all contributed to giving back to the local community.

Compared to Johnny and Tina, who dedicated a lot of time to volunteer work, Tom was still at the initial stage in developing this extracurricular activity. Tom was in his freshman year at the time we met for this research project. He admitted that he did not do much outside of the classroom, partially due to his shy personality. However, he was bold enough to ask my advice for taking part in volunteering work on campus. During the term, he pursued suggestions and some contacts I provided and later joined a mailing list of the same organization Tina was involved with, which aimed to promote Chinese language and culture in the U.S. He sometimes volunteered when the organization recruited for its events, such as a traditional music instrumental concert and the language proficiency competition. While he had not done that much so far, he was starting to think about giving back by volunteering and had started to take action by joining the mailing list and responding to requests for help.

Cathy had also been volunteering at a local Chinese radio station for a while, she DJed every Wednesday night. Cathy told me she enjoyed doing it not only because she was a communication major, so volunteering at the radio station was related to her background and field of study, but also because she felt it was a good channel to meet people and make friends.

She was able to combine her personal interests, her need for making friends and her willingness to give back to the local Chinese community with this volunteer work.

### Serving as a resource

Another way of giving back is to serve as a resource for fellow students. For instance, Chrissy planned to enroll in a mentor-mentee program in her department next year, offering her help to a Japanese exchange student adjusting to his/her study in the U.S. When asked about her motivation, she said that “I want to help people. If I hadn't met people who had helped me, I would not [have] be where I am today. I appreciated their help even though there is still a long way to go. I know it is important [to help others] even with some little things.” It was out of appreciation for what others had done for her which made her life easier that she wanted to do the same thing for fellow students, to help make their lives easier as well. This was her motivation for giving back to the community. In addition, Chrissy majored in the Business School. The school had a very competitive admission criteria, and many Chinese students in this university have applied but were ultimately denied acceptance. One of the major reasons for their rejections was their inadequate performance on the placement test which required high proficiency in English composition under time pressure. She applied three times before finally being accepted. In regards to this experience, she told me something in her to-do list, that she considered as “a thing of her style” to help others prepare for this challenge.

I passed the placement test for the Business School major, and now the Economics Department will have this kind of test trying to filter international students in the econ major as well. The school is pushing them [international students]. If you don't stand up for your own, who will? I will write some articles to express my thoughts and send them to the Chinese student and scholar association.... That is what I think: there is an assumption that Chinese students cannot get into business school. I want to send out one voice: I want to be the person standing up and saying mainland Chinese students can get into B-school. I applied three times but I finally got in. You just make yourself better. It

is possible, just don't listen to people saying you can't. If you want help, I am glad to help you.

When hearing about the news that a placement test would be added as a requirement for students who want to apply for an economics major, Chrissy's immediate explanation was that the school is pushing Chinese students out of that major since there are already a large number of them in the program. This type of placement test typically required test-takers to complete a good-quality essay in a very limited time frame, a skill that many Chinese students struggle with. This further supported her idea of the reasons behind the placement test. As someone who struggled with that type of placement test, having failed it twice before passing it the third time, Chrissy could be called an insider who had relatively good understanding of the effort required. She felt very conflicted about the test. She was willing to share both of her positive and negative experiences preparing/taking the exam with fellow students to help them prepare for the test. She was also willing to use her writing skills to compose some articles and share with others. One could sense Chrissy's willingness to share her experience and serve as a resource for other students by what she said and what she planned to do.

Tina also served as a resource for friends and fellow students. As a junior with senior credits by the time of this research, she had already taken many required and elective courses, especially in the Anthropology and the Economics Departments. She already had developed her way of evaluating a course and/or a professor, as well as evaluating the difficulty of the course, based on her experience over the years. When she took an interesting course and found the professor nice and good at teaching, she would actively tell her friends about the course and the professor, encouraging them to consider it if they were also interested in the topic. I overheard her when she talked about some courses/professors. She looked excited and happy to recommend them, and her passion was fully expressed by the animation on her face. She once compared

listening to a class one was interested in which was given by a professor one also admired to eating one's favorite dish. It is hard to forget her sincere and exhilarated attitude when she discussed courses she really enjoyed with others. What's more, when people asked for her opinion on a specific course, she would honestly share her opinion, trying to be objective and also sincere, telling what she wanted to say without trying to hide any information. As someone who was an insider of those courses, Tina contributed to the student community serving as an active and honest information resource.

In regards to Shirley's situation, even though she started to make friends in her classes with the standard that they had to be someone better than herself so that she could learn from them and be able to ask them questions, the actual situation was that the learning and help had been complementary and reciprocal. She said with pride that "my classmates are willing to ask me questions, and I explained to them about the course content." She told me her friends would come with notes and homework to ask her to go over, and she explained the material and questions to them. She was usually able to explain things to her friends in a way that they could understand. However, she did not think she was good at taking exams, sometimes her friends who asked for her help ended up with better scores on exams than she did. Shirley explained this as the following:

My problem is I don't know how to take exams, I do not have a consistent performance in my exams, sometimes I might lack luck. Before the exam, when we review together, I taught others theory and knowledge, and after the exam I find out they did better than me. My friends have a sense of security if they have something don't know, they can just ask me.

Shirley shrugged her shoulder and laughed with a bit of embarrassment on her face when telling me that her results would be worse than the people she helped study. But she followed up that before the next exam, those friends would still come to her for help and she would still be

happy to explain the material and question sets and share notes with them. Even though Shirley emphasized again and again she really strove for a high GPA, and she would try her best to get one, she still shared her knowledge and expertise by answering friends/classmates' questions. That could be interpreted as her way of giving back and serving as a resource for others.

Unfortunately, much of what the students have done to give back to the community is not known to their professors and American peers. Those extra-curricular activities and the volunteer work have been a part of who those students have become, even though that part was not fully recognized by instructors and peers.

## Changes and self-identity

During the interview, student participants were asked a specific question, "how would you describe your identity?" This is an important question to ask because it helps understand who these student participants think they are. Along with this questions were student participants' views on changes that have occurred over their time in the U.S. During the course of the interview, students often reflected on changes over time and their self-identities. While the students are all quite different (an important emerging theme of this study), similar concerns appear, including how to balance the effort of making American friends with academic efforts, how to balance insider/outsider identities, how to find courage in new situations, and how harshly one should judge oneself.

### Tina

Tina was about to graduate with her undergraduate degree after the quarter she participated in this study. At the end of the third interview, Tina summarized what she achieved in the U.S. over the past three years:

[Things I learned in the past three years include] do make up, open the door, wait in line, these Western advanced aspects are learned. People here are very friendly, willing to help others. I got lost when I first came to the university and asked a passer-by for direction, and he offered to take me to the building. Now, I think I am 60% Chinese and 40% Americanized. I want to work in a field related to U.S.–China trading, the environment, and /or energy.

I feel that I am on the right track now, such as with a good learning method. Year one, I was slightly above average, I passed then and I was satisfied, but now I feel full of energy, and if I do not get 4.0 in a class, I feel I let myself down. I will ask questions after class, I will review and practice, it is a happy learning process. (Translated from Chinese)

Since it only took Tina three years to complete her undergraduate degree, compared with the majority of college students who spend four plus years, she felt that she had saved one year.

At the same time, she also had enjoyed her three years of undergraduate student life:

I know when I get something, I have to lose something as well. I'm glad that in the past three years, I've made many friends and learned many things. I've always been happy, it just looks different now. Somebody might say I look like someone who's very good at studying. I believe only since I know the proper method could I say I know how to study. I have been pretty strict with myself, when I took 18 credits a quarter, I set a goal for myself that I cannot earn a GPA less than 3.8. (Translated from Chinese)

Tina planned to use the year after her graduation to digest what she had learned:

In regards to things I have learned in the past three years, I have loved every course I took, and the knowledge will stay with me forever. I need to take my time, and calm down. I planned to graduate in three years so that I could save one year's tuition fee. After my graduation, I have more time so I have the opportunity to reread my assignments, notes, readings, writings from experts and scholars. They are like treasures to me and I would like to take this year to redigest all this material...

I want to use this year to fully recharge myself, to digest many things academically and then pursue other areas that I have not connected with in society. I'm relatively successful and I can make it up by myself, there are free Internet courses I can listen to, some TED speeches if I like, for example our university has joined online course Coursera that I can access to advance my knowledge. (Translated from Chinese)

The above reflection demonstrates that Tina really understands where she is and where she would like to be. It also reveals her level of self-control and pacing, as well as autonomy as a learner who has the freedom to study what she wants at the pace that works best for her. She also

critically evaluates herself, and has planned to take time to solidify her knowledge base as well as acquire some real life experiences.

As an economics major, Tina frequently used numbers to explain or emphasize her points. She looked critically and evaluated how successful her college life had been and even scored herself in this regard:

In regards to success, I would give myself an eight out of ten. I lost two points partially because of my lack of social life, I had a chance to be a part of sorority, but I thought I was not that kind of person. I wish I could have sacrificed some of my GPA for a quarter to try it, but I was too afraid of getting a lower GPA to try. (Translated from Chinese)

Tina listed “not being very social” during freshman year as one of her failures. She mentioned the regret of not socializing enough with American students and did not try out for the sorority due to the concern for maintaining her GPA. Not having enough American friends was one of her disappointments and regrets. She wished she would have cared less about earning a high GPA and put more effort into doing fun things that would have forced her out of her comfort zone. At the same time, she was very happy with her academic progress, as well as proud of the volunteer work she had done (as mentioned above).

As for her self-identity, Tina described it beautifully when asked to summarize what she had been and what she would like to be: “I am, and I want to be a bridge that connects the back home pre-overseas student and the American university student together, helping them become a part of the community.”

### Tom

Tom reflected on his changes at the end of the third quarter that he studied in the U.S. He claimed that during “the year in America, strictly speaking, I have not changed that much, not as much as I thought I could have changed.”

However, he explained the biggest change in him was increased courage to try new things.

The thing I have improved on the most is that I think I'm braver than before. I always wanted to try new things, but I had all kinds of concerns and worries that stopped me. Now that is different, for example, I agreed to participate in your research and I joined a fencing club. When I went to the university cafeteria for meal, I saw a poster about fencing, I feel that is such an elegant sport. But with my previous habit of thinking, I would have rejected the idea, just in my mind I would struggle. But this time I decided to try fencing. For fencing, I participated once a week for four weeks, outside on the lawn, and I borrowed the equipment I needed.

I am a little proud of myself for doing that, but not super proud because I'm still scared to try new things. It is my personality, it also has something to do with the U.S.: I try to compensate for myself psychologically, try to force myself by telling myself since I'm already in the U.S., so I cannot be the same as I was before coming to the U.S. (Translated from Chinese)

Tom admitted that he was easily influenced by his environment. Even though he wanted to do something, he might not dare to, because he was afraid that people might laugh at him. He thought that people on the streets didn't know him, so they did not care or take notice of what he did. But if people he knew conveyed a negative attitude towards him or said derogatory things to him, he would feel bad. As a consequence, the fear of these things happening prevented him from participating in activities he might otherwise wish to be a part of.

Tom critically evaluated where he had improved and what he still needed to work on. He believed that courage can be learned through practice and by continuing to push oneself. "If you get used to being brave, then you become brave. If you get used to standing behind, you will always stand behind. I will try to push myself to become brave." Tom made the conscious choice of show more courage and developed a method to do so:

What I am scared of is ridicule from other people and them making fun of me. I found a great method to deal with it. I just imagine that they are just jealous of me and then I have a sense of superiority. For example, I went to fencing and I was embarrassed to tell other people. I just think he/she is jealous because I have the courage to participate and then they are just very evil to laugh at me, so my imagination in my brain helps me cope with

the situation. I am a sensitive person so I have to control my thoughts to make up for other people's hurtful words, whatever they say I try not to care. (Translated from Chinese)

Tom's method of imagining he is better than those poking fun at him helps him cope with the possible ridicule from others. As in the saying goes, "fake it until you make it," Tom fakes/pretends others are jealous of him to explain why they speak negatively about him, he then cares less and continues to move on. That mental mechanism has helped him to keep pushing himself to try new things. On the other side, this method of reasoning has its drawbacks. From time to time, Tom noticed the gap between reality and his imaged scenario, the differences between what he thought would be and the real situation:

In my imagination, I will become very passionate, outgoing, and very social, someone who likes to make friends. But in real life I am isolated. People say among the three Ss, social, study and sleep, you can have two out of the three. In the real life, I always study and sleep; but in my imagination, I would choose social and study. (Translated from Chinese)

Tom laughed when talking about the two Ss he had and the two he wanted. The gap between the reality and his imagined-self made him seem a bit sad, but he then turned to the positive side and recalled that along with becoming more courageous to try new things, he also noticed that he was becoming calmer in different situations:

Compared to before I would say I'm calmer. For example, during the winter break, I went to New York. My luggage was lost. If it was before, I would be so panic, but then I was ok. They found it and sent it to the hotel. Also this spring break I went to Portland. If it was before, I would worry about not being able to find the place I wanted to go to, but this time I just bought the train ticket and then left with my classmates and worried much less.

### Shirley

Just like Tom, Shirley was a freshman when she participated in this study. She reflected on her first year at the end of the third interview:

For my freshmen year, it has been pretty successful. I earned a GPA of more than 3.5, so I was on the Dean's list. Also my classmates are willing to ask me questions, and I am able to explain the course content to them. I have gotten to know some people, I know a lot of Chinese students. Here people are pure and less jealous of each other, not jealous of the fact that you can study abroad. (Translated from Chinese)

Even though Shirley has several good Chinese friends from her hometown that she could go to class and the library with, she did not feel that she belonged to any specific group:

I don't feel I belong to any group. My friends in China do not know my situation, how would they know if I study until 2 am many nights? Friends I have met here who are from China, we have just met so don't know each other well yet, we are not so familiar, we go to class together but that is it. Americans I don't know many, they are more open minded towards many things such as sex. I know it will always be a process to get to know others and make friends, and I may feel lonely so I need to participate in activities. For instance, I joined a yoga class, so I'm learning something too. (Translated from Chinese)

During the same interview, Shirley explained the feeling of being by herself:

Sometimes I feel lonely... Friends it really depends on destiny, if I meet somebody I can be friends with, then we will be friends. I don't want to deliberately chat with American classmates, because in the end, I don't know what they are chatting about. At class, everyone just does their own part, after the class, people just leave. Classmates rarely meet after the class to hang out or chat. Then I'm here by myself, my friends back home in Zhengzhou are not familiar with the situation here. If there are people I have something in common with, I talk with them. If not, I don't talk with them. I am isolated in my own situation. I am by myself and that is what I mean by being by myself. (Translated from Chinese)

On the other hand, partly due to the fact that Shirley studied in Singapore during high school, she felt that she could accept many things that students directly coming from mainland China could not accept. When asked about her identity, Shirley answered:

I can accept many things that mainland Chinese students can not accept: such as the Taiwan situation: I have pride that was born with me and don't need to always share my real opinion, what good does that serve me, right? Also about sex, people from the mainland might think it is exciting and new, I have heard about these things already, so I am more open and calm. I am not confused by new things, since I have seen and been exposed to more things so I have better resistance towards temptations. (Translated from Chinese)

She is also very proud of the fact that she is studying in the U.S.:

I do not regret that I came to study in the U.S., I have pride like a princess (she smiled when saying this). When I return from the U.S., I will have been more places than my friends back in junior high, and my parents feel secure about my situation. (Translated from Chinese)

### Chrissy

Chrissy is a student with high expectation for herself and wants to know clearly where she is, what her goals are, and how to attain them. She said that she “treasured” the chance to study in the U.S. and it was like a new beginning for her to prove herself since her grades in high school were not always very good. After her arrival in the university, she worked very hard to get used to the American higher educational system and put forth a great effort to fit into it.

However, at the end of her second year, Chrissy encountered an identity crisis. The accumulated questions of what she wanted to do and where she wanted to go overwhelmed her. She came to a point that she could not continue to study because she had so many questions and doubts about herself, her major, her life and her future.

I feel a lot of my peers treat me as a better person than I really am because of I have this publishing experience, broadcasting experience, that misguided me a lot because that has nothing to do with academics, people think that I am just better. But the truth is I just couldn't do it anymore. I felt super overwhelmed every day that I had to carry on, super overwhelmed. Before I left, I felt really overwhelmed, it is like 30 percent of the reason [for me taking a year off].

I was about to finish the second year of college and I did not know even where I am heading to, I did not even know if what I am studying everyday will take me to the place where I really want to go... I was not sure every day. I really wanted to write things. I thought China might provide me a lot opportunities that I could not have when I live my life here. It really confused me when I thought about should I go back after I graduate? Or should I try to stay? Try to find a job and use my OPT (Optional Practical Training)? If I hold this concern until I graduate, I will have to choose one, it is either use my OPT, or give up on it. Then I would lose my right to choose my life. So I am gonna pause my academic life, my college from here. I went back, I tried to work, I tried to live a life there as if I had already graduated and had went back to China, to see how I truly felt and what real life was like.

Chrissy used the metaphor of “being drawn by the horse instead of riding the horse” to describe her feeling of being overwhelmed before she suspended her academic studies. She felt taking time off was the right thing to do and she took this action without much hesitation. This action indeed showed her determination and independence:

People always tell you about what they think. I told them, I discussed it with them. My mother didn't know much about America neither did my dad. And I feel like it was not that hard to convince them [that I wanted to take time off from school]. Because I said I was 20 already. You know you are an adult, a grown-up lady, when you make a choice about your own life, can you think about a way they can control or change it? No. they can't. All you have to do is buy your ticket, cancel the I-20, tell your school what is going on and what you want to do when you come back. There is not a lot of things they can do to change it. I thought I could be better off if I paused my messed-up college life, to just [take time and figure out] my goals. I am a very goal-oriented person, I will do anything to achieve them. At this time, I did not know what I should study, I wanted to learn something that I was into, like psychology, but I don't hate accounting either.

Chrissy took a year and half away from her studies and moved back to China, There she tried several different internships and jobs mainly in Shanghai. This time off ended up being at a very good point in her life and proved to be very useful. She was able to experience the “real world” and figure out the answers to many questions that had troubled her. When she returned to her studies, she felt clearer about her future path. She summarized for me what she had figured out. The first thing is where she should be after graduation:

First of all, from my point of view, I don't really need to stay in China to achieve those opportunities, I can stay here and do my things well, to do what I can do there. And if there is any connection or anything that has to be finish inside of China, I can always fly back. Lucky for me. I am not into something that I have to do in China. It is just luck.

She also now felt it was acceptable to not live up to other people's expectation, as well as her own original expectation of completing a double or triple major. She admitted that everyone is different and she also had her own limits:

And second, I figured out that no one can have everything, [I learned to] just accept there are things that I can't do, no matter how high you think I am, there are things I can not do, like triple majors, double majors. I love to make friends with intelligent people, I love

to talk with them, I love to share my ideas with them, but I could not be one of them. I was trying to, I tried really hard, I did my best, but I have no regrets. I was not born to be one of them, but I have my uniqueness as myself.

Along with the choice of majors, Chrissy discovered that people in China were more interested in the university she attended and her skill sets rather than her specific major:

Third conclusion, when I went to look for jobs. I sent out my resumes, and I looked for jobs in completely different areas. I got pretty good feedback. I figured out the reason why people chose to interview me, to admit me, had nothing to do with what I was studying, but more about my school, this university gave me credibility. And after the school, skills [were important], I write pretty good English and Chinese, I mean not compared to here [in the U.S.].

Back to China, they thought my English was great, [I mean I knew my English was] not as good as any random person on the street [in the U.S.]. The people in China thought you must write good Chinese and English. People also saw my social media and said you can do marketing, branding/advertising, they can see my statistic query and they say you can do capital management, you can do it, I really could do a lot of things with experience I already had. When I returned, I felt I was sort of sure that whatever major I decided, that would not kill me [hurt my future success]. It is actually not that important. It is more about what you can do, and who you can be. The ways to prove what you can do and who you can be is more than a paper that writes the major that you studied.

Her days back in China also gave her a chance to observe and reflect on the differences between studying in the U.S. or in China as undergraduate students. She had once believed that universities in the U.S. would be a much better situations for students to maintain their personalities and uniqueness. After observing more Chinese universities and colleague students over the year and half year she spent back in China, she modified her thoughts:

I went back to China for a year and a half, which is five quarters. If I had not taken that gap year, I would say yes, definitely, because I did not know what kind of life they lived as Chinese college students in Chinese universities. But this time when I went back, I saw something else, I think it depends, it just depends, it depends on how you utilize your environment, how you perceive [and utilize] the resources that you have there. Right now I don't see that students who graduate from U.S. universities must be better than students who spent their undergraduate years in China. [I now believe] it varies with people, not where you are studying, or what countries you are staying in.

Another very interesting change occurred in Chrissy, she no longer deliberately put herself out to make American friends and practice English, which she had done a great deal when she was a freshman. In contrast to Tina who now regretted that she had not participated in a sorority during her freshman year due to the concern that it would impact her GPA, Chrissy had joined a sorority, where she recalled her English improved very quickly and she also rapidly picked up American culture. Despite that, at the time when Chrissy participated in this study, she frankly admitted that she no longer tried hard to make American friends.

Not anymore. I feel like compared to my freshman year, I know myself better. I don't have a lot of time left, I am already 22, and I want to use my time more wisely. We only have 24 hours per day. I can't do everything; that is one thing I figured out during the last three years. If I strike myself to study English and keep talking to domestic people, the cost will be I won't have time to do anything else, like reading or writing about the stuff I want to write about. I have compromised, I did not know what compromise was during my first year of my college. I am changing in a good way.

Giving up the effort of hanging out with domestic students was a conscious choice Chrissy made after coming to know herself better. She was still glad that she had put herself out to the sorority to make American friends and enjoy college life as many American students would do, but now she acknowledged the changes in herself and chose to focus more on using her time more efficiently.

In our last interview, Chrissy summarized what she believed of her current identity. She said "if you ask me two year later, the answer will be different. But you ask me now, I will say a Chinese international student. A regular, normal Chinese international student who is not even close to different from everyone else except for having a habit of writing." Her answer indicated that she saw herself as a changing individual over time and she did not think too differently of herself from other Chinese students. She also highly valued her talent of writing as one of her uniqueness.

## Cathy

Cathy had studied at the university for about three years at the time she participated in this research. Though she had made many friends and some very close ones who she referred to as sisters, she once shared her feeling of not having enough American friends. She chose to describe the situation of not having many American friends as a “pity”.

Like I said it is a pity that I never tried to make friends with them, but I will try to, (laugh)... [interview question: Have you had Americans classmates who came up to you and talk to you first?] yes, yes, actually my first roommate was an American girl, she was pretty nice. But at that time, when I was a freshman, something happened and I don't want to talk about, I wanted to be alone, so, that is a pity.

I then followed up with the question that if she needed to choose someone to work with, would she have a preference of a Chinese or American student. Cathy replied:

Chinese you know or American [who is] unknown, how would you choose? Before I would choose a Chinese group because it is easy to communicate [with them], but right now I think it is better to choose the American groups because you know it is a good place to practice my English, to get different cultural ideas. You know Americans they are talkative, they are really talkative. It is hard to interrupt them to say your opinions. And they can interrupt you to say things.

The above quotes showed her change of attitude over time toward who to work with, as well as her concerns of working and hanging out with American students. Cathy gave me the impression that she wanted to improve and get more familiar with American culture. But at the same time, she would hesitate and have concerns before she took action. For example, she once described the dilemma she felt: “I am not sure if I want to get to know them [American students]. In my heart I would love to know [them], but I also feel [it is] unnecessary.”

At times, if she did not take any actions, she would regret it afterwards. An example is her class participation. The following is a quote where she reflects on her behavior of being quiet in a communication TA discussion session:

Today's section [of the communication class] is a discussion session, but only the TA in front to ask us, not a group discussion, anybody can raise up their hand to answer him. I didn't talk up because I was just so tired. Actually I was thinking all the questions in my mind, but I did not say anything. I felt it was a pity after the class, I thought I should [have] said something.

This type of dilemma was repeatedly reflected in Cathy's behaviors in several situations, such as her participation in class activities, interactions with classmates, and her pattern of making friends. She surely had thought about the possibility of taking more action in these regards, but she was also worried and afraid to do so. Several times during our interviews, she asked me questions about my experience interacting with American students, ways I made American friends, and strategies I have adopted to be more confident. She listened very carefully when I talked, and she also often asked several follow-up questions. She showed great interest to know more about my experiences.

Cathy summarized the changes in her mindset over three years. "From freshman to junior, I have become more calm and mature. Before I would worry about things when anything bad happen, now I am calmer and try to figure things out." She reflected that her mind was "kind of messy" during her freshman and sophomore years, at times she did not know what she was doing and felt unsettled inside, perhaps even anxious. She felt that she had calmed down and was better able to manage situations starting from the junior year.

Additionally, Cathy shared her experience of adapting since she arrived in the U.S.:

At first I could not understand anything the professor said, that situation did not last long however... In junior and senior high school, I was very good with my studies. When I first came here, I didn't know what I should do, did not know what aspect were more important and I made a lot of superficial friends. I have been improving my own character, developing the areas that people will appreciate. I think I adjust better now than I did before and keep a better balance of what is the more important and what is less so. (Translated from Chinese)

In regards to identity, Cathy expressed herself in following words:

I feel I am an international student from China but I am not an outsider, I am definitely one part of this university. But I still wonder and worry whether I am going to China or stay here. I have a sense of belonging in this city, but not other parts of the U.S. I have a sense of belonging on campus.

Actually, the sense of belonging did not start from the very beginning. Cathy admitted that at the beginning, she did not have a sense of belonging, but as time passed, she started to realize that one should allow him or herself the sense of belonging. For Cathy, a sense of belonging and the confidence it brings is not obtained through others. Even connections to others must come through independence. She clearly emphasized her independence in the third interview:

For me, before I was more introverted. I have always been independent, I like to be by myself, go shopping by myself. I think only little girls need companions. I enjoy being by myself and I don't need people around me to identify myself. I have always been like this. Going home? I don't want to go home, I hate other people controlling my business. Other people tell me how to do things. I have my own way of thinking, I can accept others' opinion if it makes sense, but you have to persuade me. I don't think it is reasonable that I have to listen to you just because you are older. [Translated from Chinese]

Besides the factor of independence, Cathy further talked about the part of her identity that is still Chinese and a part that had been Americanized:

Part of me is Americanized, but I think I am a Chinese and I am proud of it. The Chinese have many good qualities, I do not have to be integrated into America to be a part of it. Although in the U.S. the environment is good, the food is healthy, and there are other advantages as well. But I will not forget who I am. The part of me which is Americanized includes healthy living habits, such as working out and exercising. The way of appreciating beauty: healthy is sexy, not as thin as possible. Chinese people tend to take shortcuts, like corruption, I have learned from Americans to accomplish things through one's own effort, then one will not be arrogant. It is not people around you to identify you but you to identify yourself. (Translated from Chinese)

Cathy showed her critical thinking when she commented on the positive and negative part of being a Chinese: she saw the heritage and outstanding parts from Chinese culture, but also pointed out some problems and looked to embrace the valuable assets from each culture.

Cathy consistently claimed independency by emphasizing that one should identify oneself rather than relying on other people to identify them.

She also gave a nice summary about what she had learned in the past three years while in college:

I learned the ability to be organized and to be more independent. It is not your teacher that forces you to learn, but you who looks for methods, self-reflection and self-exploration. Also I've learned critical thinking: critical thinking about everything, journalism ethics, a reporter's point of view to report and analyze things, it is not an absolute view, whether it should be reported, if it is right or wrong. I understand things better now. I improved my way of thinking: before people said things I might believe immediately. Now I am just listening critically. I will observe on my own first before making an evaluation/judgment towards people/things. I will not make random judgments. The way I do things, I will not be too impetuous to do things, if I don't feel happy, I will first cool down and see if it is worth it. I am more rational. Decisions can always be thought through, that is not a big deal. [Translated from Chinese]

As would be the case with any set of undergraduates, we are watching these students grow up.

### Johnny

Johnny is a student who showed very comfortable attitudes towards communicating with me in English. Whenever we were in an interviews or informal chat, we used English. When he sent me emails about logistic issues, such as a change of classroom, as well as his updated schedule, he would always write in English. When reflecting on what he learned about the relationship between language, culture and communication, he made an insightful comment that it is more about the culture beneath the mere usage of language.

I can communicate with Americans or people from European [descent] quite effectively. Sometimes when they don't understand me, I would say it is not because of the English proficiency but because of cultural differences, so then I tried to use some other words to clarify my opinion. I think now the most difficult part is the cultural difference, it is not the proficiency.

Once I went to the post office, the attendant was from Vietnam, a couple of Americans tried to send this mail to Beijing, they say “Dong Zheng District.” They [officers at post office] could not understand. Oh, I said it was like the Northgate in Seattle, it is an area. The district meaning is clear enough but they could not understand.

He also reflected back on the relationship and sense of belonging on campus.

Unfortunately, he experienced some of the “cold” part of the relationships and did not feel linked closely with others.

Atmosphere is not that... [he paused and started a new sentence] People are not that linked together closely. Many local students complain that this university is such a big place and students are not that linked together so closely. The administration is not so much caring about student relationships. When me and my classmates are studying in the same class, we are having so much fun, but when we are not in the same class, we are just like not linked together, we just don't contact each other that frequently.

On the other side, he gave credit to the resource offered by the university, feeling that students have the responsibility to make use of those resources:

The university does provide some resources, they give us equal opportunities in most departments, I think except for business school, 'cause business school needs people for diversity from all parts of the world, not a specific place. I think the university is providing a good atmosphere. They actually give us some resources, like the student organizations, and opportunities like workshops. I think the most important part is that they give us equal opportunities in almost all the departments.

The above quotes showed that Johnny was appreciative about the availability of campus resources, it also showed his level of independence. He actually identified himself as someone who can live without making many friends, and he did not feel lonely if he did not have anybody to hang out with. This may also be related to the feeling of not being “linked” to others on campus as he had previously mentioned.

I do not have many friends, most of them are in my both departments, or my mentors, ENGL 131 writing tutor. Most of my friends are not the same nationality. I would say one of the reasons is that I don't actually need friends, I don't feel lonely if I am not having friends, even no single friends. Some students development relationships on campus because they think they are lonely, but that is not for me. I would say I don't know, I just don't feel lonely.

Maybe due to this independent spirit, Johnny also tried to solve problems on his own, which he first mentioned as one of his regrets:

From the beginning, I tried to try out stuff just by my hands, I did not even know how to drop a course, the grade options, etc. No one told me. I made silly mistakes on the TA application. I learned things slowly, some have many friends to guide them. I don't get much information, [such as which] economics professors were not that good. I can't rely on one advisor, including the department advisor. I have to try on my own. They just repeat things on the Internet.

I do not do that intentionally, may be regrets [not seeking more help from others], but [it could] be more beneficial, as I learn to solve problems by myself. It will benefit for my job seeking, I have encountered most of the problems possible in the future. People do get help, they do not try it on themselves, they may have the same problem in the future.

Johnny then adjusted his feeling regarding solving problems all by himself, admitting it is both a regret and a benefit for him. He believes looking for help from others is like a double-edged sword: people who do not seek help are prepared in the long run but suffer in the short term, while those that do not try to work things out themselves are hurting themselves since they may encounter the same problem in the future. Besides the choice of how to solve problems he encountered, John also made the choice of making friends with people from different backgrounds and different cultures, through various channels in and outside of class. He deliberately avoided making only Chinese friends. Actually, he had a very limited number of Chinese friends.

Most of them [my friends] are from my departments, Indian friends, Korean/Japanese friends, some U.S. friends, some European/Latinos. I know less than 10 Chinese people here, and for friends maybe 1 or 2. Sometimes when I am trying to make Chinese friends, we have to speak mandarin, and if there are some U.S. people around, they get embarrassed, so I tried to not speak Mandarin if there are some U.S. audience around. Sometimes [my friends are] from activities and organizations [I participated in], from TAs: some PhD student, some MA, and some undergraduate TAs.

Sometimes we work together on projects, sometimes for the math course, I understand everything but my classmates don't, so I have to explain myself, I want to help them, and sometimes they helped me, explaining things to me, like programming. Sometimes I explained things to them and sometimes they explained things to me.

Johnny cared very much about his extracurricular activities, volunteer work and community work. He proudly identified his biggest achievement during the quarter he participated in this study as his extracurricular activities: volunteer work, work on the university newspaper, and being a research assistant.

At the end of our last interview, Johnny was sincere in summarizing the way he saw his own identity:

Things I have learned in the U.S.: how to be the person you would like, to explore a fresh path by yourself, not for money or other people. I do need to make a living. If I can make a contribution, with less money that's fine, but not too little money.

I am still a learner who is exploring to find out what I try to do in the future. A reporter: interview other people. Not American or Chinese but more global, we do have hardships when we are not American. Even for the newspaper editor, I want to keep that up, my own status, that [made me feel] happy, care for making myself happy, I want to do that, but maybe in the future I might change.

Johnny's description of his own identity showed his open mind, world vision, as well as the part of his being practical. He emphasized the importance of planning in advance, following one's passion to do things that made him/her happy, trying to contribute to the society, but also making a living with his effort.

## Conclusion

This chapter complements the previous chapter which focused on observations and analysis of the student participants' behaviors in the classroom. This chapter reveals themes and factors not easily seen through observation, but discovered through interviews and conversations during which student participants opened up and explained things using their own words. Some important factors influencing student participants' behaviors are revealed, including their previous learning experience, personalities, and parental influence. Another important part of this

chapter is the student participants' volunteer work outside of the classroom. Student participants in this study have helped their fellow students, their American and Chinese classmates, unprivileged high school students, as well as the local community. Though most of these activities were not known to or recognized by their American classmates and instructors, student participants took pride and felt these necessary parts of themselves. Specifically, we learned what these students did to help others, how they got involved, and why they chose to do so. Their accounts on these topics help break the cultural stereotype that Chinese students only care about academic studies and their own success, and help readers understand what, at least some Chinese students have done to help others at the price of their own time and energy.

Equally important is student participants' own opinion of what their identities are, what has changed in them, how they perceived their decision-making, relationship-building, and journey of their academic socialization and personal growth. Though they are all Chinese undergraduate students in the U.S., these six student participants have demonstrated very different self-awareness and reflections on their change and the paths they have taken. This again conflicts with the homogenous impression of Chinese undergraduate students as a whole and reminds readers that the findings of this chapter recommend caution. It is easy to fall into cultural stereotypes about quiet Chinese students, while the findings of this chapter have shown it is not always the case.

## Chapter 6

### Recommendations, Implications and Conclusion

This chapter includes recommendations and conclusions reached as a result of the findings from this research project. The chapter is presented in four sections.

First, recommendations for Chinese students studying in the U.S. were assembled from the student participants, their TAs, instructors, as well as the researcher, myself. The recommendations were targeted to help Chinese undergraduate students ease their adjustment into the American educational system, as well as to help them cultivate their academic socialization. Recommendations were also provided for instructors and TAs to help them support Chinese international students in their classes.

The second section of this chapter is a discussion of cultural stereotypes and generalizations and the representativeness of this research. The following are questions that will be covered in this section; Are the Chinese students in this study different from their American counterparts? Do student participants in this study fit into the cultural stereotype of Chinese students? Considering their diversity, is cultural-stereotyping appropriate? Can we generalize findings of this study about Chinese students to other settings? How should one evaluate this study from the perspective of representativeness?

The third section of this chapter discusses the limitations of this qualitative study with ethnographic characteristics, as well as the potential directions for future research.

Finally, the last section focuses on the conclusion of the study. Implication of the study and the main takeaway points are presented in this section.

## Recommendations for Chinese Undergraduate Students

When I interviewed students, their TAs and instructors, a question I would always try to ask is “Based on your personal experience and knowledge, what suggestions would you give Chinese undergraduate students who are coming to the U.S. to study?” I have collated the different suggestions and rather than present a detailed laundry list by each individual, I have synthesized them according to themes and provided typical quotations that represent the essence of the recommendation. I integrated the suggestions from student participants, TAs, and instructors, as well as my own as a researcher.

One should be aware that when answering these questions, some interviewees did not limit their target population solely to Chinese undergraduate students but also felt their advice applied to other international students. Some did not only offer their suggestions to Chinese undergraduate students but to Chinese students as a whole, including those who are pursuing higher degrees, and others did not only include international students but also believed their suggestions would also apply to all students including American students. So while the following are categorized suggestions for Chinese undergraduate students, they are not strictly limited to this demographic group, and could benefit a broader audience.

### Interact with Students from Different Cultural Backgrounds

One student participant, Cathy, suggested Chinese students form friendships with people from different cultures, even though she admitted it has been easier said than done, and she herself was still in the process of trying to do this. “I will say maybe it is hard to make friends with people from different cultures, but they should try, they should not just make friends with Chinese people, that would be like going from one China to another China. I am still trying to work on this, too.”

An Anthropology professor Tina really admired and worked closely with encourages Chinese students to interact more with American students.

I always tell my Chinese students: Get involved in America, don't just retreat into some little Chinese community. You may end up liking it, you may end up not liking it, but at least learn about it. It is getting easier and easier not to do that, it is getting easier and easier just to be Chinese in this city. You know that you can get anything you need, including vote, without speaking English. You could be a citizen and conduct your life in Chinese, even the voting is in Chinese... You know, people have stereotypes, and the more you know about Americans, the fewer stereotypes you have. I think if Chinese students come to the U.S., can live with Americans, can know a part of American life, can participate in some activities besides going to class and study, their experience will be much richer.

He fully understands how comfortable the life could be for Chinese students to hang-out only with other Chinese students, he also understood the awkward feeling these students could have when trying to make friends with American students, but he still encouraged them to try and thought it would be worthwhile.

Johnny's TA from his information class explicitly explained why it might be hard for Chinese undergraduate students to be included in a group of mainly American students:

English proficiency is one of biggest factors, they get excluded. It turned out from both sides, for the students who are not good at English, they feel afraid to speak in a large group. But for American students who speak to them, they exclude them too because they just can't communicate, and don't want to put effort to really make that work, if that makes sense. It might not be worth it, it is just not a mutual (he paused), it is a mutual thing or not to communicate. I think that is what I see happening.

The student, the instructor and the TA all admitted it would not be easy for Chinese students to get involved with American students. The process of making American friends as well as other international friends pushed Chinese students to get out of their comfort zone, not to speak their native language, and not to only hang out with those that have a similar cultural background. While Chinese undergraduate students are here for the educational aspects, to obtain full advantage from this experience, it will be helpful that they make friends from different

cultural backgrounds: not only for the purpose of learning about others, but also others can learn from them. It will help them become an active citizen of the world. Despite the challenges however, several student participants still felt it would be a worthwhile effort to try. Some felt that Chinese undergraduate students would be missing out on a great deal of cultural learning if they don't develop a network of friends from different cultural backgrounds. Although some students decided not to continue expending a lot of energy interacting with American students, they continued to think that it had been worthwhile. Some students believed that at some stage, interacting with American students as well as students from other backgrounds, would help Chinese students achieve the maximum impact from the experience. This would also help them accelerate their process of academic socialization, transitioning themselves from outsider to insider.

### Improve English Proficiency and Use the Language

Many students, TAs and instructors interviewed in this study believed English proficiency level strongly correlated with, as well as, influenced students' academic performance and class participation. For example, Johnny's TA from his information class shared her observation:

I mean all I noticed is that all my Chinese students have different levels of English, and the ones who are really good at speaking and writing, seem to understand the culture and do better here. I don't know how you do that, I don't know the struggles, the adventures they went through before they came here of learning English, studying the culture, that sort of thing. I think the longer students go to school here the better [their English becomes]. I think the older the students, the longer they have been here, it improves. But they have to put in the effort.

There have been different suggestions given by students, TAs and instructors in regards to how to improve students' English proficiency. Tina believed watching American TV shows was a good way to improve English.

I suggest Chinese students watch more American movies or some TV series to improve their English, maybe not academic level but daily life. With regards to language conflicts in speaking, listening, writing, I think I can read as fast as native speakers 'cause I have practiced a lot. My suggestion is to watch American movies, TV programs to improve English in daily life.

Shirley has also used TV shows as one way of practicing English listening:

I believe the cumulative changes in quantity will lead to the changes in the quality. Now I can listen better, no matter soap opera or the major courses. I just sometimes do not want to listen to the chemistry terminologies. I have been watching the TV show *Doctor* since senior high, it uses many biology and chemistry terminologies. (Translated from Chinese)

Tom's physics professor also mentioned watching "soap operas," similar to Tina's suggestion of watching TV series. But his point is that watching soap operas is not enough, and international students should do more. This professor had been an international student himself and had worked with international students since he was a graduate student. He summarized all his knowledge and experience into one suggestion. He urged international students to move out of only watching soap operas and TV dramas, and to do more to learn actively and keep trying to improve on their own.

It takes time to be an insider. But I think if I was giving one piece of advice to international students it would be to try to negotiate the American experience/system, just try to have a little bit more confidence in speaking the language, in writing, because it's by that practice that they will gain knowledge of what the unwritten rules are... you only learn so much unwritten rules by watching soap operas, they need to remember this especially if they have plans to further their education.

Cathy's communication TA encouraged international students to speak up in the class discussions because it is a great opportunity for them to practice their English.

The first thing that I would suggest is do not feel uncomfortable to speak up. I really try hard to provide an open atmosphere for students to express their ideas, especially at this university, freshman/sophomore they are taking classes in large lecture halls where they really don't have to speak, they just have to sit there, take notes and pay attention. But when it comes to the sections, it might be a bit intimidating, because it is a small class of 25 students and there is more emphasis on discussion. But my suggestion is even if you don't feel comfortable about your English proficiency, it is ok, it is totally fine.

Johnny's TA in his information class also encouraged international students to put forth effort and find opportunities in real life to practice their English:

So I think the best advice I can give is that they need to actually practice in real life, they need to get out there to communicate. Before they come to America, I don't know if they really understand English, I don't know the schooling there, how they learn English, how that goes... All I can say is, it is really up to them to put in the effort, 'cause I know they can and I have seen students who put in the effort and do great. Their differences are not an issue, students get along just fine, but I know they have a lot on their plate, their always having to learn English is such an extra thing on top of everything else they have to do in college, but that is what those students do to do well.

Students' English proficiency affects their class participation. Many classes in American colleges involve team activities and projects. To be successful, Chinese undergraduate students will need to be able to interact and work well with many different people and to express their opinions in English. Students need to practice to become better in English, but it is also easier to use English, once one has improved.

There are many ways to improve one's English, as mentioned in the previous findings chapter as well as this recommendation section above. Different students might find one method more useful than another, and students need to take the responsibility to decide what might work best for them. They might choose to: watch American TV dramas just as Tina suggested, go to TA's office hour to practice English as Shirley advised, visit the writing center frequently as was Chrissy's practice, work for the university newspaper as Johnny did, try to make friends with those of different backgrounds as Cathy tried to accomplish, and/or keep practicing writing as Tom undertook. They should also try to speak up during the class discussions, interact more with their peers and instructors, and be more aware of unwritten rules, as were suggested above by instructors and TAs.

No matter what Chinese undergraduate students choose to do, two things are without doubt regarding improving of English proficiency. First, it is totally up to the students to put in

the effort in whatever ways they want. They are the only ones that can hold themselves accountable to put forth the necessary effort to affect the changes they desire. Classmates, TAs, and instructors can help, assist, and suggest, but it is really dependent upon the students themselves to put forth the effort, and decide how much effort they want to put into this achievement. Second, it takes time to improve one's English proficiency. Even though studying in the U.S. provides Chinese undergraduate students a great environment to immerse themselves in the language and culture, as well as many wonderful opportunities to practice their English, it will still take them time to be comfortable and proficient and to excel at academic reading, listening, speaking and writing.

### Ask for Help

Tina strongly encouraged international students to actively seek out help and build their own supporting network. Her opinion of supporting network included both peers and people who are more senior.

Another suggestion I have is to find somebody who can support you, they might have similar interests and background with you. You can find a sense of belonging. Or find someone who is much older and senior, they can support you. My first year here, I met an old lady from Chinatown. Second year it was my history teacher and this year it was my advisor for the independent study. I think that's really helpful. (Translated from Chinese)

She also emphasized the importance of asking questions and asking for help. She explained that through a website, one might only find the key word or a simple explanation that might not be enough. Tina believes that one may be able to find information he or she needs through web searches for a key word, but if the person asks others for help, he or she may get a more well-rounded answer that puts the concept or topic in perspective or context. It also helps to make sure the information is not misinterpreted or misunderstood. In addition, she felt you should not be shy to ask someone for help in understanding the topic or point because "almost all

the times you ask for help, you will get answers to your questions, just ask, you will get what you want.”

Chrissy was very active asking help from professors, TAs, advisors, and tutors, and she did not seem to be shy or conservative in doing so. Below is an account of her reaching out to a professor asking for help in improving her English writing; this is but one example of Chrissy reaching out for help:

I got a professor, I always went to him, saying I wrote very bad in English paper and I don't know how to do this, please help me, blablabla. He said you have a knot on writing. He means I know how to write things and everyone can see that, as long as I wrote down something, it will always be well organized and clear thought, so I knew how to write. He said don't be afraid of writing things in English because you have a knot on writing, and that is the point of writing. 'Cause in Chinese I can just come up with a poem, cite everything and change into mine, because I have that in my pool, I read a lot. In English I can't. But the professor was telling me that doesn't matter, because those are all the cherries on the pie. You got the knot. So this make me not afraid anymore.

Here instead of specific help writing, Chrissy's teacher realized she needed more confidence in herself rather than help with detailed skill development. This is an example of where reaching out for help from someone who is knowledgeable and supportive helped solve a student's problem.

Besides students, TAs also held the view that Chinese undergraduate students should reach out for help more. Cathy's TA in the communication section believed that international students should actively make use of the available resources, such as TAs' office hours and professors' office hours. He first emphasized the benefits of going to TA's office hours:

I guess my second suggestion is to reach out to professors or TAs. Because a lot of times, first of all a lot of students don't come to our office hours, so if you do come with this big lengthy question it is totally fine. Because we do set two hours, three hours every week so if you do want to take up those two to three hours discussing with the TA, it is totally fine. They will give you really personal, really specialized education to a certain degree, right? So TAs are really the untapped resource on campus, while most TAs, when they do have their office hours, they just sit there doing their own work, students are not visiting.

He then compared the professor's office with the TA's, pointing out that TAs are underutilized by students, it doesn't matter if they are international students or not. He strongly encouraged all the students to make use of the TA resources on campus:

I have office hours just on Thursdays but for 2 hours straight, and if students can't make that time, they can always email me to set up appointments, that will be totally fine. Even the students who said they can not meet with me 'cause they have class or they have something else, I always say they can make appointments or something else. I do have time available but they still do not take advantage of it. I think it is a really big tip for any undergraduate student, not just international students, is that TAs, they are the ones who do all the grading, and sometimes they are the ones who come up with the test questions as well, they are just big untapped resources on campus.

A lot of students have the tendency to go to the professors' office hours, but then you know everybody goes there and you probably do not have the chance to meet with the professor one on one. Because especially in a class like ours where there are 275 students, everybody is trying to want professor's time, while our TAs are just sitting in our own office while nobody comes in.

Chrissy's TA in her psychology class also expressed a similar idea to challenge international students to be more proactive in asking for help, as well as mentioning her willingness to offer help as a resource:

I think that we try very hard to let students know that they can come to talk to us if they have problems, they should not wait, they should definitely come in again, and again. Again, because of the extent of the material, students often do not have time to go over a lot of questions in class, which is why I really like when students come in for office hours, we do have time to sit down with them and to discuss through things, and more by the student's pace. I have some student come in for an hour and discuss about something, and that is perfectly fine.

Similarly, Johnny's undergraduate TA in his information class pointed out that international students should try to go to talk with their TA more often:

I would say, encourage them to always visit their TA, I think some students just do not realize how open TAs are. I mean we get paid to talk to them, it is part of our job. They can talk to a TA about anything, like I offered to provide research when I can, I talked about materials, if they just want to talk about the assignment, if they are confused about what to do, I will go over it with them. If they are confused about a topic, we can talk about it. So they really need to do that, at least see where they are, otherwise, a lot of

times international students get lost, kind of fade into the background. It is not just them, it is all of my students do that too.

It doesn't have to be that way. You know it is not like just 'cause you are international students, it has to be that way. 'Cause I have had some really great students, I wrote several letters of rec for some of my Chinese international students and their grades were great. But they really made that effort, it does not matter if they are international students or not, it is that you make the effort, and you do a good job, and you will be rewarded for it.

Acknowledging all the benefits of using the available professor's/TA's office hours, asking for help from professors and TAs should be done judiciously. If not done appropriately, students' asking for help can be viewed negatively by their professors and TAs. Tina's advisor who worked with her on her independent study gave two suggestions on how Chinese students should interact with their professors. The first is to find the right mentor and ask only academically oriented questions instead of those with a personal nature:

It makes sense to find a suitable mentor/advisor: you have to find someone who is a good fit, and not everyone would be a good fit... In regards to guidance and mentoring, I would limit the scope to within academics, I would not give her suggestions on personal life. Like, I don't know if she has a boyfriend or not. I assume she is the only child, has no brothers or sisters, but things like her personal life I have never asked. All suggestions I could give her as an advisor focus on career and professional aspects, but not about personal life. If she asked me questions about personal life, I would not have very good suggestions. (Partially translated from Chinese)

I think anytime students ask a professor about career advice in terms of academic career, they like that. They get a little bit uncomfortable if it spills over into more personal things. Like should I marry this guy? I don't know! I mean, professors like to talk about what they do, that is why they do the job, right? I never knew a professor who didn't like his subject or her subject, you know...

Besides picking the right mentor and asking appropriate questions, this professor also honestly shared his mentoring workload. "On the practical side, you can't do too many. If I have two, or three, or four students at the same, I can handle it; but 10 or 20 students, then I don't have enough time for all of them." Considering a professor's heavy workload, he kindly reminded students to be careful not to over-exploit their professors' time and visit too often.

And you have to be sensitive, in other words, you could over-exploit the professors. Sometimes the students just always come in and they don't really have much to say, so you have to, you know, 中庸之道, (A Confucius saying, the doctrine of the mean which advocates doing things in moderation.) on one hand, you should not be too afraid of the professor, on the other hand, you should not push them too much. And don't go too often, you can spill over into being a pest.

The professor's honest input raises concerns that Chinese students should be aware of when they interact with their professors. It is strongly encouraged that students reach out to their instructors and TAs for help, especially if they have not been using this valuable resource. On the other hand, they should be careful that they have specific questions to ask to use the time of everyone effectively. In addition, they should understand the workload their requests might bring to the professor, for instance, if they ask them to be a mentor or advisor on an independent research project, or ask for letters of recommendation. So that they are not viewed negatively, Chinese students should also be conscious of the impact of their request on a professor's time and ensure they do not use it to excess.

All of the six student participants had experiences asking for help, such as asking questions after the class, visiting their advisors' office inquiring about requirements of different majors, consulting more senior students about courses and exams, asking professors for letters of recommendation, and so on. Many have also returned the favor by helping others and sharing their knowledge and resources. Through their different means, some have become experts in searching the internet to find answers to their questions, such as Johnny. Some have become very effective in finding the right person to ask for answers, such as Chrissy. Some have been good at building connections and maintaining relationships, such as Tina. Some are introverted and will only ask for help when they have to, such as Tom.

Through these students' experiences we see how important it is to reach out and ask for help to succeed at an American university. In the U.S. universities, it is not considered an

embarrassment for students to ask for help, rather, they are encouraged to do so. People with knowledge and expertise, such as professors, TAs, advisors, and senior students, are usually very willing to offer their assistance. Hence, it is important for Chinese undergraduate students to know that they should actively seek out support when needed. At the same time, they should use their resources appropriately and be respectful of other people's time, as well as use the correct resource for the problem they have (TAs, instructors, advisors, counselors).

### Balance and Manage One's Time

Reflecting on her three-year college experience, Tina regretted that she spent too much of her time studying and too little time networking and making friends. She wished she had done some things differently and strongly suggested Chinese students dedicate some time to their social life and networking.

What I want to suggest is that you should put more time in social networking, hanging out with friends, instead of just sitting there all day long studying. I have not done this enough, I am jealous of people who party with all their friends every Friday, that is not what I can do.

Cathy reminded Chinese students to manage their time well and be aware of the educational differences between China and the U.S. Cathy believed a full awareness of the demands of the workload and good time management would help Chinese students succeed in their academic life.

They should try to manage their time because the grading system is quite different from China. You know all the quizzes/participation are counted in your final grade. People in China usually play for the whole quarters and just study for the final weeks, but here you should always study because there are always [things] due[s] even in the first week.

After committing to many extracurricular activities and volunteering work, some of which had started to impact his time commitment and performance in class and group projects, Johnny candidly admitted that time management and the ability to balance his activities are what

he needed to improve upon. The challenge of balancing his commitments had impacted Johnny's academic and personal life. "This quarter I suffered a lot from balancing my schedule, but up to now, it is not too bad." Johnny said. He explained why he was always late for his information class TA session that I observed:

I messed up with my morning session. Sometimes when I got to bed it is about 2-3am on Tuesday night, I thought I would sleep 5-6 hours, and you know. I was late for almost every quiz section on Wednesday morning, usually about 10 minutes to 50 minutes late. With so many people discussing, I was late for a debate session that was super unfortunate that time. I got to my bed around 6 and said I should only sleep for just one hour. And then you know, then I got up around 8:15 and I was late, 10 minutes late for the session. And the TA said "I am sorry but I could not give full credits for the lab session, because it is really important for the participation and you are late." I did not participate, it is unfortunate, it was a great failure for me in Inform 200.

He realized the impact on his grade was not as important as what he had missed in the class discussion because of his late arrival:

My grade in Inform 200 would not suffer too much from that, but it is about participation, it is about things I want to learn, that suffers much...Missing the discussion is unfortunate for me who get to adapt to the atmosphere. It is unfortunate, it is like the biggest failure for me this quarter, but actually my grade won't suffer much. If I am heading for my grade, I would be fine, I would be super fine for my grades, it has almost no effect to my grade; but sometime you do not just study for grades.

Johnny self-reflected on the balance of his activities and his time management skills during the quarter he participated in my research. As a result, he decided to work on improving his time-management and life-balance skills in the future:

For this quarter, I got challenges in time management, it is not because I am lazy, I am not that lazy. Sometimes I just can't balance things well and sometimes I run into doubt: should I do this work? It will take my time to do other coursework that seems to be more important. If I am working for GPA, then I would not have time working for other things... I will figure out a way to increase my time management skills. In the whole year, that is the big issue...

As for the success for the quarter, I think seven or eight out of 10... I lost two to three point firstly because I did not do the work efficiently, I spent four hours of five for an article. I could save the time to study, I was not so experienced. I just sacrificed my sleeping time and study time to write the story to keep the quality. I also do not balance

perfectly as I proposed, when project was perfectly balanced. Time management is a major challenge, which I need to continue in the future.

Chrissy was ambitious and had high expectations for herself. She shared her updated understanding of her life-balance and capacity limitations:

I have to take 18 credits a quarter, I can only go above that, but I will never go below that. It is not for everyone right? I took 20 credits a quarter before but it killed me, it was horrible, I will never do that again. It killed my life, it killed my grades, it killed my everything, I know someone who can do that, someone who can control all that, but not for me, I am not one of the geniuses, I am not one of them. I tried and I knew I am not one of them, then I stopped.

Chrissy had experienced the dilemma of having limited time and many things she would like to do. She wanted to double major just like many of her friends; she wanted to keep writing since that was her passion; she wanted to fully experience an American undergraduate students' life by taking part in extracurricular activities and parties. But she found that she could not do it all and she had to make choices and sacrifice some things for others. She believed it was important for students to balance their time and choose things they really wanted to do, since they have only a limited amount of time and can not do everything they want to do.

I feel like compared to my freshman year, I know myself better. I don't have a lot of time left, I am already 22, and I want to use my time more wisely. We only have 24 hours per day. I can't do everything, that is one thing I figured out in three years. If I strike [push] myself to study English, and keep talking to domestic people to improve whatever to improve, the cost will be I won't have time to do anything else, like reading, writing stuff I want to write. I compromised and I did not know what compromise was in the first year of my college. I am changing in a good way.

Admittedly, these students have different expectations for themselves, but after navigating through the university with successful and/or unsuccessful experiences, they have all realized the importance of balancing one's life and managing one's time in order to succeed in an American university. As Chinese undergraduate students in an American university, they faced not only a different educational system, expectations and norms, but also the change from their native language to English and from a culture they were familiar with to one they were not. To

achieve their goals and be successful, it is extremely important that they learn to balance their academic and social life by reasonably distributing their time towards their different tasks and commitments.

### Utilize Cultural Heritage

Once Tina recounted a class discussion that involved topics she was familiar with, for example, policies and news from China; then she felt more confident and safe to raise her hand and share her opinions. She also felt the sincere appreciation from her classmates and the instructor, as well as their focused attention listening to her. This sort of experience also happened when her economics class was discussing China's One-Child Policy, when her development class studied China's air pollution issues, when her anthropology class considered the issue of Intellectual Property Rights, and more. She seized the opportunity to participate when Chinese elements were involved. In addition, she felt a responsibility to talk as a spokesperson for China so her class would benefit from what she knew and her perspective on the topic.

I think Tina's strategy of utilizing her own cultural heritage and background was effective in improving her comfort level in participating in class discussions, as well as having her voice heard. Chrissy's TA in her psychology section also felt positive about the presence of international students on the dynamics of the section. She indicated that she normally taught classes that involved more discussion, where the students shared their personal experiences more. She believed that international students played an important role because they could talk about their own experiences, which were generally different than what native students might bring. She thought that this was helpful and contributed to more effective group understanding.

Cathy's TA also positively viewed the presence of international students in his class:

It is definitely not negative influence, it is actually a good thing to have unique perspectives because coming to the United States, they don't fully integrated to, especially in politics, how the political system works, especially if they come from fields that don't have anything to do with politics right? So it is really interesting to get their perspectives as well, it opens a lot of discussion with other American students, because it is nice to bounce off ideas from their experiences and their thoughts to American students...

He suggested international students make use of their diverse background to contribute to the classes, and affirmed that students are graded by participation not English proficiency:

Because a lot of time, especially in political science we like different perspectives from different students. You know not everybody comes from the same background right? You know there are different economic, social, ethnic backgrounds, we are always pretty diverse, I guess the international students' diversity just adds to the fruitful discussions in the end. We are not grading on how well you can speak or how well you can write, we are grading on your participation, and ideas you are presenting and questions you are posing to the class.

These two TAs had positive views on the presence and participation of international students in their classes. They felt that because international students had different experiences and backgrounds from American students, they would increase the diversity and breadth of class discussions. This underscores that Chinese undergraduate students should value and make use of their cultural heritage. Instead of viewing their differences with American students as a deficiency, they should view those differences as assets and use their unique backgrounds and experiences to enrich class discussion. Thus they should become active members of group and class discussions, making meaningful contribution to the class.

### Be Yourself

Several student participants emphasized that even in the process of learning from others and trying to explore all the possibilities, one should not blindly follow others but be true to one's self. Johnny put his suggestion this way:

Try to do your own stuff, try to work through your own way, try to explore yourself, trying to be sincere because I don't want to follow other people, if I am not them, and I

am not super similar to them, I will not follow their path. I don't want to make myself successful if I don't want that success. I really want to be happy and contribute to the society. But I don't want to make myself super similar to any other person.

Tina felt that one should know oneself so that you can find a good fit to yourself and your goals. The process started with choosing a university that will be a good match.

Choose an appropriate university according to your own level, or else you'll be unhappy or feel crazy. If I went to Harvard or Princeton three years ago, so I think I would have cried so much since it would not have been a good fit for my level back then, I would not have been happy, my hair might even have turned white. This university, for me three years ago, was a great fit, because it was somewhat challenging for my level back then, but overall it was also suitable and ideal. I wasn't overworked or overwhelmed.  
(Translated from Chinese)

She also optimistically predicted that younger Chinese students would be stronger and superior to her own generation, if they can figure out who they are and what they want:

If the Chinese overseas students know what they truly want, they will be better and better, stronger and stronger. One generation should be better than the previous generation. For example they are now freshmen, if they realize how best they should study and live their life, then they would become better than us. (Translated from Chinese)

Chrissy openly discussed that when she was a freshman, she tended to listen to other students who were academically successful, she would follow their advice and wanted to be as successful as they were. As time went by, she started to understand herself better and wanted to be true to herself more, now that she knew what she wanted in her life. Even though that meant she had to miss out on some things and declined to act on some suggestions from friends, she felt it was the correct thing to do and felt good about this change for herself.

If my friends who are very succeeded in school recommended me to take this, take that, I would listen to them when I was a freshman. But not now. I know what I want, because I know for sure I don't have time for everything, I used to think I can try everything, but not anymore. I know for sure if I want to do accounting well, I can't do something else. If I want to maintain my accounting and writing together and have a life outside of the school, I can't have extra things, I think just growing age make me think things this way, I think this is the change before my gap year and after my gap year. I listened to those people, but not anymore. These people really gave me good suggestions, and I thank

them, but I know more about myself, and I know what I want and what I try to be, and this is pretty big.

The data suggest that Chinese undergraduate students should embrace the opportunity in the U.S. to explore themselves, be themselves, and find areas that best match their interests. Since they are the ones who should know themselves the best, even though others might have well-meaning advice, they should be the ones to make their own choices based on their interests, capabilities, and desires. If students are true to themselves and make choices that fit their interests and capabilities, they are more likely to find happiness and satisfaction in what they do.

## Recommendations for Instructors and TAs

Learning and teaching are two interconnected parts in the knowledge transfer cycle. Consequently, some interviewees' recommendations went beyond the scope of Chinese undergraduate students, they also had advice for faculty and TAs. Several emphasized a need for mutual understanding between students and instructors. Another commonly conveyed feeling was that international students can't succeed solely on their own, they will need the joint effort and support from their instructors and TAs. It was also felt that instructors and TAs have a responsibility to know their international students and actively help them succeed.

### Provide More Choices

Tom's English 131 instructor made the point that communication and class participation can be conducted through a variety of different means. Accounting for the impact of personality in that some students are more outgoing and some are more introverted, she allowed students in her class to contribute to the class by writing as well as oral participation. Students can turn in answers to her questions in class at the end of each class session and this will be counted towards their participations score. She explained that she did this not only for international students, but

for American students as well. She thinks no matter where students are from, it is natural that some are outgoing and outspoken in the class while others prefer not to speak up but listen. She fully respected students' learning preferences and choices. On top of that, the course subject she taught was college writing, so there was added advantage of having students practice writing more. Giving credit for students' written class participation, in addition to their speaking in the class, was a method this instructor used and wanted to share with other instructors, she believed this offered students more choices, and would be helpful for not only international students but also domestic students as well.

Shirley's ENGL 131 instructor, who taught a multilingual class composed of a large number of international students, also provided students many choices. This instructor had been a language learner herself, so she was very understanding of the feelings of language learners. She had also taught English abroad, which made her aware of cultural differences. As a result, she allowed room for students to make choices. For instance, she let international students decide if they wanted to adopt a more American way of learning or retain their previous learning habits. She explained:

I prefer class discussion. I like when people can talk to their neighbor, feel free and open to talk about their opinions, I also like when students can say to me, "Hey I don't agree here," or "what about this?" I find it stimulating and I like to hear different voices from my students, I don't like to just hear myself talk for the whole time. But I also realize that if they don't want to talk out loud, because of, maybe something that feels odd to them, or not comfortable for them, I have to respect that. You know, as a multilingual teacher, it is part of my job.

Another choice she left for students to decide is if they wanted to speak in their native language in class. "I tell them, you can say in Chinese. I don't care, and people will help translate." This instructor shared an account from her class:

I asked a student, who do not really talk in class, and she said "it is something about..." She could not think of the word in English. Then I said "you should say the word in

Chinese, we have tons of people in class who might know the word.” So she said Chinese, and sure enough, one of her friend translated “it is feminism.” So I was like “tell me more about it, why do you think it is a feminism theory?” She was like “it is really hard to say in English”, but I was like “just try.”

This instructor found it helpful to allow students to use their native language to share their ideas with the class and also express what they wanted to say. Along those same lines, Cathy’s TA in her communication class also demonstrated understanding for Chinese undergraduate students who chose to stick together in his class, which he also felt had some benefits:

I understand it and I think they have a sense of commonality with other students, it makes them feel a little bit more comfortable so I think it is probably a good thing that they are sticking to one other person and they do not feel as isolated. So if they feel a little bit more comfortable then they will be willing to speak a little bit more, so I see it a good thing. Just in the sense that they are not isolated and willing to speak up.

These instructors and the TAs varied in their ways of providing Chinese students more choices, one encouraged writing, one respected introversion, one allowed students to use their native languages when communicating, and the other allowed Chinese students to stick together to increase their comfort level. In whatever way, they all left students the autonomy to decide what would work best for them and respected students’ choices, which might be impacted by their personalities, previous educational and cultural backgrounds and experience.

### Give More Time

Cathy’s TA in her communication class shared his teaching strategy of holding off before calling on someone to answer a question in class, as well as making sure everyone understood that there was no right or wrong answer in the discussion session. He aimed to create a safe environment where ideas could be discussed openly. He encouraged instructors to give a bit more time for international students in their classes to formulate their ideas:

What I would suggest is that you should give a little bit extra time to formulate questions, especially international students; they hear in English, they translated to their native language, come up with their response in their native language and then try to translate their response back into English, and say that out loud. So that might take time right? My biggest suggestion is don't always go for the first person who raises up his hand every time, and it is because again, certain people take a little bit more time to formulate their ideas, give them the chance to formulate their ideas before somebody just bursts something out. It is a kind of setback if students just raise up their hands and shout out something right away, because other students may just be trying to formulate their answers and thinking. If that person keeps doing that every time, then other people might feel that person will talk anyway why do I have to, right? It is really important to let students formulate ideas.

Shirley's ENGL 131 instructor also recognized the value of waiting or pausing in her teaching:

I think one thing that I have been doing is to ask somebody, "Hey, what do you think?" And then, wait. And a lot of times that person will feel shy, or hesitated to speak... I just waited, and waited, waited. Not to make the student feel more nervous but just to say, I don't care if I have to wait, like I don't care if it takes you a while to think about what you want to say, because I have been there, I have also been the one trying to say what I want to say in another language and it takes a little bit of time, especially if it is really complicated stuff that you are explaining, so I think that was kind of strategy saying "hey, I want to hear from you" and actually being a person who wants to wait to want to hear from them.

Giving more time for international students to think and organize their thoughts showed understanding on the part of instructors/TAs, as well as their encouragement. This practice would encourage students to participate and speak up more in a classroom setting. This tactic would work not only for Chinese students, but also for other international students whose first language is not English and for any quieter students.

### Ask Students Questions

Cathy's TA in her communication class also shared his method of asking for clarification to help make sure students understand concepts presented in class. He explained that what he often does is, after covering some new materials such as explaining a concept, he would stop and ask the question "do you guys understand that?" "What did you not understand?" "What is

confusing about it?” And then students would usually take the chance to ask questions. He used this method, along with his concept of allowing students, especially international students, a bit more time to organize their thoughts and translate between English and their native languages.

Shirley’s ENGL 131 TA also adopted a similar way of getting class involvement by asking students questions. She believed it served several purposes, including providing her feedback on students’ learning, helping students get used to American classroom interactions, as well as helping them have their voices heard.

When I look around my classroom, I can see people’s brains moving. I don’t know if that makes sense. I know that they are processing because my teaching style is very interactive, I ask questions, “Oh, what about this?” They are leading questions, I try to guide them through analyzing, why did this person do that? what do you think this symbol is about? Some of them will answer, but normally it is my non-Chinese students. So I want to draw out their thoughts as well, because so many of my students are extremely intelligent in that class, and I want them to not only speak out those thoughts because I know their real quality, but also it gives me a chance to affirm them, and affirm they are practicing for future classes, because this is a pretty typical way to interact in the American classroom, so I want them to feel that their voices should be heard, and it is really important to share, and what they have to say is powerful.

The strategy of asking students questions used by the above TAs showed their commitment to students’ learning, as well as served as an effective way for them to get feedback about students’ understanding. In addition, international students are given more time and opportunities to be involved in the class and have their voices heard. This method will not only help Chinese undergraduate students, but also all the students in the class, since everyone can benefit from asking questions and hearing the answers.

### Increase Cultural Awareness

Several interviewees pointed out that instructors should have awareness of their international students’ unique cultural and educational backgrounds, indicating that they should

acknowledge that in addition to the educational system in the United States, international students had been immersed in different educational styles and cultural backgrounds.

For example, Cathy's TA in the communication course strongly advises instructors to be sensitive and aware of the educational differences:

Be considerate about international students, the way they formulate the argument, the way they were educated. Those from different countries, they were educated slightly different than the United States. So again in the United States, we always tell you to put the thesis in the very beginning, then formulate your argument, while other places they back up, back up, and then beat up the ground, that is my main argument, this supports my idea... So be sensitive about the cultural and educational style because not everybody is educated the same way as in the United States.

Shirley's English 131 instructor also noticed teaching style differences and shared her method of making adjustment according to students' learning preferences:

I am actually noticing that with a lot of students in my multi-lingual class, one on one is easier for them with me. So when we do class discussions, there might be low, there might be some quiet, but if I go one-on-one to people's desk, they will share their ideas and absolutely talk to me.

I have never taught in China. I have taught in other countries abroad and you really learn their culture. So I think, just from asking questions and having attended a panel discussion, the teaching style in China is different. Having students speak out in the middle of class, do class discussion, you know, is not a normal way for them to do in a classroom. I think for one, there are some hesitancy that "oh wait, it is really new for us culturally to do," I think part of me is trying to figure out if I want to force my way of teaching, because it is Americanized or whatever, on them. Or if I just want to allow them to be quiet, do more one-on-one stuff with them. In my next class I am doing more one-on-one with the class, I think it is because I want to be responsive to what feels comfortable for them culturally.

Along with the cultural awareness, Chrissy's TA in her psychology class encouraged instructors to let their international students know that in American culture, asking for help is strongly advocated:

I think it is important to let students know that you are resource to them. I do think that, and it is good for them to get help when they need it, because I do think that students who are native English speakers, who are originally grown up in the American culture, they get told a lot to get help, to advocate for themselves, to ask questions, that professors and TAs are resources for them. And I don't think that is necessarily always, you know, the learning style in other cultures, depend on the culture.

The recommendations indicate that it will be helpful for instructors to increase their cultural awareness and tolerance towards international students in their classes. The knowledge of where international students are from and what they have experienced prior to their educational experience in the U.S. will help instructors in teaching and evaluating these students. It seems, the longer one has taught international students, the harder one tries to learn about cultural and educational differences and their impact on learning. Similarly, the more exposure one has with international students, the more likely that he or she becomes sensitive and understanding towards their international students' cultural and educational differences.

## Discussion

### Cultural stereotypes

Some previous studies have treated international students or Asian students as a homogeneous group without considering subtle differences and cultural variations among them (e.g., Bart, 2012). In this study, I tried to be careful to avoid stereotyping and simplification when conducting my research about Chinese culture's influence on students' learning and behaviors, as suggested by Glesne (2005), Koehne (2005), etc. This research tried to fully address participants' diversities even though they are all Chinese undergraduate students in the U.S., going to the same university. This study aims to help readers understand that there are differences among any seemingly homogenous student body, such as the group of Chinese students, specifically Chinese undergraduate students.

Throughout the study, I have learned a great deal from the student participants, as well as how traditional assumptions about Chinese international students could be inaccurate and misleading. The literature has noted stereotypical views of Asian students as passive learners who lack participation (Liu, 2001; Wan, 1999). Just as Littlewood (2000)'s research indicated

that Asian students do not necessarily prefer to sit back and listen, I have discovered that the reason Shirley did not speak up in class may not only be because of her fears and shyness, but mainly because she felt she could learn more by listening to the instructor and other students' questions. I learned that Johnny chose not to ask for help but work independently when he encountered problems in his life, with the full awareness that it might take him much longer to work through them on his own. He believed it would be worth the effort since those problems might appear later in his life and it would be better to learn to solve them sooner rather than later.

When Chrissy felt things were out of control in her life and she was no longer “riding the horse but being pulled by the horse”, she was courageous enough to take a year off to reflect on her life and came back stronger as a result and with a sense of new beginning. I learned that Shirley deliberately chose to be teammates with Chinese classmates of hers, especially those who she knew previously as hard-working, at the cost, which she willingly accepted, of not making many American friends because grades and academic achievement were more important to her.

Those vivid examples from the study encourage readers and Chinese undergraduate students to increase “resistant capital”, as Oropeza, Varghese, and Kanno (2010) suggested in their study about linguistic minority students in higher education. As a language learner, one should try hard to increase his or her ability to challenge the negative stereotypes and labels and establish positive identities of their own. Consequently, I believe that no matter whether one is a native speaker or not, one should be careful to not stereotype others simply based on their nationality, accents, etc.

### Generalizability

One might be interested to know to what extent the findings and conclusion of this study can be generalized to other situations. The answer is that this study is not designed to lead to its

generalization. As one of the main differences between quantitative and qualitative methods, quantitative methods look for explanations and predictions that will generalize to other situations, with careful sampling strategies and experimental designs in order to produce generalizable results (Usher, 1997), while qualitative methods focus on transferability-- the ability to apply findings in similar contexts or settings, instead of generalizability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

That is to say, results of qualitative studies should not be simply quantified or generalized to a larger population and different settings. As Chen, X. (1994) explained in discussing the generalization of the findings on her dissertation on Chinese students' relationship-building with Americans in United States universities, she claimed that "as I only studied 9 Chinese students in the Boston area, the findings can not be generalized to other populations in other settings." The same thing can be said about this study, that since I only studied 6 Chinese undergraduate students in a large research institution in the Northwest of the U.S., the findings can not be generalized to other populations in other locations and situations. Having said that, the results are highly suggestive of student challenges and possible strategies in similar settings.

### Representativeness

As one might ask, this study has only six student participants focusing on academic socialization of Chinese undergraduate students, how representative is it? How compelling are the findings and conclusions? Since this study was a qualitative study, it was not designed to represent all types of Chinese students in great detail.

The beauty of qualitative methods lies not in the number and representativeness, but the depth and detail it can provide. As Bloomberg & Volpe (2008) claimed, one of the basic principles of qualitative research is that each research setting is special in its own mix of people

and contextual factors. Therefore, unlike in quantitative research, representativeness and inferring from the particular to the general is not as important as the participants' ability to provide information about themselves and their setting.

This study's volunteer-based recruitment method offered six student participants with different ages, majors, places of origins and academic status the opportunity to share their experience. It is my responsibility as a researcher to ensure each student participant's voice is heard, their stories are told and their experiences reflected upon, so that others may gain insight and take whatever helpful insight they can and apply to their own learning and teaching.

The hope is also that by learning about these six Chinese students' experiences from this study, people can form better opinions of what some Chinese students may think and what they have accomplished, so that they can contribute to improving on the educational and social experience of future Chinese international students, as well as other international students.

## Implications, Limitations and Directions of Future Studies:

### Implications

Throughout the process of data collection and data analysis, I explored if there are commonalities or tendencies in my research participants' academic socialization and self-identities. Based on the research results and data collected, I synthesized suggestions for international students studying in the U.S. as well as for their hosting-country professors, TAs, and administrators.

My research is meant to be helpful to a diverse audience. First, Chinese students who want to get their undergraduate degrees in the U.S. can learn from the research and prepare accordingly. Chinese students who are currently studying in English-speaking countries might be

able to learn from the student participants' experiences and reflect on their own. For U.S. higher education institutions which host a large number of Chinese students, it is hoped that giving voice to these students' experiences will help institutions to better understand and support their own students. Instructors and TAs in U.S. universities can learn more about Chinese students' learning preferences, habits, and expectations.

There are also some gaps that my research will try to fill in the literature. First of all, I situate my research within the background of international higher education, my understanding of internationalization in higher education (e.g., Altbach, 2010; OECD, 2011) can provide valuable insights and situated contexts of individuals' learning, change and development, as well as make a contribution to understanding the impact of the internationalization of higher education on international students' academic socialization in Western countries and cultures.

In addition, many previous studies about Chinese students' relationship building emphasized students' well-being and psychological aspects (e.g., Chen, 1994; Chen, 1999; Gu, 2009), while studies about students' academic socialization usually haven't involved much of students' social life and relationship building (e.g., Morita, 2000, 2004; Yang, 2010). Oral academic discourse socialization has been the most ignored in the studies of academic socialization (e.g., Duff, 2010). My study aims to contribute to filling this gap and shedding light on the influence of students' social life and relationship-building on their academic socialization, especially in oral academic practices.

The method of focus group interviews can also provide unique insights. Though one-to-one interview between the researcher and the participant has been widely used in past studies, not that much research regarding Chinese undergraduate students' experiences in the U.S. has been conducted using focus group interviews, where all the participants have the opportunity to

share their stories, communicate their opinions, and exchange ideas with each other. My usage of focus group interviews can contribute to my research and future research in many ways, such as to identify the issues or concerns of greatest importance to participants (e.g., Angrosino, 2007), provide information that might be ignored by some individuals, find out the commonalities and differences among each participant's experience and understanding (e.g., Rabiee, 2004), help observe interactions among the participants (e.g., McLafferty, 2004; Twinn, 1998), and bring the topic to greater depth and breadth (e.g., Lederman, 1990).

### Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative studies, this study was able to provide rich, in-depth understandings of six Chinese undergraduate student participants. This study gave them the floor to have their voices heard and opinions expressed (e.g., Glesne, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). However, also because of the nature of the qualitative study and the small number of student participants, the study could not provide a comprehensive view of the Chinese undergraduate student experience in the U.S. The findings of the study are context-based and specifically-situated; therefore, they should not be simply generalized for other locations, institutions, ethnicities, and etc. Special caution is needed when one seeks to explain transferability of findings from one qualitative study to other similar contexts (Bloomberg, & Volpe, 2008). For future research designed to develop a broader view of Chinese international students' learning in other contexts, the study could be designed with increased sample size of the participants, as well as employ mixed methods to gain the benefits of quantitative methods.

In addition to the limited number of the student participants and specific contexts, in this type of qualitative study with ethnographic characteristics, the researcher usually serves as the primary figure in data collection and data analysis (Angrosino, 2005; Bloomberg, & Volpe,

2008; Chen, 2006; Glesne, 2005; etc). As Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) view, “the human as instrument in qualitative inquiry is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness.” The data of this study were collected mainly via in-depth interviews complemented by observations and informal conversations. The process of finding patterns and themes from these data was contextualized and comprehended through my lens. The process of listening to others' stories and then interpreting and retelling the accounts came through my understanding. Even though I have been very careful in my comprehension, it is unavoidable that my analysis is subjective, it is possible that my biases, my background and personal experience impacted the findings I present. In addition, even though all of the student participants had generously opened up and shared their feelings with me, my identity as a Chinese international graduate student who is working on a Ph.D. degree in English might give them some pressure and even create some hierarchy. Even though I have tried my best to create a relaxing and nonhierarchical environment during our conversations, to listen carefully and respect whatever the students said, and to be personal and approachable, my identity as a researcher might still hinder the students from telling all they want to say, they might selectively choose to share things they think suitable to share with me.

As in all study designs there are strengths and limitations. One limitation of this study's data collection is the length of the observation period: students were interviewed and observed during one quarter encompassing an 11-week period. Questions regarding students' changes were asked during this 11-week period, the information from which could be limited. If the study had covered a longer time period, perhaps two quarters or one year, more changes might have taken place and more patterns of students' behavior might have been identified.

Along with the length of the observation period, due to practical reasons, such as limited available time and overlapping course schedules, I was not able to observe students in every

course that they took during the quarter, nor did I talk to every professor/TA who taught them. I was able to observe a part of their courses, and interview instructors of those courses that I did observe who also granted approval of my interview request. It would have been helpful to observe more courses each student was taking during the quarter, as well as to talk to more of their instructors.

In regards to the focus interview at the end of the quarter, I was only able to gather half of the student participants. Therefore, the exchange of ideas and the synergy of the conversation might not have been as rich as if all six student participants had attended. If the focus interview had been arranged earlier in the quarter, instead of at the end, there might have been the chance that more interviewees would have been available.

### Future studies

To return to the point of representativeness mentioned above, one possibility for a future study would be to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods together to understand Chinese students' academic socialization in the U.S. Surveys could be designed and widely distributed asking scaled questions such as students' patterns of asking questions in class, frequency of using office hours, to what extent they feel confident participating in group discussions, etc. From more participants, the statistical methods would generate quantitative data, allowing for statistically significance and interpretive analysis. On the other hand, the qualitative results from this study are a useful starting point for future investigations. A selection of students could also be interviewed and observed in greater detail, with their words and actions recorded. In this way, both the qualitative and quantitative methods could be strategically integrated.

For additional future research, more could also be done to study the impact of university policies and the local environment on the success of international students. As mentioned in the

introduction, this research was conducted in a large research university in the northwest U.S. Here the local population of Chinese is significant. In addition, many large employers in the area employ a significant number of Chinese. The location of the university provided a unique local culture that is made up of welcoming, open-minded, and warm-hearted local residents. On top of that, the size of the university added institutional characteristics: large universities might be able to provide more resources, while the complexity of navigating through all the useful information to find suitable support may be more daunting. It would be interesting to see how different locations and university characteristics influence Chinese undergraduates' learning and behavior.

What is more, my research focus was on academic socialization, mainly focusing on what happens in a classroom as well as activities outside the classroom that related to academic learning, such as use of office hours, use of the writing center, study groups, etc. It would be worthwhile to expand the scope to also include students' social life experience on a personal level, such as how their friend-making influences their English learning and confidence-building, how the experience of their social life impacts what is happening in their classroom, how their learning in the classroom impacts their behaviors in their social life.

## Conclusion

This qualitative research with ethnographic characteristics has focused on the process of academic socialization of six volunteer, Chinese undergraduate students in the U.S. These students varied in their age, places of origin, majors and academic status, English proficiency level, personalities, family backgrounds, and previous learning experience. Through a quarter-long observation, interviews, and other methods of data collection, the research has identified that these student participants have both similar and different patterns regarding their

participation in a classroom setting, their interactions with professors, TAs, and classmates, and their ideas of self-identity.

First of all, Chinese undergraduate students in the U.S. are not that different from their American peers. Even though all participants belonged to a general group of Chinese undergraduate students studying in the U.S., they all had various behaviors and unique ways of thinking. There are many differences between the students and no major generalized behavior of Chinese undergraduate students could be identified. For instance, not all Chinese international students tended to talk less than their American counterparts. It really depended on the individual. Factors such as parental influence, students' personality, and students' previous experience played a role influencing their attitudes and behaviors, each to a different degree on each individual student, just as those factors might also influence American students. The Chinese students in this study showed differences in the degree to which they spoke up in class, in the frequency with which they used office hours, and in the degree of their participation in class discussions, just as you would expect American students would have shown.

On the other hand, Chinese international student participants in this study showed some common tendencies that were different from typical American students. English language proficiency was an important factor influencing their learning and behaviors. Students' cultural background and language proficiency impacted their understanding of the American higher education system, the expectations and norms of U.S. colleges (such as issues of plagiarism), English slang and humor, as well as context-based discussions. There existed a gap for each student during their study in the U.S., due to the cultural, educational, and language differences between China and the U.S., though some faced a larger gap than others. All the students experienced this gap and discomfort and struggled to overcome it. It took some longer to

navigate this gap than others. In addition, some took active and immediate actions to overcome the impact of this gap while others acted more passively. In this sense, these Chinese undergraduate students were different from their American peers in the area of academic socialization, since they needed to navigate the gap caused by the differences in education, language, and culture between China and the U.S.

While we would expect almost all undergraduates to face the need for academic socialization and identity threats, at times these were severe for these international students. The length of their stay in the U.S. influenced their progress of academic socialization, as well as their self-identity. While they all explored and adjusted to the American higher education system, some stretched themselves farther outside their comfort zone, while others did not. All of them felt they had changed over time, some described themselves as “calmer,” more “confident,” and “braver” compared to when they first arrived in the U.S. Those changes were reflected in different areas of their lives, such as their interactions with American students, the way of they approached problem-solving, the acceptance of various opinions around them, and their knowledge and understanding of themselves. Again there were different degrees of change noted for each participant, but all felt they had changed. Some had anticipated they would experience more changes and were disappointed more had not happened, others were satisfied with their improvements over time. Some also had regrets and wished they had done things differently, some claimed that they were happy with what they had accomplished and would just like to continue. Among the times when student voices were strongest was when they reflected on their self-identities over time. These reflections gave an opportunity for readers to understand what these Chinese undergraduate students have experienced and their attitudes towards their experiences.

Finally, there was one striking finding that worked against stereotypes of Chinese students in the US. Besides academic efforts, all of the student participants were also involved in activities for the purpose of giving back to the community and enriching their extracurricular activities. And all of the students took pride in these efforts.

Recommendations were collected from student participants, their instructors and TAs as well as the researcher in regards to how Chinese international undergraduate students could better adjust to American universities and smooth their academic socialization. These recommendations included, but are not limited to, interacting with American students, asking for help and using available resources, using effective time-management, exploring multiple ways to improve their English, and utilizing one's own cultural background as an advantage. One should be aware that some of the recommendations, as the interviewers pointed out, are suitable not only for Chinese undergraduate international students, but also for students of other nationalities and academic status. Suggestions and recommendations for TAs, professors, and the university to support international students were also collected. These include giving them more time to absorb and respond in class, giving them more options to participate as they acclimate to the new educational system and language, and increasing instructors' cultural awareness.

With increasing numbers of international students being admitted to U.S. universities, Chinese undergraduate students are an important group to be understood. If a university grants admission to them, it is part of the university's responsibility to truly understand and support them. If these students are exposed to all the available resources and helped at an early stage of their studies and socialization in the U.S., they might have an easier time adjusting to their academic and social life, avoiding many of the struggles, failures, and embarrassments that might otherwise occur. I believe that a joint effort should be made by all parties involved, including

international students themselves, their American peers, instructors, university administrators, and other parties involved. Working together the process of international students' academic socialization can become easier and smoother.

## Appendix

### Appendices A:

#### A-1 Recruitment notice posted through CSSA mailing list (Chinese Version)

亲爱的华盛顿大学的中国同学们：

你们好！

我是左微，三年前来华大攻读教育系/英语系的双硕士，现在华大英语系继续念博士。我研究的课题是“中国本科生在美国大学的学习与社交经历”，现在我需要征集 4-6 名华大本科生参与到我的研究中来。如果说您没有在美国读过高中，现在在华大读本科（具体哪一年纪专业没有关系），愿意分享你的经历，并且想了解更多同龄人在美国的学习生活故事，欢迎你加入我的研究，谢谢。

我的课题主要关注于来美国读本科的中国学生在英语习得，适应美式大学教学方式，与同学及教授人际交往等方面的问题。由于中国学生来美国，包括来华大的人数与日俱增，这样的研究具有迫切性和实际意义，能够通过了解部分中国本科生的经历来提供给美国教授、学校建议，也能让中国同学更好地了解如何有效适应美国高校学习，提高自身能力。

这个定性研究的具体方案是：经过你和教授的同意，我将会在课堂上观察和记录你（我本人不参与任何课堂活动）；我们将会在学期开始前，学期中和学期末各进行一次访谈；我会搜集你所上的课的资料和你的作业。如果你的教授愿意，我会和他或者她见面聊聊你在课堂上的表现和他或者她的建议。这个研究是纯学术无报酬的，你的真实姓名和各项隐私将会得到保护，但是你将有机会思考自己的学习习惯和方式，了解同龄人的学习适应情况；并且，我会提供免费的英语文章修改和学术方面的咨询服务。同时，作为一个在华大学习数年的中国学生，我对于美国教育体制，华大资源，中英文思维对比，如何跟美国人交往等话题都有一定认识，愿意分享给我的研究对象。这将会是一次愉悦的，有意义的，彼此都有收获的研究，期待本科生同学你的参与。

如果你感兴趣参与，或者有相关问题，请联系我：[weizuo@uw.edu](mailto:weizuo@uw.edu)，[206-552-6698](tel:206-552-6698)。

下面的英语附件是本项目申请学校 Human Review Board (IRB) 的正式文件，供参考。

非常勿扰，谢谢！

## A-2 Recruitment notice posted through CSSA mailing list (English Version)

Dear Chinese undergraduate fellows at the UW,

My name is Wei Zuo. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of English, and I have been studying at the University of Washington for three years. I am writing to talk about a study that I am conducting and want to ask for your help and participation.

My research relates to Chinese undergraduate students' language acquisition and cultural adjustment at UW. As you may have noticed, there has been a dramatic increase in the population of Chinese students studying in the U.S. However, there is not much literature about Chinese undergraduate students' experiences, challenges, strategies and expectations. My research will be helpful for Chinese students to learn from your experiences and reflect on their own. U.S. higher education institutions which host a large number of Chinese students might learn from the research and understand Chinese international students better. Instructors in U.S. universities might come to know more about Chinese students' learning preferences, habits and expectations. So your participation will be really valuable and important in making those happen.

I plan to recruit four-six Chinese undergraduate student participants. If you are chosen to be a participant, during Spring Quarter 2014, I plan to observe you in your classes, interview you three times throughout the quarter, as well as collect course materials and your assignments. Upon the approval of you and your instructors, I will also conduct interviews with your instructors regarding your performance in their classes. Please be aware that all this information will be confidential and your privacy will be protected. This study is not in any way an evaluation of your learning, and none of this will impact your grades in the class or an instructor's evaluation of you. I will also take strict steps to ensure that this study is not intrusive for you and your class.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Though you will not get paid for participating, you might find it helpful to reflect on your learning, to explore what has been done well and what can be improved, and to talk about your challenges and strategies. This can be a good experience for your own learning process. You can stop at any time, and all information is confidential. If the results of the study are published or presented, I will not use the names of people, the university, the classes and any other information that would identify participants, the university or the department.

Thank you very much for your consideration. If you are interested in participation in this study, please email me back. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by phone at 206-552-6698 or by email at [weizuo@uw.edu](mailto:weizuo@uw.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

Sincerely,

Wei Zuo

Ph.D. Candidate

### A-3 Email contact form to instructors/TAs

Dear [Instructor Name],

My name is Wei Zuo, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of English, University of Washington.

I am writing to talk about a study that I am conducting and want to ask for your help and participation. My research relates to Chinese undergraduate students' language acquisition and cultural adjustment at UW. I plan to collect six Chinese undergraduate students' experiences about their learning experiences especially academic socialization, and one of my student participants is in your class currently. I am contacting you for your approval to observe your [course name] on some of the [course time] since one of my student participants, [student Name] is taking your class this quarter. I would also love to have a copy of the course syllabus if possible.

I am doing this research because there has been a dramatic increase in the population of Chinese students studying in the U.S. However, there is not much literature about Chinese undergraduate students' experiences, challenges, strategies and expectations. My research will appeal to a diverse audience. First, Chinese students who want to do their undergraduate degrees in the U.S. can learn from the experiences of others and prepare accordingly. For U.S. higher education institutions which host a large number of Chinese students, they can learn from these students' experiences and understand and support them better. For instructors in the U.S. universities, my research will provide information about Chinese students' learning preferences, habits and expectations.

My study will include interviews with students. Besides students' points of view regarding their own study, it would be extremely valuable to hear from their instructors. One of my student participants [student Name] is currently taking a class with you. In order to gain a better understanding of his/her class participation and overall learning, I would like to gain your permission to observe five-ten sessions of your class which he/she is taking during the Spring 2014 quarter. I would also like to have a 40-60 minute interview with you about the focal student's learning. This study is not in any way an evaluation of your teaching, your class, or the student's learning. I will take strict steps to ensure that the study is not intrusive for you or your students.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Participants can stop at any time, and all information is confidential. If the results of the study are published or presented, I will not use the names of people, the university, the class, or provide any other information that would identify participants, the university or the department. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

Thank you very much for your consideration. If you are interested in participation in this study, please email me back. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by phone at 206-552-6698 or by email at [weizuo@uw.edu](mailto:weizuo@uw.edu).

Thank you very much for your help!

Sincerely,

Wei Zuo

Ph.D. Candidate

Language and Rhetoric

English Department

University of Washington

## **Appendices B:**

### **Consent forms**

#### **B-1 Participant Consent Form: Chinese Undergraduate Students**

##### **Study of Chinese undergraduate students' language acquisition and cultural adjustment**

Investigator: Wei Zuo

Language and Rhetoric

English Department

[Weizuo@uw.edu](mailto:Weizuo@uw.edu)

Phone: 206-552-6698

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sandra Silberstein

[tq@u.washington.edu](mailto:tq@u.washington.edu)

#### **Investigator's Statement**

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you all the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to provide better understanding of Chinese undergraduate students' language acquisition and cultural adjustment at the UW. I want to collect data on Chinese undergraduate students' experiences about their learning and academic socialization. Some of the areas I might study include classroom participation, group work, coursework (including class papers and feedback), and learning strategies.

#### **Procedures**

If you choose to participate in this study, I would like to interview you three times throughout the Spring 2014 quarter, at the beginning, middle and end of the quarter, respectively. Each interview will last no more than 60 minutes. I would mainly ask you questions about your academic experience. For example, I will ask you, "please talk more about the academic successes you have had and challenges you have faced," "Could you please give me several examples of things you learned from your professors and classes, if there are any?" and "How do you describe your relationship with your classmates/instructors?" Upon the approval of you and at the convenient time and location for all participants, we will have an informal group discussion about topics that interest all participants. There will be no specific interview questions to respond to, but some topics might have appeared in a one-to-one interview I will have had with you.

In addition to interviewing you, I will try to sit in on five-ten sessions of each of your two-three courses upon the instructors' approval. I will take field notes in the classroom and try to get a sense of how you learn in a classroom setting. I might ask you questions about how you interpret your

behavior/choices/performance in the classroom after the class. I might also interview your instructors about his/her opinions of your learning. None of data will influence your course grades and it is voluntary to participate.

With your permission, I would like to audio tape your interviews so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation based on which I will write a written transcription. I will assign a pseudonym to you to protect your rights, and I will destroy the original recording at the end of June 2019. The transcript will be sent to you for your reference electronically. The data will be stored in a password protected computer that only I will have access to.

### **Risks, stress or discomfort**

Some people might feel that interviews or observations will harm their privacy. If participants are uncomfortable with specific questions, they can choose not to answer them. If they would like to withdraw from the study, they can do it any time they want. What's more, my interview protocols and observation focus are designed under the guidance of theory and professor's instruction, the level of professionalism and specificity will help participant feel more comfortable.

### **Benefits of the study**

Many students find it helpful to reflect on their learning and self-identity, to reflect on what can be improved and what has been done well. Another benefit may be the possibility of having more attention given to Chinese international students' learning in the U.S. and possible improvement in university support and service to your group.

### **Other information**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You can quit at any time you want. Information about you is confidential and under protection. I will assign you a pseudonym and code the study information. I will keep the link between your name and the numerical code in a separate, secured location until June 2019. Then I will destroy the information linking your information to the pseudonym. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name or any other information that might identify you. This study will not influence your course grades in any way. Your instructors will not have access to data for any evaluation purposes.

Government or university staffs sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at any legal risk of harm.

I may want to re-contact you for future related studies. Please indicate below if you give me permission to contact you for future research. Giving me permission to re-contact you will not obligate you in any way.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact me by the email address or phone number listed at the top of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at: 206-543-0098.

Signature of investigator Printed Name Date

Participant's Statement

This study has been explained to me clearly. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research, I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I give permission for this research to audiotape my interview.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this research to observe me in the class.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this research to video/audiotape me in the class.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this research to collected course related document.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this research to interview me at the time and location convenient for me.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for the research to re-contact me to clarify information.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

---

Signature of participant Printed Name Date

## **Appendices B:**

### **Consent forms**

#### **B-2 Participant Consent Form: Focal Students' Instructors/TAs**

#### **Study of Chinese undergraduate students' language acquisition and cultural adjustment**

Investigator: Wei Zuo

Language and Rhetoric

English Department

[Weizuo@uw.edu](mailto:Weizuo@uw.edu)

Phone: 206-552-6698

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sandra Silberstein

[tq@u.washington.edu](mailto:tq@u.washington.edu)

#### Investigator's Statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you all the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to provide better understanding of Chinese undergraduate students' language acquisition and cultural adjustment at the UW. I want to collect data on Chinese undergraduate students' experiences about their learning and social life. Some of the areas I might study include classroom participation, group work, coursework (including class papers and feedback), and learning strategies.

#### **Procedures**

If you choose to participate in this study, I would like to have an interview with you which will last no more than 60 minutes during the Spring 2014 quarter. I would ask you questions about the focal students' academic performance in your class. For example, I might ask you to talk about what you think is the biggest challenge he/she faces in your class; what you have noticed special about this student's learning style/strategies, if anything; how active you think the student is answering questions in the class and participating in group work; and what you think the student needs to improve most in your class, if anything.

In addition to interviewing you, I would like to ask for your permission to sit in on five-ten sessions of your class to observe the focal student. I will take field notes in the classroom and try to get a sense of how he/she learns in a classroom setting. I might ask you questions about how you interpret his/her behavior/performance in the classroom. None of data will be used for the purpose of evaluating your course and it is completely voluntary to participate.

With your permission, I would like to audio tape your interviews so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation based on which I will write a written transcription. I will assign a pseudonym to you to protect your rights, and I will destroy the original recording at the end of the quarter. The transcript will be sent to you for your reference electronically. The data will be stored in a password protected computer only I will have the access to it.

### **Risks, stress or discomfort**

Some people might feel that interviews or observations will harm their privacy. If participants are uncomfortable for specific questions, they can choose not to answer them. If they would like to withdraw from the study, they can do it any time they want.

### **Benefits of the study**

You might not directly benefit from taking part in this research study. However, many teachers and educators find it helpful to reflect on their teaching. Another benefit may be the possibility of having more understanding of Chinese international undergraduate students in the U.S. and providing more insight into the needs and learning strategies of this group of students.

### **Other information**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You can quit at any time you want. Information about you is confidential and under protection. I will assign you a pseudonym and code the study information. I will keep the link between your name and the numerical code in a separate, secured location until June 2019. Then I will destroy the information linking your information to the pseudonym. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name or any other information that might identify you.

Government or university staffs sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at any legal risk of harm.

I may want to re-contact you for future related studies. Please indicate below if you give me permission to contact you for the future research. Giving me permission to re-contact you will not obligate you in any way.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact me by the email address or phone number listed at the top of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at: 206-543-0098.

Signature of investigator Printed Name Date

### Participant's Statement

This study has been explained to me clearly. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research, I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

I give permission for this research to audiotape my interview.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this research to collected course related document.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this research to observe my class.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for this research to video/audiotape my class.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for the research to re-contact me to clarify information.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

---

Signature of participant Printed Name Date

**Appendices C:**  
**Notification statements**

**Sample notification for student participants and instructor participants**

Wei Zuo is a Ph.D. candidate in Language and Rhetoric in the English Department at the University of Washington. She is conducting a research study which examines Chinese international undergraduate students' learning, academic socialization and self-identity at the UW. She would like to interview Chinese undergraduate students and their instructors as well as observe the focal students in class settings in order to get a better understanding of their learning. Her study is not an evaluation of your studying or teaching and your participation in her study is totally voluntary. She may be taking notes and audio recording during meetings with you, but she will ask for your approval in advance. She will use pseudonyms to protect your rights. Any information she records will be strictly confidential and no one else would have access to your information. The recordings and all other information will be deleted by June 2019. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact her at: [weizuo@uw.edu](mailto:weizuo@uw.edu). If you have further questions about the researcher and the research, you can contact the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

## **Appendices D:**

### **Interview protocol samples**

#### **D-1 Beginning-of-quarter Interview Protocol with student participants**

Topic: Chinese students' language acquisition and academic socialization at the UW

Informant: A Chinese undergraduate student who has been studying at the UW.

Preamble: Hello, I am a doctoral candidate in the English Department, and I am interested in learning about Chinese students' experience studying at the UW. I know you are an undergraduate student here, and I believe you will have something to say about your experience. It will be very helpful if you can talk with me and the interview can help me gain more understanding of your academic experience. So thank you for your time.

First of all, I want to ask for your permission to record this interview.

- The reason that I want to record the interview is that the data will be transcribed more accurately and understood better.
  - It will be confidential and under protection, so please do not worry about your rights and privacy.
1. Where are you from, and what languages do you speak? What is your first language?
  2. When did you start learning English, and reading and writing in English?
  3. Can you tell me a little about your parents' background, what educational level they are, if they have studied abroad before, and what they do.
  4. What is your age and year in college? How long have you studied in the U.S. or in other English-speaking countries?
  5. What made you decided to come to study in the US? How did you prepare for coming to a U.S. university?
  6. Why did you choose UW? Eg, University's name? Location? Program? Family?
  7. Before coming to the UW, how regularly did you use English? For what kinds of academic tasks did you use English?
  8. What would you say is your current level of using English? For example, reading? Writing? Social activities?
  9. What would you describe regarding your English proficiency level, such as different skills, changes over time, etc?
    - What skills have improved and how? What still needs a lot more work?
    - How did those skills get improved?
    - What is your plan to work on those weaker skills?

10. Generally speaking, how would you describe your experience at UW?

- Any highlight/sad moment?
- What are some successful examples?
- What have you learned? About learning expectations and teaching styles in the universities in the U.S.? About the U.S. culture?

11. Have you faced academic challenges since you've been at the UW? How did you solve them?

12. How successful is the UW's support and service to international students, as you see it?

13. What resources you have been using on campus that you like/dislike? What you hope to see?

- For what purpose? When?
- How helpful were these and in what ways?
- What kind of support or services do you wish you could find at the UW but have not yet?

14. How often you go to professors' office hour/TA hour? And why?

- can you talk specifically about your relationship with your classmates/instructors?

15. Did you spend any time on activities/volunteering related to school?

16. Who are you mainly friends with and how did you become friends with them?

- How would you describe the people you usually study with or hang out with, in terms of their nationality, academic level, and quantity?
- Do you have a sense of community/belonging here?

17. How are you feeling about this academic quarter? What do you think will be the most challenging part and what do you think you will have to do to succeed in these courses?

18. Is anything else going on in your life that is affecting your school work that I should know?

19. How do you see your identity now? Has any changes occurred during your study in the US? Has your experience changed your sense of your Chinese identity in any way? If so, how?

20. Any advice for students who are studying abroad like you?

Concluding Remarks:

1. How would you describe college life to your friends back home who are considering studying overseas?

- What are the opportunities they will have?
- What are the challenges they might face?
- What can they do to better prepare themselves?

2. For the interview, is there anything else that I haven't asked but you would like to add? Thank you very much.

## **D-2 Middle-of-quarter Interview Protocol with student participants**

1. Over the past five/six/seven weeks, do you see any changes in your learning/class participation?
2. How would you describe yourself as a student?
3. How would you describe all the courses you are taking right now?
4. What is your feeling towards instructors/professors in your class? Anything you wish they could do to help with your learning?
5. (For those who are taking composition class) is writing difficult for you? Why or why not?
6. What do you see as your major challenges? How do you overcome them?
7. What are the things you think need improvement most from you?
8. What are your learning strategies?
9. Do you think you participate in class discussion/group work often? Why or why not? Did you use any strategies to help you with the class participation?
10. How will you describe your relationship with your fellow classmates?

### **D-3 End-of-quarter Interview Protocol with student participants**

1. How would you describe this quarter?
2. Can you briefly comment on each course you took, such as what you learned, the professors/TAs, challenges?
3. What are the highs and lows in this quarter?
4. How successful would you say you are as a student this quarter on a scale of 0 to 10. Why?
5. What types of academic challenges did you face this quarter and how did you address them?
6. What were some very helpful strategies or resources you used in your study this quarter?
7. What improvement have you made in developing your academic skills?
8. Have you changed since your entry into the university? If so, how?
9. Where do you see yourself in a year?
10. What is your goal after undergraduate study? Do you see the connection between what you are learning and what you want to do after?
11. If there is one thing that you need to improve most, what would you say it is and why?
12. What do you see as your own identity?
13. How would you describe life as an undergraduate student in the U.S. to your friend and family back home?
14. Is there anything else you think is important to share about your experience this quarter?
15. What suggestions would you give to incoming Chinese undergraduate students, based on your experience?

#### **D-4 Interview protocol samples with instructors/TAs**

Topic: Chinese students' language acquisition and academic socialization at the UW

Informant: An instructor who has my Chinese undergraduate student participant in his/her class.

Preamble: Hello, I am a doctoral candidate in the English Department, and I am interested in learning about Chinese students' experience studying at the UW. One of my student participants, X, is taking your Y course, and it will be very helpful if you would share some of your opinions on his/her performance. This interview can help me gain more understanding of his/her academic experience. And both his/her name and your name will be protected by using pseudonyms. So thank you for your time.

First of all, I want to ask for your permission to record this interview.

- The reason that I want to record the interview is that the data will be transcribed more accurately and understood better.
  - It will be confidential and under protection, so please do not worry about your rights and privacy.
1. Please talk about your overall impression of his/her performance in your class.
  2. What have you noticed special about this student's learning style/strategies, if anything?
  3. Compared to all the other students in your class, what do you feel about his/her understanding of your assignment requirements?
  4. Compared to all the other students in your class, to what degree do you think his/her work meets your standards and expectations?
  5. What do you see as his/her strong points?
  6. Please talk about what you think are the main challenges he/she faces in your class.
  7. What effort have you noticed he/her has made in order to deal with the above challenges?
  8. What suggestions/help have you provided for him/her to address those challenges?
  9. Do you think there are some changes in him/her in regards to academic performance from the beginning of the quarter till now?
  10. (follow up question) What are the reasons of these changes?
  11. How active do you think the student is answering questions in class? Based on your understanding, why do you think he/she acts that way?
  12. How active do you think the student is participating in group work? Why do you think he/she acts that way?
  13. How active do you think the student's interaction is with you, such as attending office hours, asking you questions, asking for clarification, etc? Why do you think he/she acts that way?
  14. What do you think the student needs to improve most in your class?

### **D-5 Follow-up Interview protocol with instructors**

Dear Professor, Thank you very much for meeting with me again to do this follow up interview. I really appreciate your time and help.

Before we start, I want to ask for your permission to record this interview, which can help my future transcription and coding.

1. Please tell me what is new about my student participant since our last interview.
2. What grade did the student get in your class and can you explain a bit why.
3. What stood out most in him/her as a student in your class?
4. How successful do you think my student participant is as a student and why.
5. Did you notice any changes in his/her learning skills and academic behaviors throughout the quarter? Please give some examples.
6. What do you see as his/her main strength and weakness in learning, compared to American students and other international students?
7. What would you say his/her major academic challenge is? Any suggestions on how to cope with that?
8. What does my student participant needs improve most?
9. How would you describe my focal student's relationship with you? Any suggestions for students on how to interact with professors?
10. Do you see the influence of personality in my student participants' learning and behaviors in your class? If so, how?
11. If we generalize a bit, what suggestions would you give to Chinese undergraduate students?
12. What suggestions might you give for instructors who have several Chinese undergraduate students in his/her class?

## **Appendices E: Observation guides**

Field notes will be recorded during observations in the following scenarios with emphasis on:

### **Classroom:** try to take transcript-like notes

- Interactions with classroom instructor and TA
  - How often have participants volunteered answers, if at all?
  - How often have participants raised their hand to ask questions, if at all?
  - Do participants talk to teacher before or after that class?
  - Have participants followed the instructions well?
  
- Interactions with classmates
  - Have participants greeted/chatted with classmates before/after classes?
  - When there is group discussion, how active are participants? What roles do they take: initiators, recorders, timers, negotiators, etc?
  - Do the participants listen carefully to others' talk in the class?
  - Do participants join study groups?
  
- Classroom behavior
  - Do they come to the class on time?
  - Do they stay focused? Take notes?
  - Do they finish the assigned homework?
  - Do they volunteer answers or ask questions?

### **Cafeteria/study room observation during interviews:**

- Environment:
  - Are there many people around? Is the environment quiet or loud?
  - Is the atmosphere of the setting informal or formal, friendly or serious?

- Contents: Document things said by participants
- Voice: Tone, volume, and speed of participants' responses
- Facial expression, body language, eye movement

**Appendices F:**  
**Data Source-by-Research-Question Matrix**

<u>Research Questions</u>	<u>Data Sources</u>
	Interview Student Interview Professor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do Chinese undergraduate students at the UW assess their experiences in terms of academic learning and language acquisition?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Motivation</li> <li>➤ Learning style</li> <li>➤ Learning strategies</li> <li>➤ Interaction with classmates (study groups, teamwork)</li> <li>➤ Interaction with instructors (office hours, ask questions)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">X X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X X</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do Chinese undergraduate students at the UW assess their experiences in terms of cultural adjustment?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strategies to learn the culture</li> <li>➤ Changes of identity of Chinese culture, if any</li> <li>➤ Changes of understanding of the U.S. if any</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">X X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree has the university supported Chinese undergraduate students?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What resources/ support do these students use most?</li> <li>➤ What important resources/support does the university lack?</li> <li>➤ Ways to improve support in the future</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;">X X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X X</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X X</p>

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