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Reassessing the Cultural Distance between China and the United States  
as Perceived by Students from the Sino-American 1+2+1 Dual Degree Program

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Presented to the Faculty  
Eastern Washington University  
School of Communication

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Science in Communications

By  
Cynthia Letts  
June 5, 2012

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**Abstract**

As a result of the exponential growth of international commerce and academic exchange between Mainland China and the United States, this thesis examines the present-day validity of those Chinese and American cultural characteristics, such as practices and values, historically understood as defining cultural differences. Using Babiker's Cultural Distance Index (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980) questionnaire (an institutionally established instrument since 1980), 45 Mainland Chinese student-sojourners conveyed their perceptions of cultural differences found in daily living. Chinese participants identified many cultural attributes that still affect the migrant's perceptions of difference. These attributes are language, food, education costs, and leisure activities. Participants found the CDI attributes, climate, modernity, elder esteem, and social dating conventions, of no definable difference between cultures. Participants also identified new cultural attributes pertinent to present-day comparisons of China and the United States. These are lifestyle, the significance of education, transportation, sexuality, and politics. The outcome of a follow-up, open-ended questionnaire elaborated these findings. The thesis discusses returnees' perceptions and attitudes of cultural differences as established in the Cultural Distance Index and how present-day changes in cultural relations require a modified instrument for measuring distance. Also addressed are other issues related to the difficulty of measuring cultural distance today such as changes in migrant student's perception and identification of its own culture after studying abroad—understood as transculturation. The study concludes with suggested areas of focus for future development in intercultural competency within the context of Sino-American student

exchange.

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## 1.1 Introduction

In the 1970s, U.S. normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China began Deng Xiaoping's "open door" policy and the exchange of people and information from the once insular PRC (Schirokauer, 1991). What began as a trickle of PRC sojourning students has now turned into a full wave, as the number of student/exchange visas issued has increased by 32.7 percent in the last decade (Department of Homeland Security, 2010). According to the Institute of International Education, registration into U.S. territory institutions for the 2010/2011 academic year included 157,558 Chinese students (Institute of International Education, 2010), making the People's Republic of China the principal contributor of international students to the United States. This volume of cultural and intellectual movement warrants the examination of how our two nations' cultural practices affect one another and, specific to this study, how the effects of this exchange influence the life perceptions of those students who would volunteer their academic energies and resources for the purpose of participating in a cross-cultural academic endeavor such as the Sino-American 1+2+1 program.

Historically, Western instrumentation has measured East-West cultural characteristics through a bipolar lens, which may or may not reflect the true nature of influence (Chirkova, Lynchb, & Niwaa, 2005; Newman & Gao, 2005). There is also the concern of transculturation: after thirty-something years of academic and economic cooperation, and popular culture's increasing influence, with a nation of fundamental political and

ideological difference, *how much distance remains between China and the U.S.?*

Research involving differences between cultures is generally pursued for their influences on the migrant. In the past decade or so, research has followed the Chinese student's sojourning experience—and its reentry into Chinese society and the negative effects of acculturation and reentry (Asante, Gudykunst, & Newmark 1989; Sussman 2002, 2011). Following forty years of research and theory, regarding sojourner acculturation and reentry adjustment, efforts generally follow two distinctive avenues: academic or occupational. The foundational works of Dr. Isam Babiker, Professor Emeritus at the Department of Mental Health, University of Bristol, and member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and international cultural theorist Geert Hofstede, are perfect examples of this divergent character. Babiker's CDI (1980) is primarily utilized within academic studies while Hofstede's (1984) ever-evolving cultural dimensions have placed his theories at the center of international corporate venture analysis (Séguin, 2011). Although the occupational focus appears to be more pragmatic—in terms of working toward a positive result within a particular industrial venue—academic research seems to have stood still, focusing on incremental nuances from variations of the formerly mentioned instrumentation.

This study is guided by the following research questions: Firstly, do Chinese students experience any change in their perception of the U.S. culture, in terms of cultural distance and value orientations, as a result of their participation in the 1+2+1 Dual Degree

Program? Secondly, in terms of these students' perceptions, are cultural characteristics/values between the PRC and U.S. becoming less diverse? Thirdly, what lessons can be taken away from this work that would aid in the sojourning Chinese student's reentry adjustment? To answer these questions, this work will begin with a review of literature following research and theory surrounding the psycho-sociological phenomena of migrant adjustment and those traditionally defining cultural characteristics and values that have helped scholars predict the degree of adjustment a migrant may experience in its sojourn. Following this groundwork, the literature will survey recent studies and theory surrounding global trends of cultural convergence. Next, data is analyzed from Babiker's 1980 Cultural Distance Index questionnaire (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980); a design concerned with comparing the "concrete aspects of daily living activities, as well as local custom and environment [of] any two cultures" (p. 110), examining potential cultural differences such as food, family, and religion. Participants' essay answers to open-ended, follow-up questions offer deeper insight regarding the differences in areas relating to life satisfaction and the issues of cultural identity that scholars like Nan Sussman (2002) and Young Yun Kim (2001) suggest these perceptions imply. Within this study's discussion, certain cultural attributes are recognized as having little effect on the migrant student's psychological or sociological processes, while other attributes are reaffirmed as influential. Thus, this work's conclusion moves through issues of difference, beyond the discourse of migrant student acculturation, and into a

constructive suggestion of future study toward the possibility of a cooperative effort in developing a Sino-American comprehensive, intercultural training curriculum for the sojourning student.

## **1.2 Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to identify and assess those distancing cultural attributes between the U.S. and China that international commerce and communication may have influenced over the past forty years. These concerns were addressed through the perceptions of migrant Chinese students, taken from two sample groups sharing the same Chinese and American university experience: one group newly arrived at their U.S. host universities, with preconceptions of U.S. culture, and the other group having returned home for one to two years. With the second group in mind, the study also endeavored to discover salient attributes which influenced the student's reentry experience. More importantly, the entirety of this work's purpose was to seek out areas of the migrant student's experience that could be improved through a better understanding of present-day cultural distances.

This project grew out of the researcher's own sojourning experiences and her work with international students. This work expresses two aspects of the author's intellectual interests: Primarily, the author hopes those conceptualizations learned through Eastern Washington University's communication program may reflect in the theory and

methodology presented. Secondly, the author hopes this work reflects a culmination of her extracurricular efforts towards understanding the Chinese student's unique circumstances and needs in the sojourning experience.

This project efforts to follow a holistic approach to social science inquiry and travels through the three foundational paradigmatic modes of inquiry: discovery, interpretive, and critical inquiry (Vaishnavi & Kuechler, 2007). This thesis' research questions, its literature review, and methodology, are motivated by discovery; the analysis of the respondents' data is moved by interpretation; and this work's conclusion is inspired by an aspect of the critical inquiry paradigm in its proposal of a pragmatic solution to the problem discovered and interpreted. Thus, this thesis attempts a holistic and phronetic approach to this inquiry, and in so doing, offers evidence of responsible social science. In this regard there is a metatheoretical process at work here, an aggregate of instituted theory and thought combined with the intuitive experiential, that leads to a pragmatic conclusion.

## 2.0 **Literature Review**

### 2.1 **Cultural Adjustment and the Sojourner**

#### *Preface*

The behavioral and social sciences study people, and people influence—and are influenced by—their environment. When one asks a question about changing cultures, one is really asking about the people who are changing. People perceive change and difference when their environment challenges their constructs of reality. Consequently, inquiry must be addressed to those people who are changing—or are assumed as such. For this reason, the literature reviewed approaches the central threads in the research questions, which is “change in perception” and “cultural distance and value orientations” by examining how changing “cultures” affect people.

#### *Culture Shock*

The term “culture shock” refers to the reaction one experiences upon exposure to a culture different from one’s own. As early as 1940 anthropologist John Holt used this term in noting rural American mountain dwellers' reaction to urban migration as a *culture shock* (Holt, 1940). Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1954) initially compared the phenomenon to an occupational malady, a pathological disorder that generally rights itself over time, identifying four stages (honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment) a traveler may experience in that process (p. 177). Although never inducted as a psychiatric disorder (Mumford, 1997), the phenomenon is “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse,” with the introduction of a subordinate culture to a dominant one (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). Peter Adler

(1975) gives a concise yet thorough description of the process as “primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences” (p. 15).

Almost half a century later, the term “culture shock” has become cliché, and the study now draws more from social psychology and education, with terms such as “adaptation” and “acculturation” applied to specific socio-psychological aspects relating to the dynamic relationship that exists between the migrant and its environment. It is now “considered a contact-induced stress accompanied by skill deficits that can be identified and remodeled” (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). Categorically, there are several groups identified as experiencing some form of culture shock: immigrants, refugees, native peoples, ethnic groups and sojourners. A sojourner is defined as a temporary immigrant, one who travels to another culture with intentions of returning home, and the international student falls into this category (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). According to Coleen Ward (1998), cross-cultural psychiatrist at New Zealand's University of Canterbury,

... two fundamental types of sojourner adjustment have been identified.

The first, termed psychological adjustment is associated with psychological well-being or emotional satisfaction; the second, referred to as sociocultural adaptation, is related to the ability to “fit-in” or negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment. (p. 279)

Since Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1960) first assertion of a pattern of measurable



stages involved with the migrant's adjustment, instrumentation has focused on variations of these two aforementioned aspects: sociocultural adjustment "social difficulty" and psychological adjustment "depression" (p. 21-23) as litmus to an overall consensus of life satisfaction (Gullahorn, & Gullahorn, 1960; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). The U-model is represented as a line graph, following positive and negative values; the lowest values are during the migrant's adjustment to its new environment while the highest values are immediately upon arrival and, subjectively, upon achieving acculturative success in that environment.

#### *Reverse Culture Shock*

The phenomenon of human migration—traveling and living away from one's familiar environment—has been the focus of significant research since the early-twentieth century (Sussman, 2011). Remigration—returning to one's home environment after living in another environment—has received attention almost as long (Szkudlarek, 2010). The psychological, sociological, and environmental effects of remigration bear evidence of the importance of understanding cultural differences between host and home. The following material is reviewed to further understand this phenomenon, and these effects, for this purpose.

Reverse culture shock, or reentry adjustment, has been reduced by some to a mirror event of the initial adjustment of sojourning (Adler, 1975; Mumford, 1997). However, studies among American, Turkish, and Japanese students that reveal a measurement of lower life satisfaction (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham, 2001), with some regretting their return home (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). Stella Ting-Toomey, in her text,

*Communicating Across Cultures* (1999), states "Because of the unanticipated nature of reentry, its impact is usually much more severe, with returnees usually feeling more depressed and stressed than they did with entry culture shock" (p. 250). Finally, Judith Martin (1984) identifies those three predominant situational identifiers leading to reentry stress:

[Upon entering a culture], people expect cultural differences and a certain amount of shock and adjustment. However, no such expectations exist on returning to the home culture. Second, student sojourners go abroad at an age when they are formulating their core values, beliefs, and general lifestyles. Having shaped their values in the foreign culture, students, on returning home, find that they are out of step with their former culture. Third, sojourners are not always aware of the changes that have taken place in themselves until returning home and facing the challenge of readjusting to their previous culture (p.127).

The validity of reverse culture shock has altered the social sciences' perceptions of acculturation and adaptation to the point of revisiting and challenging the standardized U-Model of cross-cultural transition and adjustment (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998) to include that track of adjustment involving reentry. The W-model of cultural adjustment depicts life-satisfaction levels over time—like the graphed U-model, but with a “second wave” representing the migrant's reentry acculturation process upon its return home—with the lowest overall measurement at reentry (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Some variables involved in this dynamic include the

strength of the reentrant's primary cultural identity (Sussman, 2002, 2011), successful acculturation to their host country (Meintel, 1973; Tajfel, 1981; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008), and the legitimacy of the returnee's expectations (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Butcher, 2002).

### *Acculturation*

Within the cycle of adjustment to a new environment, the sojourner arrives at a point of decision—what Ting-Toomey (1999) describes as the *flight, fight, or commit* phase—in which begins a conscious effort to adapt to its new environment. It is at this point the process of acculturation begins. Acculturation is the transformative process an individual experiences during continuous, direct contact between two distinct cultures; it refers to the physical/environmental, biological, cultural, social, and psychological changes in an individual experiencing acculturation (Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok, 1987). Acculturative stress is the intrapersonal distress one experiences in the interim of adjustment, presenting those psychological and emotional reactions of culture shock, and coping mechanisms are dependent on the sojourner's individual and cultural attributes (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Findings from studies among sojourners in Canada reveal that predominant coping mechanisms against acculturative stress employed by Chinese are “cultural learning” and conformity (Zheng & Berry, 1991; Bond, 2010). This posture, in light of PRC/U.S. institutionally understood diametric cultural values, constitute what Henri Tajfel (1981) considers the onset of a social identity reconstruction: a subordinate group member (in the case of migration acculturation, we will consent to the idea of the migrant as the

subordinate) is drawn to seek passage into the dominant group (in the case of migration, the dominant group would be defined as the host's culture), first by emulating, then by adopting the group's philosophies and norms (Tajfel, 1981). To what degree acculturation becomes assimilation depends on the strength of the individual's cultural identity, life satisfaction, and self-identity (Bond, 2010; Sussman, 2002; Zhou, 2008). As anthropologist Deirdre Meintel (1973) observed in the auto-ethnographic study of her own experience of reentry after fieldwork abroad, with the conscious insertion of oneself into a culture, and thereby becoming constitutively subjective, there is a certainty in the alignment of one's perspectives with that culture (Meintel, 1973).

Those sojourners who successfully adapt to their host country, and maintain deference to their home, experience a bimodal orientation. A unimodal orientation, in which the sojourner has acquired a degree of assimilation into the host culture, is more likely to suffer reentry distress (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987), and may consider choosing host over home (Christofi & Thompson, 2007). Adaptation is a necessary skill-set in the acculturation process for the PRC student, both in the classroom and social environments dissimilar from one's own. The positive experience of successful acculturation of one's host society's life philosophies and norms equate to self-empowerment, a feeling of autonomy, and personal resilience (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Those same, hard-won attributes, once returning home to a society that may not embrace the host's attitudes, can become the cause of both inner and interpersonal conflict.

## 2.2 **Determinants of Migrant Reentry Adjustment**

To some degree, every culture—no matter the geographical distance from one to another—differs in social normatives and practices. For example, a migrant from the Midwest United States, accustomed to traditional familial relationships, would find approaching strangers and forming fictive kinships in the transitory environment of South Florida very challenging. Iowa and Florida, although within the borders of one country, are diverse in some cultural attributes. In an attempt to predict how an individual may react to another culture, scholars and experts have identified cultural differences between societies.

### *Cultural Distance and Dimensions*

Within the history of intercultural relations as a field of study, a number of perspectives have been in play in the prediction of differences between societies and the behavior of those who would traverse between these cultures. Research from Christofi and Thompson supports the hypothesis that individuals who adapt most successfully overseas have a more severe reentry adjustment (2007), and the degree of cultural adjustment or acculturation stress is directly linked to the degree of difference between home and host. Within the field of intercultural relations, research appears to be fueled by two distinctive and dominant bodies: academia or industry. As mentioned earlier, the foundational works of Isam Babiker and Geert Hofstede are perfect examples of this divergent character.

As an immigrant himself, Isam Babiker was interested in the emotional health and well-being of the sojourning student—those students who would travel abroad for a

specific period of time to study in a foreign country. He created the “Cultural Distance Index” to measure the degree of basic cultural and environmental differences, as perceived by international students attending Edinburgh University in Scotland (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980), and it continues to be utilized within academic studies for this purpose. Babiker (1980) was “fully aware of the problems of definition and the methodological difficulties which make quantifying certain cultural attributes, such as value systems an impossible task” (p. 110), and chose to identify cultural attributes by the physical or tangible aspects of the society, which would include food, clothes, familial structure, and social hierarchy. He believed these basic structures as foundational to one's core understanding of what the concept of “culture” implies to the individual (p. 111). After more than thirty years, variations of the index continue to be utilized with its findings as a Litmus test to the validity of their selection (Mumford, 1997; Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009; Yijälä, Lönnqvist, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Verkasalo, 2012). Invariably, CDI correlates are more significant among those students traveling to countries very different from their home (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Mumford, 1997). Referring to these cultural distancing parameters, certain differences between the PRC and U.S. can be established.

Although Hofstede's instrumentation was not directly utilized in this particular study, the influence of his theories is present in most discourse—academic as well as industry. It is necessary, then, to address the theorist and his dimensions: Geert Hofstede's interest in cultural difference came from his cross-cultural experience in international management. His multinational study at IBM was the impetus of his ever-evolving Cultural

Dimensions paradigm, which has placed him at the center of international venture analysis (Séguin, 2011). Hofstede (1984) followed a social-psychological focus on those constructs that shape the way a society functions and how that affects the individual, their value systems, and devised several bi-polarized dimensional values, such as individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and (formerly called the Confucian Dynamism) long versus short term orientation (Hofstede, 1997). It may be assumed the reason behind the commercial success of Hofstede's model(s) is accessibility; international business interests want manageable insights into a prospective partner's culture, and these scoring systems provide a "Self-Other" comparison to suit these needs. Both models, Babiker and Hofstede's, are commonly referred as *cultural distance indexes*.

To date, most research has followed these two approaches and is applied in fields from domestic sociology to international investment speculation (Rogers, Priscilla, & Tan, 2008; Littrell, Salas, Hess, Paley, & Riedel, 2006). However, there are those who would suggest that any attempt of discrete measurement of cultural distance would find constant and changing discrepancies in the measuring; that variables would be rendered spurious by such conditions as the growing transculturation of societal and individual attitudes (Shenkar, 2001). Zhihong Gao and Cynthia Newman's 2005 study of converging cultural values among Chinese and U.S. college students suggest delineating one culture from another, in a globalized environment, has become a complex and possibly elusive objective. Yet even since, much theory and instrumentation continues to work within the construct of the bipolarization of societies. It is with this problem in mind that this study

goes forward.

*Bipolar Determinants of Migrant Reentry Adjustment*

The way in which we consider our actions and treatment of others is an integral component of how a society functions on a day-to-day basis. Although the degree to which concepts of decorum or address are upheld depends on many internal and external factors, there are such social practices that are understood to be inherent to the traditions of certain societies. In contrast to Confucianism (that philosophy from which the majority of Western-based theory of Asian culture arises), U.S. Judeo-Christian ideologies (those philosophies from which the majority of Western-based theory arises) are understood to emphasize a highly individualized, autonomous, and self-focused identity (Hofstede, 1980, p. 162). China's underlying Confucian precepts are in deference toward hierarchical social and kinship constructs, with an emphasis on the continuity of self and community (Bond, 2010). Stella Ting-Toomey (1999) identifies a cultural value dimension, universal to Asian cultures, as the "Confusion Dynamism Dimension." Values of this dimension are *yuan* - a long-term orientation towards fatalism and change, *jia* - deference to family, *shangsi* - the fundamental confidence in hierarchy, and *xui* - an aspect of honor/shame from which reverence and politeness emerge (Bond, 2010, p. 248). Yet, it is hard to find studies that can conclusively distinguish these attributes as strictly the cultural property of one particular society over another.

Filial piety, that concept of *jia*, is not largely considered an element of cultural practices in Western society, and even cross-cultural analysis of mate preferences have largely been based on Western models (i.e. Eurocentric theorems regarding ideals, social-



evolution, psychoanalytic models) Schwartz, Weisskirch, Hurley, Zamboanga, Park, Kim, Umaña-Taylor, Castillo, Brown, and Greene (2010) theorized that the traditionally collectivist notions of communalism, familial, and filial piety, may be found in Western constructs of reality, but formed through a differing conceptualization. In a massive study, capturing large and ethnically diverse samples, 10,491 students from 30 colleges in 20 U.S. States completed self-assessment questionnaires that created a single construct from the “Asian” concepts of communalism, familial, and filial piety clustered onto a single factor, which the authors called “family/relationship primacy.” This cluster was endorsed more strongly by minority group members (African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans) than by participants of European decent (Schwartz, et al. 2010). What these results imply is that, depending on what ethnicity Americans a Chinese student comes in contact with, such cultural values may or may not be relative to a sojourning student's acculturative process.

Another area indicative of cultural distance is the discrepancy between the Western notion of happiness and *fu*, the concept of satisfaction in life balance and the closest thing traditional Chinese philosophy has resembling happiness. In an effort to create a universal evaluation for both Western and Chinese concepts of happiness, or subjective well-being (SWB), Lu, Gilmour, & Shu-Fang (2001) devised a cross-cultural study involving 783 university students in Taiwan and the United Kingdom. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire containing multiple-choice statements representative of both the Chinese Happiness Inventory (reflective of a collectivistic and long-term orientation, with questions regarding interpersonal harmony, social standing, and contributory

satisfaction) and the Oxford Happiness Inventory (reflective of an individualistic, short-term orientation, with questions regarding positive affect, sense of control, and self-satisfaction). Analysis revealed that, while Taiwanese participants could strongly relate to both scales, the British could not. The one exception was the value of Confucian work dynamism, and its attributes are similar to the Western-Protestant work ethic. It is explained as such:

Confucian work ethics have two main components: (a) the creation of dedicated, motivated, responsible and educated individuals; and (b) the enhanced sense of commitment, organizational identity and loyalty to various institutions... Because work occupies a central role in modern living everywhere, it is not surprising that endorsement and implementation of work ethics have a universally beneficial effect on happiness (p.489).

Contrary to traditionally understood Chinese social norms, the Western approach to dialogue and public interaction promotes the individual's identity, rather than group integrity. This type of communication can be interpreted as confrontational. U.S. classroom culture demands student-student and student-teacher interaction, with heavy emphasis on overt self-expression, which is in direct opposition to *shangsi* and *xui*, those Confucian-based tenets that would have a student compliantly and respectfully sit under a professor's tutelage, deferring to its authority. Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) performed a qualitative study with 104 Taiwan and Chinese students enrolled in U.S. universities, identifying acculturative stressors. Among language disparities, classroom expectation

offered high correlates to stress. In a Hong Kong study, Cheng and Tsui (2009) conducted a study using conversation analysis to find methods of disagreement. Quantitative findings revealed, contrary to stereotypes, Chinese speakers are only 16 percent less likely to disagree with their partner. Yet qualitative analysis further revealed that Chinese speakers tend to use language that would soften or mitigate—redressive language—in disagreement, reflecting those intrinsic cultural concepts of *xui*, that value which brings about the concept of saving face—both of the speaker and the partner in dialogue—from embarrassment or shame. Another conversational analysis study focused on Chinese-American (U.S.) differences in complaining and found Chinese speakers used the same redressive language with interpersonal expressions of discontent or protest. However, this study observed a wider spectrum of speakers than the Hong Kong study, so that among both nationalities, the degree of directness or redress was found to be dependent of the social status of the recipients (Chen, Chen, & Chang, 2011). The conclusion one may come to, regarding communication speech-act style differences, is that both societies have specific rules of conduct that vary in application according to the speakers' status and situation; both societies exercise fluidity in communicating with one another.

The perceived understanding of China's orientation toward a collectivist society creates a fundamental difference in the parameters of interrelationships and what Westerners would consider the boundaries of fairness. *Guanxi*, loosely translated, implies a connectedness between people that is beneficial (Bond, 2010, p. 509), equating to preferential treatment within all aspects of society. The purpose of *guanxi* is to promote harmony, but it is especially problematic to Western investors and those Chinese who

have experienced equitable social practices in a Western society. Irene Hau-siu Chow (2004) constructed a comparative study integrating Chinese social norms and institutional theory, and her findings reflect the brackish environment of industrialized Asian culture:

Extra value is given to harmonious human relations. Owners/managers put less emphasis on ability and more on an employee's potential loyalty and attitude toward the company. Given the importance of guanxi in Chinese culture, having the right connections and the opinions of co-workers are considered more important in Chinese and Taiwanese firms than in Hong Kong firms (p. 635).

The relevancy of guanxi, for the student who has neither experienced a working environment at home or in their host country, may be negligent. In saying this, it is possible that the egalitarian environment of American academia, or U.S. society in general, may offer enough exposure to warrant conflicting dispositions in the returning student's concept of—for lack of a better term—fairness. This conflict would probably present itself once the student has completed its education and begins the process of job-seeking.

### **2.3 Comparative Case Studies**

Having reviewed a few quantitative studies representative of a macro-view of Chinese and U.S. cultural orientations, it seems reasonable to now bring our lens a little closer. The following narrative and case studies among Chinese, Cypriots, Russians, Singaporeans, and Taiwanese participants reveal the possible challenges of the returnee's re-assimilation into one's home culture.

Hsieh Min-Hua (2007) produced a psychological case study narrating one subject, a female Taiwanese student, using interviews and journal analysis, through her acculturation into U.S. educational and social culture. Hsieh's focus was the student's struggle in adapting to social communication norms that brought on a feeling of "invisibility" that added to the acculturative stress normally expected by the sojourner. According to Hsieh, this is a typical dilemma for female Chinese students: "Because American society generally values assertiveness and considers keeping silent an indication of incompetence or ignorance, to avoid being assigned a deficient identity, most of the international students try to be more assertive and expressive" (p. 381). The student's eventual successful adaptation to Western individualistic and self-expressive norms of communication, and her recorded self-satisfaction at acceptance by her American peers (p. 386), creates a concern as to how this adopted behavior may be received upon a student's return home. More importantly, if host acculturation transforms the migrant's concept of self, how does one readjust to home conditions after, as Martin (1984) describes, those "changes that have taken place in themselves" (p.127)?

Pursuing this thought, two case studies follow migrant students expressing a preference for host over home. Wan Guofang (2001) conducted a narrative case study on the cross-cultural experiences of two Chinese graduate students in a large U.S. university. Despite acculturative stressors, such as language acquisition and class workload, after two years in the U.S. the couple considered themselves well adapted. "Y" and "F" had both left engineering jobs in pursuit of an American education. Upon return, they expected higher paying jobs and better housing in China because of this exposure. The

husband spoke of those social differences between the U.S. and his home:

People who, with only high school diplomas, were less qualified than us, but had connections, were assigned houses. While we, no matter what we did, or how hard we worked, no house was assigned to us... But I heard that this is a country where law works... Step by step. Take TOEFL, and GRE ... Not like other countries that you never know their standards. In China, sometimes you have to have connections (p. 33).

Depending on a student's social standing upon his or her return to China, the traditional practice of beneficial relationships, *guanxi*, could be a problematic disparity compared to the egalitarian environment of the U.S. Having experienced a working environment, Wan's informants seem to anticipate this conflict upon returning to China.

Intrigued by statistics reflecting the increasingly high rate (50-70 percent) of foreign students returning to their host country after their reentry to their country of origin, Victoria Christofi and Charles L. Thompson (2007) created a phenomenological study of eight former international students originally from Cyprus, Russia, and Germany. Interviews were simplistic in nature, but with elaborate analysis that derived common themes. The theme of "changing/static" (referring to the sojourner's perceptual changes in relation to their home country) involves two sub-themes, adjustment and identity, which are strongly associated with the sojourner's successful assimilation of their host country's cultural and economic norms. Returning "home" then, becomes a dichotomy of ideals and a source of inner-conflict. A composite account of participants describes their findings:

I looked forward to returning to my home country after having lived abroad for several years. However, when I returned, I began to realize things at home had changed or I had changed. I found myself constantly comparing my home culture with the [sojourn] culture and found my home culture lacking in several ways...The reality of returning home was in stark contrast to the idealized expectations I had for returning home. I remembered the good things about home while forgetting the bad ones. The freedom I began to take for granted where I was living was noticeably absent in my home country...Adjustment to cultural change was an issue when I left home and when I returned; the former was expected, the latter was not. (pp. 56-57).

A migrant's rejection of host over home is not necessarily the best scenario: No matter the benefits, expatriation removes the migrant from the emotional security family, denies a society of potential contributions from the student's education, and—en masse—can influence political relations between nations.

#### **2.4 The Role of Identity and Intercultural Competency**

Rejection of host over home is one possible consequence of a returning migrant's difficulty in adjustment upon returning to its own culture. In some instances, the rejection of host over home may be pragmatic: After so many years abroad, the migrant's status may advance from temporary sojourner to expatriate, and choosing one's residence is a matter of time and identity invested. But as Sussman (2011) maintains, sometimes host preference is the result of a weak cultural identity, connection to one's home culture, and

is associated with a deficiency in intercultural competence. The ability to negotiate through different groups' practices and norms, while keeping one's understanding of self, is an act of intercultural competence. Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) consider it the "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people" (p.11). One's identity is a negotiated, cooperatively constructed, and reinforced entity within one's group; through the interaction with others, these constructs become patterns of meanings, interpretations, and norms for practices and attributes of that group (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Identity "gives one a sense of one's own ontological status and serves as an interpretive frame for experience" (Cupach & Imahori, 1993, p. 113). Nan Sussman (2002) asserts that a pivotal element in reentry adaptation is the migrant's strength of cultural identity. Her Cultural Identity Model involves four factors:

- ⤴ Cultural identity is a critical but latent aspect of self-concept;
- ⤴ Salience of cultural identity is, to a large part, a consequence of the commencement of a cultural transition;
- ⤴ Cultural identity is dynamic and can shift as a consequence of the overseas transition and self-concept disturbances; and
- ⤴ Shifts in cultural identity serve as a mediator between cultural adaptation and the repatriation experience (p. 394).

In other words, one does not necessarily understand the import of one's own cultural identity until immersed in another, and the strength of one's cultural identity determines, to a certain extent, the degree of assimilation into the host society and the degree of



adjustment one experiences once returning home. These two dynamics are interrelated elements of the Chinese migrant student's experience. Without a strong understanding of one's own culture, and how one fits into that culture, one cannot experience living abroad without threat of losing objectivity. Objectivity, in this respect, allows the sojourner the flexibility of learning subjectively, because one has a grounded concept of self.

Regarding this population under study, there is a concern as to the degree of cultural identity they hold. Although popular social theories contest Confucianism as foundational to most practices and customs, three decades before the Maoists, Chinese scholars were assimilating Western ideologies of science and technology (“Aristotelian formal logic, emphasizing stability, coherence, and the resolution of contradiction through integration and synthesis” (Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010)), leaving ritual and metaphysics behind (Xiao, 2002). Since the mid-1980s, China prioritized its education, creating new higher education institutions on an exponential level, translating Western texts for curriculum (Sun, 2002). Foreign educators were replaced with foreign educated professionals. As more institutions produce degrees domestically derived, the number of tenured foreign-educated faculty may reduce. Nonetheless, in the past decade the ratio of Chinese-educated to Western-educated faculty is 1-3 (Lin & Liu, 2007). What this equates to is a migrant student population, well-educated in Westernized humanities and sciences, owning a weak cultural identification and primed for assimilation into their host's culture.

## **2.5 Converging Cultural Values**

Most recently, numerous studies have promoted discourse regarding whether the

characteristics of one group of people can be so easily delineated from another. The understanding of intercultural communication as a continuum, in which meanings are shared across a nonlinear mesh of interactions, has become predominant in intercultural discourse. Daphna Oyserman and Nicholas Sorensen (2009) suggest that the concept of “culture is best understood as a multidimensional rather than a unitary construct [...] and that societies access a diverse set of overlapping and contradictory processes and procedures for making sense of the world” (p. 25). They see the traditionally bipolar construct of culture as a unitary model—perceiving a society only through its most distal and immediate aspects. In this regard, generalizations are made. Oyserman and Sorensen's model is analogous to the blind monk attempting to identify one small portion of the elephant. Before China's ascendancy into world affair and economy, when social scientists could homogenize “Asian” culture as one, this approach may have been useful in the strictest academic sense. But now, as modes of communication are no longer dependent on geographical boundaries, those practices and attributes traditionally held to one people do not appear so inherent—or perhaps they never did. Michael Harris Bond, co-creator of the “Chinese Values Survey” (1988) and author of the *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology* (2010), cautions against epistemological pitfalls such as simplification, essentializing, or linealizing. His rationale for this warning is as follows:

First, personal values are the active internalization and individualized construction of a culture, and so are not equivalent or reducible to modal personalities, cultural norms, or collectively cherished practices. Second, values are pitched at a level that is higher in abstraction than attitudes

attached to a specific issue or social object. Third, values differ from value orientations and generalized beliefs, in that values are evaluative and not restricted to a statement of how two entities are related. (2010, p. 244)

This same reasoning can be found in generalizations of Americans, such as liberalism or culturelessness. However, one need only converse with a neighbor to understand Bond's distinction of cultural values discerned by the individual—the individual's positionality.

In 2010, Hsu Siu-Yu analyzed the content of over 1,500 television advertisements from various U.S. and mainland China cable channels. Creating an age-balanced pool, she found the most commonly understood cultural values (Individualism, Collectivism, Modernity, and Tradition) were present, to some degree, in most ads. Yet in all ads targeting Chinese youth, a generation born into the immediacy of the internet and the globalization of the local and vice-versa, there appeared to be a dichotomy of all values present (Hsu, 2011). The idea that life is always presented in duality, as paradox or *maodun*, is embedded in China's language, and many concepts are presented from a yin-yang perspective—with two diametrically opposing sub-concepts. With the Western region of China's major business centers as areas of study, Faure and Fang (2008) compare the semantics of concepts:

...the word “thing(s)” is called *dongxi*; dong means east and xi means west. From a Chinese perspective, everything embraces opposite properties such as east and west. Another classical example is *weiji*—the Chinese word for “crisis:” wei means danger and ji means opportunity. Asking the Chinese whether they are “long-term oriented” or “short-term

oriented,” whether they are ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine,’ and whether they are “reserved” or “expressive” they would be confused because the Chinese worldview is essentially “both-and” instead of “either-or” (p.195).

In 2004, Newman and Gao (2005) surveyed university students in Shanghai and the States for the purpose of identifying those notions of cultural identity, such as dependence and interdependence self-construals, and life values such as education, career, and relationships. In direct contrast to predominant paradigms, Chinese students reported a stronger orientation toward independence ( $x = 5.4180$ ) over their American counterparts ( $x = 4.9135$ ). The general concept of relationships held the highest mean of both groups (China, 38.3, U.S., 57.2), although interpretive analysis revealed these Chinese students have a higher regard for competition and monetary gain that may take precedence over relationships. Since the authors do not reveal the U.S. universities, there cannot be any demographic analysis of those particular participants' economic backgrounds or deduced cultural inclinations toward life strategy. There is a confidence, however, in speculating that university students in such a power hub as Shanghai would have definite educational goals that would serve a larger plan. These results, then, are exemplar to a long-term orientation embedded in the practices and attributes of Chinese traditional culture. Those salient traits of individualism may reflect the competitive environment that Shanghai now hosts as a hub of Pan-Asian commerce. This scenario reflects Igor Klyukanov's (2005) positionality principle: cultural identity is created from both a fixed macro-level and an unstable, micro-level. One is associated with a particular

identity, but there is individual fluidity on a local, interactive, level. Both are salient aspects of an individual's self-construal and, within the context of *mao-dun*, that Chinese concept of contradiction as essential condition of life (Bond, 2010, p. 248), are in harmony with the dynamics of a brackish cultural environment.

## **2.6 Summary of Literature Reviewed**

Through exploring how people interact and react to environmental and social change, behavioral and social sciences study people, and people are most influenced by their environment. When one asks a question about changing cultures, one is really asking about the people who are changing. Consequently, the questions must be addressed to those people who are changing—or are suspected as such. For this reason, the literature reviewed approached the central threads in the research questions, which is “change in perception” and “cultural distance and value orientations” by examining how changing “cultures” affect people:

1. Cultural adjustment, or culture shock, is a sociopsychological phenomenon when one experiences life in a environment different from one's own. This acculturation adjustment is also experienced when one returns home.
2. Traditionally, social scientists have determined that certain societal characteristics are unique from one culture to another, and these determinants are the basis for predicting the degree of cultural adjustment a migrant will experience.
3. Psychologists and social scientists have determined that an individual's identification to one's cultural, the cultural identity, plays a significant role in the migrant's ability to negotiate successfully through its intercultural experience,

which is expressed as intercultural competency.

4. In recent years, studies comparing cultural differences, or investigating migrant experiences, have found that some cultural attributes are not necessarily unique to one culture, but can be identified in cultures that have not traditionally been associated with that attribute.

The next chapter will cover a study in which people were asked questions about the environments they have lived in and how they were different. Through those answers, it will be discovered as to how those environments effected those people. Ideally, these discoveries will lead to a constructive conclusion.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Institutional Review Board**

This research project (HS3748) was granted exempt approval by Dr. Sarah A. Keller, on April 5, 2011, for Eastern Washington University. Subsequent participating university IRB approval include Ball State University, California State University San Bernardino, Coastal Carolina University, George Mason University, Georgia Southwestern State University, Mansfield University, Northern Arizona University, and Salem State College.

#### **3.2 Design**

The investigation was a mixed model concurrent triangulation study using Isam Babiker's *Cultural Distance Index* and questionnaire (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980) with open-ended follow-up questions. The questionnaire sought to ascertain the perceived differences, or similarities, of cultural identifiers, such as climate, food, social structure, and lifestyle. Follow-up textual data were incorporated to clarify and/or elaborate those findings from the questionnaire.

Mixed-Methods research has become a commonplace methodology research—recently comprising 30 percent of methodology in health care (Palinkas, Horwitz, Chamberlain, Hurlburt, & Landsverk, 2011). Todd Jick (1979), described the application's benefits as such:

The use of multimethods can also lead to a synthesis or integration of theories. In this sense, methodological triangulation closely parallels theoretical triangulation; that is, efforts to bring diverse theories to bear on a common problem. Finally, triangulation may also serve as the critical

test, by virtue of its comprehensiveness, for competing theories. (p. 609)

Typically, a quantitative study is complemented by a smaller qualitative sample; the quantitative sample is usually a convenience sample from a subject-compatible population while the qualitative sample is purposive, selected for its participants' experience or expertise regarding the subject matter (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative data aids the researcher in interpreting that quantitative data through expert insight.

Dr. Thomas J. DeStefano, of Northern Arizona University, conducted one such study in which a large quantitative survey served to answer questions regarding Chinese international students' academic experience and mental health while abroad; a smaller, qualitative study in China focused on expert assessment from PRC university faculty and student returnees; this entailed focus groups and one-on-one interviews. This project encompassed eleven universities (5 U.S. and 6 Chinese), and utilized two quantitative instruments: a survey following the students' experiential responses to environment and culture, and scholastic scoring. Narrative interviews with these students shed light on correlations between GPA and ICSES results, while mainland focus groups worked on the problems associated with reentry onto a PRC campus. Triangulation of this data served to concentrate on future concerns for those institutions involved in this particular exchange program (DeStefano, 2010).

It should be noted that the circumstances of this graduate project did not permit focus groups or interviews, as is prescribed in a mixed-method approach. Yet the open-ended follow-up questions allowed for expansive responses that warranted interpretive analysis. With this alteration in mind, this work should be considered as a quantitative effort



modeled after a mixed-method approach. However the spirit of discovery and interpretation is afforded through its design, in that the triangulation process allows for more confident interpretations of unpredicted and context related findings.

Two sample population groups were sought: One would be of Chinese student sojourners, newly arrived to the U.S., whose perceptions of their host's cultural attributes would not be influenced by acculturation. Rather, perceptions of their host cultural might be more aligned with pre-arrival perceptions of U.S. culture. The second sample population would be of Chinese student sojourners who had returned to their home in China for one to two years. Based on the theories covered in this work's literature review, this group's perception of their former host's cultural attributes should have reflected different values than that of the less experienced group.

Focus was placed on participants of the Sino-American 1+2+1 Dual Degree Program. The Sino-American 1+2+1 Dual Degree Program involves an affiliation of American and Chinese universities, operating through the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the China Center for International Educational Exchange (CCIEE). This program was chosen for three reasons: (1) As Eastern Washington University is an active member, the researcher would have local access to advisors with a familiarity to the program, (2) within the program's design, participants of the second sample population would have a uniform time spent (two years) in their host country, and (3) a greater possibility of finding participants with commonalities such as home and host universities ( i.e. common home and host environments), and therefore securing internal validity.

### 3.3 Recruitment

To begin a reassessment of the differences in cultural perceptions between the China and the United States, one must turn to those perspectives that carry the most weight: those sojourners who will arrive with preconceived notions of the U.S. and whose assessments, after returning to China, may offer a concrete understanding of those differences and similarities now in place.

Participating U.S. universities were approached during the school year of 2010-2011. Once cooperation within a school's international student support system and requisite institutional approval was achieved, demographics of the school's expected prospective fall 2011 arrivals were forwarded. From this data, appropriate officers at corresponding Chinese universities were contacted for cooperation. This inquiry produced nine participating universities in the United States with twenty-four corresponding Chinese universities actively participating. They are identified as follows:

#### United States Participating Universities

Ball State University, Indiana

California State University, San Bernadino

Coastal Carolina University, South Carolina

Eastern Washington University, Washington

George Mason University, Virginia

Georgia Southwestern State University

Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

Northern Arizona University

Salem State College, Massachusetts

China Participating Universities

Beijing Normal University, Beijing

Changshu Insititute of Technology, Jiangsu

China Pharmaceutical University, Jiangsu

Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Chongqing

East China Jiaotong University, Jiangxi

Guangdong University of Business Studies, Guangdong

Guangzhou University, Guangdong

Hainan University, Hainan

Hefei University of Technology, Anhui

Inner Mongolia University of Technology, Nei Mongol

Kunming University of Science and Technology, Yunnan

Liaoning University, Liaoning

Nanchang Hangkong University, Jiangxi

Nanjing Agricultural University, Jiangsu

Nanjing Normal University, Jiangsu

Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Jiangsu

Ningbo University of Technology, Zhejiang

Shaanxi Normal University, Shaanxi

Shandong University at Weihai, Shandong

Soochow University, Jiangsu

Southwest Jiaotong University, Sichuan

Suzhou University, Jiangsu

Xi'an International Studies University, Shaanxi

Xi'an University of Science and Technology, Shaanxi

Zhejiang Normal University, Zhejiang

### **3.4 Participants**

Over the course of the three month window, fifty-three 1+2+1 students responded to survey invitations. Of this number, forty-five participants completed the CDI questionnaire. From this number, twenty-nine participants (Group A) had recently arrived at their designated U.S. university, and sixteen former 1+2+1 students participated (Group B) from China.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to +30 years, with 60 percent between 18 and 21 years, and 37.8 percent between 22 and 30 years (S.D.=0.54).

Twenty-one males and twenty-four females participated. Ethnicity, family economic status, and country of attachment were assessed as a pre-survey questionnaire. The ethnic majority of the sample were Han (93.3 percent, n=44) with one participant Zhuang. The majority (82.3 percent, n=37) of participants came from families whose parents were either in professional or managerial occupations, while a small but substantial number (11.1 percent, n=5) came from families without this status. While there was a broad range of Chinese universities represented in the sample—and therefore some concern of the geographic cultural reliability, all participants had spent their time in one of nine participating U.S. schools of the Sino-American Dual Degree Program.

### 3.5 Procedures

Group A: Each participating U.S. university's international adviser forwarded an email invitation to newly arrived 1+2+1 program students to participate in a study involving the reassessment of cultural differences between the PRC and U.S., with a link to a survey site, *Survey Monkey*, provided. To protect all participants' identity, this email was sent BCC (blind carbon copy) en mass. To prevent misinterpretation, invitational email, interval email reminders, and the online questionnaire were in Mandarin. (This procedure entailed the researcher working with a Chinese graduate student and follow-up examination by faculty.) All participating U.S. university advisers reviewed the survey in English.

Group B: Former program students, now living in China, were contacted through their former Chinese universities. To ensure geographic cultural reliability, only those home universities of Group A were considered for this sampling. Prospective Group B participants received a forwarded email invitation in English, inviting them to participate in a survey regarding their assessment of cultural differences between their former host country and home. Email reminders, also in English, were sent at intervals throughout the three months open to the study. Thirty days prior to the closing of the questionnaire's availability, a final reminder with an incentive for a \$5 (USD) Amazon.com gift certificate was sent out to all participants who had volunteered their e-mail address in the demographic portion of the survey, but had not completed the open-ended questionnaire.

The first component of the online survey involved demographic and qualifying questions regarding their citizenship and 1+2+1 participation. The CDI (Babiker, Cox, &

Miller, 1980), the second component to the survey, assessed the participants' perceptions of cultural differences between the U.S. and that of China. The CDI is a twenty item, 3-point value scale developed from previous culture research (e.g., Mumford, 1998, 2000; Romanova, 2007; Wang, 2009; Ward, & Kennedy, 1993). Wei-Hsuan Wang (2009) utilized the CDI to determine those perceived physical and social characteristics within a large-scale, multiple instrumentation study on reentry adjustment. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was tested via Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient and proved that it was reliable ( $\alpha = .84$ ). The 3-point scale ranges from 1 (similar to China) to 3 (very different from China), with the mid-point (2) value as "somewhat similar/different." It must be noted that one question (6a. Is it a secular society?) was unusable because of a translation error, leaving the number of viable questions at nineteen.

### **3.6 Research Questions:**

The first two research questions and their hypothesis are addressed in the quantitative analysis of the Cultural Distance Index questionnaire. The third research question and hypothesis is addressed in the analysis of the answers to the follow-up questionnaire.

***Research Question #1: Do Chinese students experience any change in their perception of the U.S. culture, in terms of cultural distance and value orientations, as a result of their participation in the 1+2+1 Dual Degree Program?***

***Research Question #2: In terms of these students' perceptions, are cultural characteristics/values between the PRC and U.S. becoming less diverse?***

*Hypothesis #1:* The results of the Cultural Distance Index questionnaire will render some

attributes irrelevant while identifying new attributes of focus.

*Research Question #3: What lessons can be taken away from this work that would aid in the sojourning Chinese student's reentry adjustment?*

*Hypothesis #2: Answers to the follow-up questionnaire will reveal areas problematic to reentry adjustment.*

## 4.0 Results

### 4.1 CDI Findings

CDI data were analyzed using the statistical package for the social science (SPSS) version 20.0. With multiple comparisons within unmatched, ordinal groupings, a standard significance set at the level of  $p < 0.05$  has the potential of creating a Type I error. Therefore, the Bonferroni correction method adjusted alpha levels of .0025 per test (.05/20). Since the CDI values are 3-valued ordinal (ranked from similar to very different), but grouping of sojourners (Groups A and B) are categorical, cross-tabulation analysis with strengths of association were compared by means of the Kendall's tau-c treatment of Gamma (Kendall's tau-c is measured from 1.00 to -1.00, following a strong or weak agreement in association).

At the  $\alpha = 0.0025$  level of significance, none of the variables proved a null hypothesis, which suggests there exists enough evidence to conclude that there is a difference in perceptions of China/U.S. cultural attributes between groups. Based on the quantitative findings, attributes of climate, modernity, elder esteem, and social dating conventions are perceived as irrelevant to this sample population. The results are addressed with tables<sup>1</sup> displaying Groups A and B results, as follows.

#### *Low Distance Perceptions*

Questions of Climate (Q1a), Modernity (Q7b), Elder Esteem (Q9a), and Social Dating Conventions (Q10b), were uniformly perceived by both groups as similar, having low distance between China and U.S. cultural attributes. None of the pairings showed a

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of space, the value "somewhat similar or different" is shown on the tables as "so-so."



statistically significant relationship. Climate (Q1a) received 55 percent of Group A and 50 percent of Group B ( $r = .051, p = 0.729$ ); Modernity (Q7b) had 55 percent from Group A and 50 percent from Group B ( $r = .041, p = 0.776$ ); Elder Esteem (Q9a) received 69 percent from Group A and 69 percent from Group B ( $r = -.032, p = 0.81$ ); and Social Dating Conventions (Q10b) received 93 percent from Group A, and 100 percent from Group B ( $r = -.063, p = 0.146$ ).

| LOW SCORING ATTRIBUTES                          |         |       |                |
|---|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1a. What is the climate like?                   | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 55.2%   | 34.5% | 10.3%          |
| Group B   | 50.0%   | 37.5% | 12.5%          |
| 7b. Do most homes have modern amenities?        | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 55.2%   | 37.9% | 6.9%           |
| Group B   | 50.0%   | 43.8% | 6.3%           |
| 9a. What respect is shown to elders?            | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 69.0%   | 6.9%  | 24.1%          |
| Group B   | 68.8%   | 18.8% | 12.5%          |
| 10b. Crosstab: Can men and women meet socially? | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 93.1%   | 3.4%  | 3.4%           |
| Group B   | 100.0%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%           |

Table 1: CDI Low Scoring Attributes

*Moderate Distance Perceptions*

Questions of Rainfall (Q1b), Men and Women Fashion (Q2a & 2b), Education Level (Q4b), and Religion (Q5b & 6b) were uniformly perceived by both groups as moderately different. None of the pairings showed a statistically significant relationship. Rainfall (Q1b) received 57 percent of Group A and 50 percent of Group B ( $r = .051, p = 0.729$ ); Men's Fashion (Q2a) had 69 percent from Group A and 69 percent from Group B ( $r = -$

.043,  $p = 0.775$ ); Women's Fashion (Q2b) had 55 percent from Group A and 50 percent from Group B ( $r = .284, p = 0.033$ ); Education Level (Q4b) received 76 percent from Group A, and 81 percent from Group B ( $r = .049, p = 0.669$ ); Religious Diet (Q5b) had 59 percent from Group A and 56 percent from Group B ( $r = -.219, p = 0.103$ ); and Religion in Society (Q6b) had 83 percent from Group A and 81 percent from Group B ( $r = .024, p = 0.831$ ).

| MODERATE SCORING ATTRIBUTES                     |         |       |                |
|---|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1b. What is the rainfall?                       | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 24.1%   | 58.6% | 17.2%          |
| Group B   | 31.3%   | 50.0% | 18.8%          |
| 2a. What fashion do men wear?                   | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 3.4%    | 69.0% | 27.6%          |
| Group B   | 0.0%    | 68.8% | 31.3%          |
| 4b. What is the average education level?        | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 24.1%   | 75.9% | 0.0%           |
| Group B   | 18.8%   | 81.3% | 0.0%           |
| 5b. Are there religious dietary rules?          | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 27.6%   | 58.6% | 13.8%          |
| Group B   | 43.8%   | 56.3% | 0.0%           |
| 6b. Does religion play a large role in society? | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A   | 6.9%    | 82.8% | 10.3%          |
| Group B   | 6.3%    | 81.3% | 12.5%          |

Table 2: CDI Moderate Scoring Attributes

*High Distance Perceptions*

The question of Common Food (Q5a) was the only variable uniformly perceived by both groups as very different. It did not show a statistically significant relationship.

Common Food (Q5a) had 66 percent from Group A and 75 percent from Group B ( $r = .111, p = 0.377$ ).

*Split Perceptions: Low - Moderate*

The questions of Chinese Language (Q3b) and Women’s Roles (9b) had split low to moderate perceptions: Chinese Language (Q3b) received a low scoring by Group A at 41 percent, while Group B perceived moderate difference at 44 percent ( $r = -.126, p = 0.394$ ). The question of Women’s Roles (9b) also received split responses, with Group A perceiving a low difference at 55 percent and group B perceiving a moderate difference at 56 percent ( $r = .105, p = .461$ ).

| LOW – MODERATE SCORING ATTRIBUTES |         |       |                |
|-----------------------------------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 3b. Is Chinese spoken?            | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                           | 41.4%   | 20.7% | 37.9%          |
| Group B                           | 18.8%   | 43.8% | 37.5%          |
| 9b. What are women's roles?       | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                           | 55.2%   | 44.8% | 0.0%           |
| Group B                           | 43.8%   | 56.3% | 0.0%           |

*Table 3: CDI Low to Moderate Scoring Attributes*

*Split Perceptions: Low - High*

The questions of Free Education (Q4a) and Marriage Systems (10a) had drastic split perceptions between groups: Free Education (Q4a) received a high scoring by Group A at 55 percent, while Group B's perceptions were split between a low 44 percent, and high difference at 44 percent ( $r = -.124, p = 0.406$ ). The question of Marriage Systems (10a) also received split responses, with Group A perceiving a low difference at 49 percent while the bulk of group B perceived a high difference at 44 percent ( $r = .237, p = .116$ ).

| LOW – HIGH SCORING ATTRIBUTES         |         |       |                |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 4a. Is education free?                | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                               | 31.0%   | 13.8% | 55.2%          |
| Group B                               | 43.8%   | 12.5% | 43.8%          |
| 10a.. What is the system of marriage? | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                               | 44.8%   | 31.0% | 24.1%          |
| Group B                               | 25.0%   | 31.3% | 43.8%          |

Table 4: CDI: Low to High Scoring Attributes

*Split Perceptions: Moderate - High*

The questions of Primary Language (Q3a), Quality of Life (7a), Leisure Entertainment (8a), and Social Interaction (8b) were split in moderate and high perceptions between groups: With the question of Primary Language (Q3a), Group A's perceptions were split between a moderate, 38 percent, and a high difference at 38 percent, while Group B perceived a high difference of 50 percent ( $r = .115, p = 0.454$ ). The question of Quality of Life (7a) also received split responses, with Group A perceiving a moderate difference at 59 percent and group B splitting its response between a moderate, 44 percent, and a high difference, 44 percent, in perceptions ( $r = .045, p = .767$ ). The question of Leisure Entertainment (8a) received split responses, with Group A perceiving a moderate difference at 55 percent and group B perceiving a high difference at 69 percent ( $r = .219, p = .110$ ). Social Interaction (8b) was perceived by Group A as having moderate differences at 69 percent, while Group B perceived high differences, 56 percent, in perception ( $r = .235, p = .115$ ).

| MODERATE - HIGH SCORING ATTRIBUTES        |         |       |                |
|---|---------|-------|----------------|
| 3a. What is the primary language spoken?  | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                                   | 24.1%   | 37.9% | 37.9%          |
| Group B                                   | 18.8%   | 31.3% | 50.0%          |
| 7a. What is the quality of life?          | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                                   | 6.9%    | 58.6% | 34.5%          |
| Group B                                   | 12.5%   | 43.8% | 43.8%          |
| 8a. The leisure entertainment here is ... | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                                   | 0.0%    | 55.2% | 44.8%          |
| Group B                                   | 0.0%    | 31.3% | 68.8%          |
| 8b. Social interaction here is ...        | similar | So-so | very different |
| Group A                                   | 3.4%    | 69.0% | 27.6%          |
| Group B                                   | 6.3%    | 37.5% | 56.3%          |

Table 5: CDI Moderate to High Scoring Attributes

Notes:

It is interesting to note that, within most data sets' analysis, Group B (those sojourner students now returned and living in China for one to two years) showed higher scoring for perceived cultural difference than Group A (those sojourning students newly arrived in the U.S.). Theories derived from these results, and the follow-up answers, are addressed in the discussion portion of this thesis.

**4.2 Group B Follow-Up Contributions**

Five participants from Group B (those student sojourners who had returned to China for one to two years) answered open-ended follow-up questions. The follow-up questionnaire was broken-up into three segments: questions corresponding to the subject matter on the CDI questionnaire, personal reflection on the returnee's experience, and program recommendations and advice to future program students. The survey tool

identified participants according to the date of the response and the respondent's IP address, and were subsequently assigned queue numbers. This information is noted below:

| Group B Follow-up Participants |               |           |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Queue Number                   | Response Date | City      |
| 1                              | 09/22/11      | Shanghai  |
| 2                              | 10/03/11      | Shanghai  |
| 3                              | 10/05/11      | Nantong   |
| 4                              | 10/22/11      | Beijing   |
| 5                              | 12/13/11      | Chongqing |

*Table 6: Group B Follow-up Participants*

#### *CDI Relevance*

Generally, each participant had its unique opinion, yet consensus occurred in some areas. The contributions did support CDI analysis, however, considering questions of women's roles, religion, living standards, education, and leisure entertainment as most relevant, while fashion, lifestyle, weather, and climate were not considered particularly relevant to their perceptions of China and U.S. differences. The questions and pertinent responses follow:

*Question #1: Of those comparisons mentioned in the online questionnaire, which do you find most relevant to your perceptions of U.S. and China and why?*

Participant #5 considered "female's social status" (Women's Roles) a salient subject, pointing out filial piety as having precedence over an unmarried daughter's life choices. Following this train of thought, Participant #4 noted a difference in male-

female relationships and inter-generational communication.

Participant #3 felt that the questions of religion identified a conspicuous difference between U.S. and Chinese cultures, and suggested that this dynamic serves as a cohesive property in U.S. society.

Participant #1 considered “living standard[s], education and [leisure] entertainment” as relevant areas of difference, noting that “living standard[s] of a country is shown on every aspect,” but offered housing as an example: “For Americans, living in houses with gardens is normal, but in China only the rich do because the housing is too expensive.” This participant noted that higher education was “more reasonable in States” and outdoor recreation and activities were more accessible than in China.

*Question #2: Of those comparisons mentioned in the online questionnaire, which do you find least relevant to your perceptions of U.S. and China and why?*

Participant #5 did not consider fashion as relevant attributes because “...it is becoming close since we are reading the same fashion magazines, watching the same shows, and gossiping about the same celebrities.” Perhaps in the same thread, Participant #4 considered questions of lifestyle (perhaps the sociological definition: consumption, entertainment, and dress) less relevant.

Participants #4 and #3 thought that the questions of climate/weather were too generic, since “China and the US are both big countries, different areas have different weather.”

Participant #1 saw the question of modernity (the question reads, “Do most homes have modern amenities?”) as irrelevant because “things like electric products are very

much the same.”

Participants were also asked to offer their thoughts on culturally related attributes not found in the CDI questionnaire, that they might have deemed relevant. Some attributes, such as lifestyle, gender roles, trust, and luxury items, were addressed in the previous answers but should receive attention as attributes outside of the present index. The questions and pertinent responses follow:

*Question #3. What U.S. attributes, not covered in this survey, would you consider very different from that of China?*

Participant #5 perceived social acceptance/intolerance of sexual orientation and identity as a defining cultural characteristic, and disclosed her own orientation as representative to the atmosphere in China: “As a lesbian, I cannot come out from the closet to my family since they are not that open heart. So, the only thing I can do is become more independent (both economic aspect and mental aspect).” This corresponds to Participant #1's perception of the fluidity/rigidity of gender roles as a salient cultural attribute: “[In the States] boys and girls can also become very good friends, but in China, relationships always have something to do with bf/gf's.”

Participant #1 and #4 saw students' motivations for higher education as a determining cultural attribute. “In states, most people study out of interests...study much deeper into a subject. In China, we study to finish tasks.”

Participant #3 perceived a society's interest and practice in sports and fitness as a culturally defining attribute. This respondent also noted that people in the U.S. were more trusting than in China, and credited that to religion “...In the States, people are



kind of united, consciously or unconsciously, by a common belief. So I see more trust in the States. People would like to offer help to each other. In China, people are more self concerned...”

Participants #2 and #3 believed that transportation, both public and private, identified differences between China and the U.S. They noted that Americans own cars at an earlier age than the average Chinese, but public transportation in China was far superior to the States:

In China, almost all the cities have a very good public transportation system, especially in big cities. For instance, in Shanghai there are already 11 metro lines and hundreds of bus routes. And there are some more under construction. It's okay if one doesn't own car because the metros and buses covers almost the whole city.

Participants #1 and #5 also commented that politics are a determining factor in cultural differences.

As noted in the previous question, respondents saw modern amenities as similar, in both countries, but Participant #1 did observe that home luxury items were not common in China: “But States do have some entertainment products that Chinese don't have, like hot tubs, ha!”

As noted, participants #4 and #5 both suggest that lifestyle is a more contemporary cultural attribute. If so, it is an area that is heavily influenced by popular culture.

Question #4, *What U.S. attributes, not covered in this survey, would you consider very similar to that of China?* received short and varied answers from participants. It is

interesting to note, however, that Participant #5 saw a common resistance to “government policies” in both countries, while Participant #1 saw urban lifestyle and the importance of family as common cultural attributes. Creating a strong consensus from previous questions, Participant #2 saw fashion as a commonality.

#### *Participants' Personal Reflection*

The second segment of the follow-up questionnaire targeted personal reflection regarding the participants' sojourning experience and their return home, as these impressions relate to China-U.S. comparative cultural attributes. Some questions (#5, 7, 8 & 9) in this segment were a variation of the CDI follow-up questions and received little response. The general impression one receives is that of intellectual expansion to a larger view of Chinese and world affairs.

*Question #6: What did you learn of your own culture while in the United States?*

*Could you please describe those situations in which you learned these things?*

Participants #1 and #5 both expressed how their view of international affairs and politics had expanded, since living abroad, and had come to believe their misconstrued knowledge in world affairs was related to a certain worldview propagated in Chinese press. Participant #5 explained how her exposure to Taiwanese students, on her U.S. campus, had changed her opinion of that particular political situation:

I learned that Taiwan is not belong to China. The situation is that I talked with some Taiwanese students, they told me their democracy situation, and how they did the original Chinese cultural inheritance. I understood that

they did something better than us, they should be independent. And there are more political issues, I think there is no need to name all of them.

In contrast to these participants' perspectives, participant #2 believed that many Americans are just as ill-informed about the People's Republic of China, since "Cantonese is considered the most widely used Chinese speaking language."

Question #10, an extension to #6, asked the participants to explain how the Sino-American experience has transformed their perceptions of their place in the world. All respondents expressed a more open and adventurous attitude toward new people and experiences.

Participant #5: "In the U.S., I met people from the worldwide range, they can be travelers, professors, students and even neighbors. I am told that I am too young to settle down, I should go out and see this fantastic world. If I stay my whole life in only one place, it will be a waste of my life."

Participant#2: "I became much more outgoing when meeting new friends."

Participant#1. "I'm much more open for the unknown world that I want to explore."

#### *Participants' Recommendations*

The last segment of the follow-up questionnaire gave participants the opportunity to offer suggestions for program improvements, and advice to future students. The answers emphasized intercultural communication, immersion, and independent living. These answers also revealed a certain level of reentry disillusionment, life dissatisfaction, in the sojourner's return adjustment.

*Question #11: If you were asked to create a special training curriculum for students*

*preparing to enter the Sino-American 1+2+1 Dual-Degree Program, what subjects would you recommend? (Please consider all those academic subjects at your disposal.)*

Participant #5 emphasized preparation for independent living and training for the U.S. academic environment. The former would include: “How to study language fast...How to adjust your political thoughts...Studying is not the only thing you can do in U.S.! [There is] travel, work, and other communications to American culture.”

*Question #12: Following this same thought, what advice would you offer a student to enhance his/her U.S. university experience?*

Participant #1 proposed a practicum communication class with American students and emphasized that, while abroad, “experience as much as possible.”

Participant #2 and #5 emphasized intercultural socialization. Participant #5's advice was more to the point and worth its entirety:

You are a student, but you are not planning to pay 60,000 dollars to only study your textbooks! You are here to study the other culture, to travel around, to change/adjust your political thoughts. You should know, as a human, you have freedom, and you should have democracy rights! You work so hard, because your homeland does not have this kind of "crap," and this is your work to change this situation!

*Question #13: What type of training would you recommend for Chinese students preparing for their return home?*

Participant #1 suggested to “prepare for the disappointments.”

Participant #5's remarks also displayed reentry disillusionment and addressed the loss of equilibrium in cultural identity:

Well, I have to say, if they want to go back home, then they should not watch YouTube, not use facebook and twitter first, since they are not allowed to be used in China. And following, there are tons of things they need to know, to learn, to change, from an almost American to a whatever Chinese.

## 5.1 Discussion

This study focused on identifying and assessing those present-day distancing cultural attributes between the U.S. and China, as perceived by two groups of migrant Chinese students. With the second group in mind, the study also endeavored to discover salient attributes which influenced the student's reentry experience. More importantly, the entirety of this work's purpose was to seek out present-day attributes pertinent to the migrant student's experience. This discussion (1) acknowledges those cultural attributes perceived as relevant and irrelevant to this body of participants, (2) through Group B's responses to the follow-up questionnaire, efforts to identify new areas of difference, and (3) discusses possible circumstances behind the division of perceptions between groups.

### *CDI: Findings of Similarities*

Through the use of Babiker's (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980) Cultural Distance Index questionnaire, it was predicted that some cultural attributes would prove irrelevant while identifying new areas of focus. Resulting analysis found that respondents uniformly considered four attributes, climate, modernity, elder esteem, and social dating conventions, irrelevant to cultural differences. Respondents also uniformly perceived attributes like rainfall, men and women's fashion, education level, and religion, as moderately different or similar. The question of food was the only attribute scoring as "very different" by both groups. Follow-up questionnaire answers from Group B confirmed much of what the CDI analysis revealed, and these are expanded below.

#### *Climate*

As Group B respondents suggested, China and the United States are physically large

and diverse: each nation covers a little under 3,700,000 square miles and are similarly varied in topography and climate (Girhard, n.d.). In saying this, a Chinese family on vacation from Beijing could experience the same diverse climate shift in Shenzhen as a student sojourning to George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. With the diverse climates of two vast nations understood, this question would receive rejection or, at best, a multivalued response.

### *Modernity*

Within the population of this study's samples, urban middle and upper economic strata (as discovered in the demographic portion of the questionnaire, 89% of participants' families are either in professional or managerial occupations), there is no perceived differences in modern home amenities. According to Shu Xiaoling and Zhu Yifei (2009), the overall economic status of China has been climbing since the 1970s, raising the quality of life and its population's subjective well-being. In the past decade, the average household income has almost quadrupled, offering Chinese urbanites an increase in year-to-year disposable income (CNBS). In their answers to the follow-up questions, respondents have expanded the concept of modernity into urban infrastructure: Participants note that mass transportation is more prominent and accessible in Chinese urban environments than in the U.S.

### *Elder Esteem*

Nor is there a perceived difference in elder esteem—what may be perceived as familial hierarchy—between these Chinese respondents and the U.S. cultural practices they encountered through their sojourning experience. As in Schwartz, Weisskirch,

Hurley, Zamboanga, Park, Kim, Umaña-Taylor, Castillo, Brown, and Greene's "family/relationship primacy" theory (2010), the notions of communalism, familism, and filial piety do exist in U.S. society—and may be evident to the Chinese sojourning student—but Americans do not consciously conceptualize these attributes as such. Yet as the respondents have perceived, they are part of American social practice.

#### *Social Dating Conventions*

Since the term "dating" may be interpreted by the liberal Westerner to mean many circumstances, this question should be explained: The question asks, "Can men and women meet socially?" Considering that this questionnaire is tailored for a wide spectrum of cultures, the inference of "social dating" is subjective to the cultures under comparison. With the subjectivity of this practice understood, it is very intriguing that respondents perceived social dating conventions of Chinese urban youth similar to those American practices observed. This response corresponds to changing urban societal attitudes toward dating and sexuality, despite the Chinese government's continuing campaign against "immoral behavior" on university campuses (Jeffereys, 2006).

#### *CDI: New Areas of Cultural Difference*

In the follow-up questionnaire, Group B participants were asked the question, "What U.S. attributes, not covered in this survey, would you consider very different from that of China?" Their contributions offered possible areas of focus for future inquiry into present-day measurable cultural attributes. Suggestions include: lifestyle, the significance of education, transportation, sexuality, and politics. Each potential attribute is briefly examined.



*Addressing “Lifestyle” and Popular Culture*

A conspicuous term used by respondents, broadly referring to fashion, was “lifestyle,” and it reverberates as reference to a cultural phenomenon beyond a similar style of clothing. The concept of *lifestyle* is sociologically considered as a mixture of expressive habits, consumption, entertainment, and dress (Sobel, 1981); lifestyle is a product of popular culture. Within urban environments, like Shanghai and Beijing, there exists a popular culture immersed in the a mixture of globalization and localization via consumption. This consumption has espoused a Bourdieu-like class of popular culture, a petite bourgeoisie comprised of the global localized in style and application (Bao, 2008). It is found in stylings, media, conversation, popular discourse; it is immediate and transcends time-space in that immediacy. So, when a respondent suggests that the lifestyle of urban Chinese and the lifestyle of urban American are more similar than different, there is more to this cultural attribute than clothing: it encompasses a consumerist mindset of the popular, the global, wrapped in the local. It also presents a certain homogeneity in the popular. *Lifestyle*, in this context, is a measurable cultural attribute.

*A New Perspective on Education*

Participants acknowledged the validity of questioning education costs, but as students whose daily experiences evolved around an academic environment, it be may be interpreted that they did not have a clear understanding of an average American's education level. Nonetheless, of those American students they encountered, participants noted a clear cultural difference in the motives for education. As Participant #1 asserted,

Students' personal goals, for the ones who have been educated the states, they know what they want to achieve in their lives much better and have the confidence to find a way leading to the kind of life they want...In [the] States, most people study out of interests... In China, we study to finish tasks.

From the traditional understanding of Asian cultural values, one may conclude that Participant #1 has identified the cultural dimension of individualism (Hofstede, 1984), in that students in the States pursue their own interests rather than fulfilling a civic need. Yet education is also a practice of daily living, and as such *Motives for Education* may be considered a cultural attribute.

#### *Transportation*

The issue of transportation was raised in two ways: public infrastructure and vehicle ownership. A society's infrastructure of public access to transportation speaks to the degree of modernization as well as its intellectual assets. Participant #2 noted that in the U.S., cheap and reliable public transportation was only available in big cities and rarely to the boroughs. He compared such situations to Shanghai's "11 metro lines and hundreds of bus routes...It's okay if one doesn't own car because the metros and buses covers almost the whole city." Private ownership speaks to a society's wealth—its disposable income. Participant #3 noted the age of car ownership, "Most Chinese still take public transportation and will not have a car until about 30s." *Modes of Transportation*, then, is suggested as a measurable cultural attribute.

#### *Sexuality-Gender Roles*

Although the rhetoric of societal norms in sexuality and gender tend to view tolerance toward behavior outside monogamous heterosexuality as either the byproduct of Western liberalism (Jeffereys, 2006) or a remnant from a less enlightened, decadent society (Hinsch, 1990). So, it must be noted that this attribute in discussion is not coming from a Eurocentric perspective, but one of an objective ethnographic one. Participant #5 identified differences in cultural practices through “gay people's marriage problem and social identity.” Participants #1 and #5 touched on the idea of sexuality/gender rigidity, in that Chinese families generally expect a female child to find a man who is rich or renowned to marry, and platonic relationships between different sexes are uncommon. Participant #5 also addressed a general intolerance to non-heterosexual lifestyles in China. Homosexuality is no longer considered an illness or crime in China. Yet according a large survey in 2002, 55% of British students agreed that “homosexuality should be allowed” while 73% of the students in China did not (Higgins, Zheng, Liu, & Sun, 2002). As a social trend, sexuality-gender rigidity speaks to the same cultural practices that dating and marriage address, but from a broader construct of identity, and should be considered in the assessment of differences between cultures. How to find a diplomatically acceptable terminology, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

### *Politics*

One can tiptoe around the subject for decades, but determinants of differences between cultures cannot be thoroughly exhausted until political ideology is examined. A culture's sociopolitical ideology frames all other practices behind the whys and wherefores of a society's movements and creates the metanarrative “involved in [all]

ethical, social, and political praxis” of a society (Lyotard, 1984, p. 40). If all other cultural identifiers were to translate into some homogenous variation of global consumerism, the basic structure of a peoples' understanding of reality would be found in the sociopolitical ideology. Two participants addressed politics as a cultural attribute that influenced their experience in the U.S. and their return home. Participant #1 notes a commonality that exists between Chinese and U.S. culture is “the desire that people want to get peace, and against government's policies.” From this perspective, ideological differences are not the issue here, but there is a common understanding of democratic values at play. Participant #5 advised future migrating students to learn new ways of viewing the world by expanding their view beyond their own sociopolitical constructs. In the address of the subject as an aspect of a society's culture, *Politics* is an elemental, a concrete, part of any cultural comparison.

#### ***Addressing Returnee's Perceptions of Difference***

Regarding all other areas in question, language, education costs, quality of life, leisure entertainment, social interaction, women's roles, and marriage systems, perceptions of cultural difference were split between groups with Group B's returnees consistently perceiving the widest distance. That some U.S. cultural attributes have become inconsequential to the urban Chinese sojourner's perceptions of cultural differences, since Isam Babiker (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980) first postulated these questions, is not surprising. As stated before, recent international commerce and communication would inevitably influence those cultural perceptions of people in partnership. What is surprising, however, is the quantity of those attributes which

reflected such diverse split perceptions of difference between the sample groups, and, specifically, that returnees' (Group B) perceptions of cultural difference was generally higher than the students who had newly arrived (Group A) to the States. The question now arises: *Why do such discrepancies in cultural perception exist between these groups?*

There are a few probable reasons why these perceptions exist and should be examined. The first consideration is the perceptions of Group A—those Chinese students who had recently arrived to their U.S. destinations. The survey was officially accessible to respondents October 1, 2011 (although a few Group B participants responded shortly before this date), giving the average Group A participant six to eight weeks of exposure to its host country and university curriculum. The purpose of this group's timing was to capture those preconceived notions of U.S. culture, and not necessarily an educated assessment of the culture they were presently immersed. There is also the possibility of the migrant experiencing their highest levels of psychological distress during this period. According Ward and Kennedy (1993), “students experience the greatest amount of depression, psychological adjustment problems, within the first month of arrival; depression dropped significantly after 5 months in the country” (p. 280). With these two factors at work, and possibly in conflict, the newly arrived migrant's perceptions of difference should be at their highest.

One of the criteria for Group B participants was the length of time they had been back at home, and invitations were only sent to those former students who had returned during 2009 and 2010. The reasoning behind this condition was to be able to allow for a reasonable adjustment process to occur in the migrant's reentry and, in so doing, extract

responses with few negative perceptions coinciding with reentry adjustment, or reverse culture shock. In Kevin Gaw's 2000 literature review of reverse culture shock in students, he notes that, "some individuals may experience few, if any, effects of reentry, while others appear to have problems ranging from a few months to a year or longer" (p.34). Working from the perspective that those participants of Group B have been home long enough to reacclerate to the norms, practices, and culture they were raised in, it is reasonable to consider other variables that would cause higher perceptions in difference from those participants (Group A) that were, theoretically, experiencing the stress of a new environment.

One plausible answer would be what Nan Sussman (2002) asserts: that if the migrant enters their journey with a "weak cultural identity." Considering what this work has presented as the state of mind for the Chinese student in preparation for sojourning—a familiarity to Western ideology via academia, the presence of a global within the local of popular culture, and a tolerance for duality within a cultural construct—it is plausible that Group B participants are exhibiting some degree of cultural identity disturbance. The result is that of a *subtractive* or *additive* identity. Sussman describes these "invisible" identities as such:

Some repatriates feel as though they no longer fit into their home country. I call this the "subtractive" identity response. They feel "less" American or Chinese or Brazilian. The once-familiar ways of behaving appear strange and cherished values seem unimportant, irrelevant or negative. These repatriates feel different from their family and find it difficult to relate to

friends and co-workers. Another type of identity response also results in distress and discomfort upon returning home but for slightly different reasons. These repatriates experience distress because they have interwoven many of the host country's values and behaviors into their own. I call this the "additive" identity response. And acting on the host country values and behaviors when back in the home country causes discomfort for repatriates and those in contact with them. When I returned to the U.S. after a sojourn in Japan, one of my "additive" behaviors was to insist that all visitors to my home remove their shoes. This annoyed friends and deliverymen equally. (p. 3)

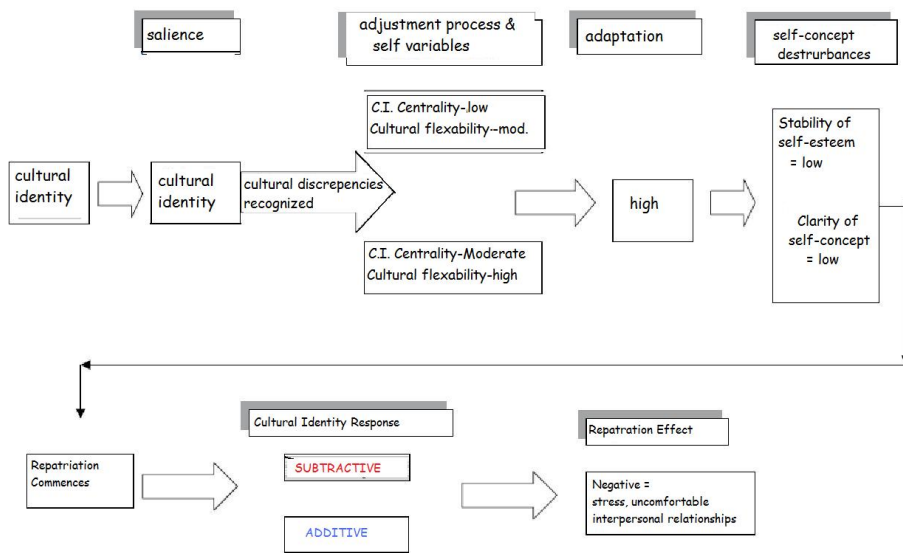


Illustration 1: Subtractive and Additive Identity Shifts (Sussman, 2002, p. 394)

This researcher has experienced both types of adjustment identities, and like Christofi

and Thompson's (2007) participant, the additive identity disallows for fostered cultural practices and attitudes to harmoniously exist; one is constantly comparing host to home, and romanticizing attributes of the culture left behind. The dynamic of a subtractive identity is apparent in Group B's Participant's criticism of perceived attributes, such as the lack of trust in Chinese society, the distaste of once familiar (“traditions kill promotion and future”), and the general rejection of home culture. The presence of an identity shift is salient in one participant's advice to future migrants preparing to return home: “Prepare for the disappointments.” Without a strong cultural identity, as another participant described, the migrant returns home and must face the conflict of being “an almost American to a whatever Chinese.”

If true, the presence of a negative-effect cultural identity shift in Group B participants would be a possible explanation as to why measurements of PRC/U.S. cultural difference among returnees were higher than those respondents newly arrived in the United States.



## 5.2 **Limitations**

This study and its results should be interpreted in light of several important limitations. First, according to Babbie (2010) despite the elaborate measures taken to acquire participants, the samples were ultimately of non-probability convenience (p. 192) and cannot be considered representative of the entire population of Sino-American Dual Degree Program participants. Relating to this limitation, although the concurrent between-groups design attempts to draw individuals from the same population, the possible element of sampling bias may skew a direct answer to the question of changing perceptions (p. 323). Of course, the perfect design would be a longitudinal study, wherein the same subjects repeated measures, and it is recommended that a study of this kind be considered in future inquiry. Second, the Babiker CDI (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980) was applied as originally designed, with a three-value scale. Consequently, the ordinal values were limited to descriptive analysis, which produced large p-values and did not allow for many forms of analysis (p. 501). Thirdly, there is the lingering doubt, in working with a self-reporting method, as to the level of performance being enacted by the respondents—what is commonly known as the Hawthorn Effect (p. 234). Considering the researcher's speculation as to Group B participants exhibiting some degree of cultural identity disturbance, performance bias toward a representative of the participant's host is a possible scenario one must consider.

### 5.3 Conclusion: Implications for Future Research

Traveling from home and everything familiar is a pivotal event in the life of any international student, and one's return home is part of this journey. In a global media and market economy, one may have a sense of the exotic in one's own society: popular culture, electronics, the world-wide merchandizing websites on the internet, even the language one has practiced and utilized for years, all function as simulacra—a presentation of a reality we choose to believe true. But once among a different society, those representations can fall short, and in so doing, present the migrant with the sense of falling through the looking glass; so much of what one comes into contact with is familiar, but not.

Following the literature reviewed, this study began with certain assumptions:

- 1) Cultural adjustment, or culture shock, is a sociopsychological phenomenon when one experiences life in an environment different from one's own, but is also experienced when one returns home.
- 2) Traditionally, social scientists have determined that certain societal characteristics are unique from one culture to another, and these determinants are the basis for predicting the degree of cultural adjustment a migrant will experience.
- 3) Psychologists and social scientists have determined that an individual's identification to one's cultural, the cultural identity, plays a significant role in the migrant's ability to negotiate successfully through its intercultural experience, which is expressed as intercultural competency
- 4) In recent years, studies comparing cultural differences, or investigating migrant

experiences, have found that some cultural attributes are not necessarily unique to one culture, but can be identified in cultures that have not traditionally been associated with that attribute.

*Addressing Hypotheses and Research Questions:*

Hypothesis #1 predicted the results of the Cultural Distance Index questionnaire would render some attributes irrelevant while identifying new attributes of focus. Thus, Hypothesis #1 was supported. Of Babiker's 1980 *Cultural Distance Index*, these Chinese participants identified many cultural attributes that still affect the migrant's perceptions of difference. These attributes are language, food, education costs, and leisure activities. Participants found the CDI attributes, climate, modernity, elder esteem, and social dating conventions, of no definable difference. Participants also identified new cultural attributes pertinent to present-day comparisons of China and the United States. These are lifestyle, the significance of education, transportation, sexuality, and politics.

Research Question #1 asked if Chinese students experience any change in their perception of the U.S. culture, in terms of cultural distance and value orientations, as a result of their participation in the 1+2+1 Dual Degree Program. CDI scoring between Group A (those Chinese students who had recently arrived to their U.S. destinations) and Group B (those student sojourners who had returned to China for one to two years) revealed generally higher perceptions of cultural difference after two years in the United States. Relevant to this question, Chinese participants recognized a marked difference in educational approaches and student motivation.

Research Question #2 asked in terms of these students' perceptions, are cultural

characteristics/values between the PRC and U.S. becoming less diverse? Participants agree that fashion, popular culture, stylings—lifestyle—are very similar. Urban modernity was considered equal, but in infrastructural areas like public transportation, there was a general consensus that U.S. was lacking. Elder esteem, or the general acknowledgment of familial hierarchy, was also considered similar in cultural practice.

Hypothesis #2 predicted Group B's answers to the follow-up questionnaire would reveal areas problematic to reentry adjustment. This hypothesis was partially supported, in that analysis of essay responses from former Sino-American Dual Degree Program students, who had returned and lived in China for one to two years, inferred that some returnees may exhibit behavior reflective of a shift in cultural identity. This shift may present in negatively perceived social and interpersonal behavior, with an emphasis of a negative attitude toward one's own culture. If nothing else, a disturbance of cultural identity would inhibit the migrant's successful reentry and reacclimation into society. This situation falls under the intrapersonal dynamic in reverse culture shock, or reentry acculturation, theorized as the lack of the sojourner's identity to its home culture, and the inevitable attachment to its host. Such identity deficiencies may become common-place in a global environment of the popular. In so evolving, China may experience the “brain drain” of expatriation en masse.

Research Question #3 asked of what lessons can be taken away from this work that may aid in the sojourning Chinese student's reentry adjustment. From this student's perspective, future work would not necessarily involve further study of migrant students' sojourning acculturation, but the earnest inquiry toward the practical application of

decades of research and theory into educational intervention.

A nation sends its citizens abroad for the purpose of enhancing its place in the world. Through those experiences, citizens are expected to contribute with knowledge that translates into a country's enhanced global identity. However, through the research reviewed, we understand that the sojourner's identity is not so easily transformed, and the complexities of human identity must be negotiated. From this researcher's assessment, a sojourning student can be trained to see its experience through the lens of objectivity rather than emotional reactions (Adler, 1975; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Although many Chinese and U.S. associations offer their student-sojourners pre-departure training—seminars and websites offering practical advice for negotiating daily life in the United States—and remote support for the student while abroad (NAFSA, 2012; CIEE, 2012), there is no institutionally-based comprehensive training in place. A comprehensive program would offer the student the internalization of learned intellectual processes through critical and reflective self-analysis via experiential learning, which could involve one or all of the following implementations:

- ♣ Standardized pre-departure seminars, covering Chinese cultural studies, ethnographic theory, and intercultural communication
- ♣ Immersion practicum activities, such as volunteer work and homestay, online journaling and mentor supervision, while abroad
- ♣ Reentry focus group participation, culminating in the creation of an ethnographic report—a self-assessment student's experiences

This type of program, individually tailored by the student and for the edification of the

student's well-being, would help reduce reacculturation and identity issues and ameliorate the student's successful reentrance into Chinese society. Such a program is in place at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, producing positive student migrant reentry experiences and repatriation retention (Jackson, 2011). Through Sino-American cooperation, steps can be taken toward creating such a program within the Sino-American 1+2+1 Dual Degree curriculum, further enriching the partnership of those agencies and institutions already in place.

There are three paradigmatic modes of inquiry underlying research design and methodology: discovery, interpretive, and critical inquiry (Vaishnavi & Kuechler, 2007). This project has traveled through two of the three modes in inquiry: discovery and interpretation. Through this work, we have discovered that, through these students' perceptions, cultural characteristics/values between the PRC and U.S. are becoming less diverse. Through interpretation, we have found new areas of cultural similarities between the PRC and United States. Also through interpretation, there is evidence that some Chinese students experience identity disturbances that would inhibit their reentry adjustment and their potential as effective citizens. This work's conclusion incorporates an aspect of the critical inquiry paradigm in its proposal of a pragmatic solution to the problem discovered and interpreted. Thus, this thesis has attempted a holistic and phronetic approach to this inquiry, and in so doing, offer evidence of responsible social science.

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### Appendices

#### Cultural Distance Indexing Questionnaire (Isam Babiker, 1980)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1a. What is the climate like?<br>Similar to my home in China<br>Slighter warmer or colder<br>Much hotter or colder                                  | 5b. Are there religious dietary rules?<br>No<br>Yes, but not mandatory<br>Mandatory   |
| 1b. What is the rainfall?<br>Similar to my home in China<br>Slightly wetter or dryer<br>Much more or less precipitation                             | 6a. Is it a secular society?<br>Yes<br>Yes, but religion is prominent<br>No. It is a theocracy                              |
| 2a. What fashion do men wear?<br>Fashion is much like my home in China<br>Different styles, but similar fashion<br>Fashion is much different here   | 6b. Does religion play a large role in society?<br>Similar to China<br>More visible here<br>Religion is prevalent           |
| 2b. What fashion do women wear?<br>Fashion is much like my home in China<br>Different styles, but similar fashion<br>Fashion is much different here | 7a. What is the quality of life?<br>Similar to China<br>Somewhat better/worse than China<br>Notably better/worse than China |
| 3a. What is the primary language spoken?<br>Chinese<br>Many languages, but primarily English<br>Almost exclusively English                          | 7b. Do most homes have modern amenities?<br>Similar to my home in China<br>Many appliances<br>No                            |
| 3b. Is Chinese spoken?<br>By most people<br>By some<br>Rarely   | 8a. The leisure entertainment here is...<br>Similar to China<br>Somewhat different activities<br>Very different             |
| 4a. Is education free?<br>Free through secondary level<br>Free through primary level<br>Not free  | 8b. Social interaction here is...<br>Similar to China<br>Somewhat different<br>Very different                               |
| 4b. What is the average education level?<br>Secondary<br>College<br>Primary   | 9a. What respect is shown to elders?<br>Similar to China<br>More respect<br>Reversed  |
| 5a. What food do most people eat?<br>Similar to the food in China<br>Somewhat different<br>Very different   | 9b. What are women's roles?<br>Similar to China<br>Somewhat different<br>Restricted   |

10a. What is the system of marriage?

Similar to China

Loosely structured arrangements

Free agency, no structure

10b. Can men and women meet socially?

At parties and social occasions

Only through the families

No

**Group B Follow-up Questions (Letts, 2011)**

Thank you for your participation in my research. The questionnaire you have just completed was created in 1980. It defines ten basic attributes of a place and its people that may influence those who travel and live in another country. The questionnaire considers climate, fashion, language, education, food, religion, quality of life and lifestyle, social customs, and gender roles.

The following questions will allow you to elaborate and explore your perceptions of these topics, based on your own experiences as a Sino-American 1+2+1 Dual-Degree Program participant and your return home. Please consider this part of your participation as a confidential conversation with someone very interested in what you have to say. You can be as brief or detailed as you would like.

There are three segments to this conversation: In the first, you will be able to clarify whatever thoughts you have regarding the online questionnaire. The second segment will ask you to critically evaluate these “cultural attributes” (practices, ideas, words) from your experience abroad. Finally, the third segment will give you the opportunity to critically evaluate your international experience.

**Conversation Segment 1:**

1. Of those comparisons mentioned in the online questionnaire, which do you find most relevant to your perceptions of U.S. and China and why?
2. Of those comparisons mentioned in the online questionnaire, which do you find least relevant to your perceptions of U.S. and China and why?
3. What U.S. attributes, not covered in this survey, would you consider very different from that of China?
4. What U.S. attributes, not covered in this survey, would you consider very similar to that of China?
5. In the forty years since the Cultural Distance Questionnaire was created, what do you think has contributed to change the relevance of some of these attributes?

**Conversation Segment 2:**

6. What did you learn of your own culture while in the United States? Could you please describe those situations in which you learned these things?
7. What differences considered in the online questionnaire do you consider most

influential to your adjustment to returning home?

8. Of the attributes you have identified, that were not covered in the questionnaire, which do you consider most influential to your adjustment in returning home?
9. Aside from climate and geography, do you think that some cultural attributes are not distinctly American or Chinese? If so, could you please try to identify these?

**Conversation Segment 3:**

10. Please tell me how your Sino-American experience has transformed your perceptions of your place in the world?
11. If you were asked to create a special training curriculum for students preparing to enter the Sino-American 1+2+1 Dual-Degree Program, what subjects would you recommend? (Please consider all those academic subjects at your disposal.)
12. Following this same thought, what advice would you offer a student to enhance his/her U.S. university experience?
13. What type of training would you recommend for Chinese students preparing for their return home?

**文化距离问卷****Cultural Distance Questionnaire, Chinese Translation**

1a. 这里的气候是什么样的？

像我家在中国  
偏暖或偏冷  
非常热或非常冷

1b. 什么是降雨量是多少？

像我家在中国  
稍微多雨或偏干  
非常多雨或降水少得多

2a. 时尚男人穿什么样的服装？

时尚与中国非常相似  
风格各异，但类似的时尚  
时尚与这里非常不同

2b. 时尚女人穿什么样的服装？

时尚与中国非常相似  
风格各异，但类似的时尚  
时尚与这里非常不同

3a. 什么是通用语言？

中文  
许多语言，但主要是用英语  
几乎完全英语

3b. 汉语是通用口语吗？

大多数人  
一些人  
很少

4a. 教育是免费的吗？

初中是免费的  
小学是免费的  
免费

4b. 什么是平均受教育水平？



初中  
大学  
小学

5a. 大多数人吃什么样的食物?

类似于中国食品  
有一些不同  
非常不同

5b. 宗教是否对饮食有规则?

没有  
是的, 但不会强制  
强制性的

6a. 中国是一个非宗教的社会吗?

是的  
是的, 但宗教是突出的特点  
这是一个政教合一的社会

6b. 宗教是否在社会中发挥很大的作用?

与中国类似  
宗教更加随处可见  
宗教是在两国流行的

7a. 生活质量有什么差别?

类似中国 (类似)  
比中国好一点/比中国差一点 (很小差异)  
好很多/差于中国 (很大差异)

7b. 相比中国, 美国大多数家庭拥有现代化的设施吗?

与中国类似  
许多家庭用具  
没有

8a. 这里的休闲娱乐...

类似与中国  
有一些不同的活动  
非常不同

8b. 社会交往这里是...

类似与中国

有所不同

非常不同

9a. 尊重长辈的礼节一样吗？

类似中国

更加的尊重

相反

9b. 美国女性在社会中的角色？

类似中国

有所不同

是被限制的

10a. 什么是美国的婚姻制度？

类似中国（类似）

有安排和选购的（很小差异）

没有结构（很大差异）

10b. 美国的男人和女人能在什么场合下社交？

类似中国（类似）

只有通过家庭（很小差异）

**VITA**

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