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APPROACHING CHINESE CULTURE: STRATEGIES AMERICAN EXPATRIATES ADOPT FOR LEARNING CHINESE CULTURE

ABSTRACT

It is generally believed that cultural sojourners have difficulties adapting to a wide range of business, academic, and social situations in a host culture. They need to adopt certain strategies to learn a foreign culture. Building upon existing literature on intercultural learning, adaptation, and perception, this research investigates American professional expatriates' experience of coping with cultural others in China. In particular, this research investigates communication strategies that the American expatriates adopt in learning Chinese culture.

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted in China to collect data from multiple perspectives on how American professional expatriates adapt themselves from home (American) culture to host (Chinese) culture. The interviewees range from business executives, business owners, to diplomats, educators, employees at nonprofit organizations and young graduates fresh out of American schools.

American expatriates utilized three strategies in intercultural learning and adaptation. The three strategies are *independent approach* (obtaining information from the Internet, printed publication, TV, radio, and other mass media), *observational approach* (obtaining information by active observations in China), and *interactional approac*h (obtaining information by interacting with the Chinese people, as well as interacting with fellow expatriates). Details of these strategies are discussed and future research directions are suggested.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

The rapid economic growth in China is phenomenal. China's comparative cost advantage is striking, and only a few countries such as Vietnam can compete effectively with China. According to a comparative survey on labor cost in Asian countries conducted by the UFJ Bank's Singapore Branch in 2001, the relative labor cost index was 3.0 in Shenzhen and 9.5 in Shanghai, while

it was 100 in Japan. China's process of industrialization has a significant feature of simultaneously accommodating both labor-intensive and capital-intensive industries.

Meanwhile, the expanding market is reviving the century-long dream of capitalizing on the giant Chinese market. The growing middle class in China equals the size of the Japanese population and almost 50 percent of that of the US population (Yoshida). Of the 1.3 billion people in China, only about 200 million Chinese are serious consumers, in the eyes of global marketers, but this number is expected to increase dramatically in the near future as the economy develops.

The annual GDP growth of China in the past 20 years has maintained a continuous and phenomenal rate of 10 percent. Researchers at the invest-ment bank Goldman Sachs in an October 2003 report estimated that China's economy could overtake that of the US—the world's largest—by 2039. A near-term catalyst for increased advertising in China is the 2008 Olympic Games, which provides a seminal moment for China to be on a highly vis-ible world stage.

An extremely low labor and raw material cost, a growing middle class, and a vast country are only a few reasons that draw scores of multinational companies (MNCs) to China for overseas market expansion and production outsourcing. As a result, hundreds of business professionals are sent to China for overseas operations by American MNCs (Eisenberg and Goodall). They are expected to spend more in China and expand their operations in China (Sanders and Madden). More and more American professional expatriates will find themselves working and living in China. Consequently, greater attention needs to be paid to the effectiveness of the American expatriates' intercultural learning and their adaptation process in China. An increasing number of business schools worldwide are incorporating intercultural com-munication into their curricula through individual lectures, research projects, courses, and study abroad programs (Cheney; McCain).

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to create an operational framework of intercultural learning and adaptation for future research. In particular, we intend to examine the popular intercultural learning strategies that American professional expatriates use during their life and work in China. We hope to generate more effective tools of intercultural communication training for future American professional expatriates in particular, and for cultural strangers in general.

PART II: LITERATURE REVIEW,
RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND HYPOTHESIS

In this study, an American expatriate is seen as a *cultural stranger*, who is away from a home culture (American), and works and lives in a host culture (Chinese). A cultural stranger carries a culture of a distant origin and yet stays in close proximity with people of a host culture (Kim). The scope of this study is the intercultural learning and adaptation processes of American expatriates in China. *Intercultural learning* refers to the process of obtaining and understanding information about the norms and values of a host culture by a cultural stranger, which takes place either in the home culture or the host culture. *Intercultural adaptation* refers to the process of adjustment that a cultural stranger undergoes cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally in a new host culture, away from the home culture. To function and thrive in the new environment, an expatriate has to adapt cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally to the norms of the new host culture (Kim).

Intercultural learning is achieved by intercultural communication (Chen and Isa), including mass communication and interpersonal communication in the host culture (Gudykunst and Kim). Mass communication strategies that strangers adopt for cultural learning include watching TV; listening to the radio; reading newspapers, books, magazines, and newsletters; and browsing the Internet. Interpersonal communication strategies include talking to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances in the host society for local cultural information, including specific knowledge, emotional connotations, and behavioral patterns.

Mass communication strategies provide easy-to-access information that covers the foundation of a host culture. The knowledge that expatriates gain through these strategies is mainly cognitive principles of a host culture, including philosophy, economics, history, politics, demographics, food, family structure, and art. Also, interpersonal communication strategies assure immediate feedback for the strangers. Through direct interaction with their hosts in an authentic host cultural environment, cultural strangers are not only taught knowledge of a host culture, but they also gain immediate feedback on the emotional attitudes and behavioral rules of the host people. Much of this is tacit knowledge that is not taught through mass communication channels (Gudykunst and Kim).

Intercultural learning is the foundation for intercultural adaptation. Only when one is prepared cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally can one go through a transformation in mindset and identity while in a new culture.

Research indicates that problems in intercultural learning and adaptation were often due to poor organizational interventions (Brewster and Pickard; Pfaendler), inappropriate acculturation choices (Stierle et al.), and the lack of spouse/partner/family assistance (Adler; Black and Gregersen; Stephens and Black). Jeffrey Arnett argues that a lack of willingness to adapt and the psychological consequences of globalization should be considered. We need to see to what extent these problems exist for American professionals in China.

Young Y. Kim contends that the goal of intercultural integration is psychological health and the creation of an intercultural identity. Hongmei Gao argues that the ideal typology of intercultural adaptation is the cultivation of a state of multiple cultural identities for a cultural stranger. This means that a stranger is completely integrated with the local culture through developing a hybrid host-home cultural identity, while maintaining home culture capacity in knowledge, emotional connotations, and behavior.

A cultural stranger comes from an "ethnic" community, which influences the mindset and behavior of a stranger either through the peer group residing in the host culture or through the generalized background from which the stranger originates. Kim considers five critical foci in intercultural learning:

(1) interpersonal communication activities
(2) mass communication activities
(3) inter-ethnic social interaction
(4) intra-ethnic social interaction
(5) host communication competence.

All of these foci are incorporated into the interview guide for this research.

Intercultural communication strategies include comments and observations about what strangers do in intercultural communication to be culturally fluent in a host culture. Such strategies are functional in order to overcome the problems and difficulties in the process of intercultural learning. Kim summarized the two major categories of intercultural learning: mass communication and interpersonal communication. Mass communication provides the foundation and background of a culture, but interpersonal communication gives immediate feedback on cultural norms, especially concerning emotional connotations and behavioral patterns of a group of people. Allen T. Church stressed the importance of social interaction with the host people in a stranger's acculturation process. Thus, we will examine the communication strategies

that American sojourners adopt for intercultural learning in China and the approach that is most effective.

PART III: RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION

A total of twenty semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted based on an in-depth interview guide. The participants were English-speaking American professionals working at professional, technical, and managerial positions in the Greater Shanghai Area, including the city of Shanghai and its satellite cities, such as Minghang, Suzhou, and Songjiang. The interviewees were identified based on a quota sampling technique derived from general employment categories of American expatriates in the Greater Shanghai area, which include communication, diplomacy, education, wholesale, consulting, nonprofit, import, and export as well as part-time workers.

The in-depth interviews were designed to elicit narratives with respect to intercultural learning strategies in the participants' communication with mainstream Chinese society. These interviews helped reveal the meanings behind actions, to test emerging ideas, and to gather data essential to this study. Within the broad scope of the interview guide, semi-structured dialogic interviews were conducted, from an "*I-Thou*" (Buber) standpoint, interacting with each participant with mutuality and confirmation.

There is no exact census data to show how many American expatriates are currently in China. This is in part due to the mobility of this group of people. A conservative estimate is that there are about 8,000 American citizens working in the Greater Shanghai area, an industrially advanced coastal area and the location of this research. Such conglomerations of American professionals serve as a resource population for this study. The in-depth interview participants were identified through a list of organizations provided by the American Chamber of Commerce in China. The respondents' age range is from 25 to 65 years of age. The contact process involved getting in touch with the human resource departments through phone calls and e-mails, with the research proposal and Institutional Review Board approval letter attached. Then face-to-face interview time was set up and the interviews were conducted, with each interview lasting between one and one and one-half hours.

PART IV: INTERCULTURAL LEARNING STRATEGIES

The interviewees were asked whether they learn Chinese culture through printed media such as books, newspapers, newsletters, magazines, and journals, online sources, or by attending classes, or by interacting with the

Chinese people and fellow expatriates. An overwhelming majority of the interviewees responded that their major strategy of intercultural learning for Chinese culture is through individual interactions with their Chinese colleagues, Chinese in-laws, Chinese friends and acquaintances.

In-depth interviews reveal that most expatriates have used three major approaches to learn Chinese culture: independent, observational, and interactional approaches. *The independent approach* embodies strategies such as reading books, magazines, newspapers, attending classes, and browsing online. *The observational approach* entails prolonged observation and interpretation of the Chinese culture while living in Chinese society. *The interactional approach* embodies interpersonal communication with both the Chinese people and peer expatriates.

Each approach has its advantages and drawbacks, and most expatriates utilized a combination of all three approaches. The independent approach provides background for expatriates' knowledge of Chinese culture, the observational approach gives the context, while the interactional approach provides meaning and immediate feedback to expatriates concerning the knowledge, emotional connotations, and behavioral patterns of Chinese culture.

The expatriates interviewed primarily benefited from the interactional approach, especially interpersonal communication with their Chinese colleagues, friends, in-laws, nannies, and other acquaintances. Intercultural learning through interactions with Chinese people is crucial to the expatriates' adaptation process, and one cannot learn enough prior to coming to China. Pat said: "I don't think any preparation back in the States could prepare you for living in China. I just think that it is impossible." The benefits and challenges of the three approaches are presented in detail below.

Independent Approach

Most of the expatriates used various mass media outlets to study Chinese culture before their arrival. These included attending courses, reading books and newspapers, browsing online, and watching Chinese movies or movies on China. Attending courses and reading books were the predominant strategies. However, there is a lack of effective and up-to-date books on Chinese culture and Sino-American communication geared toward the expatriates. Often they find themselves reading books about China published in the 1990s, 1980s or even prior to the application of the 1978 "open door policy."[1]

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[1] The 1978 Open Door Policy: Under the leader Deng Xiaoping, China adopted an open door policy to reform its economy from a planned format to the market format. The country has been achieving double-digit economic growth ever since.

With the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy and relatively recent opening of China to the outside world, most printed publications lag behind the constant growth and change of the Chinese culture in mainland China. Additionally, there is a lack of intercultural communication books for Americans coming to China that are not geared for tourists, but more for long-term expatriates. Ben's comments are pertinent on this point:

> The books that are available are geared towards short-term foreign tourists, not for expatriates. I haven't read anything that goes in depth into Chinese culture. Recently my friend showed me a book about British culture and why British people are the way they are. It goes into every single detail of the culture and language, why they express things the way they do, and why they always talk about the weather, rituals, customs and everything. It is very insightful but also humorous. That is something I'd like to read for Chinese culture, but I think it would be several years away before we see such a book.

Whitney shares a similar view:

> When I first came here, I bought a book called *China Street Smart*. It covers what you must know in order to be effective and profitable in China. And it just kind of explained all of this Guanxi stuff. I later found myself hanging out with all kinds of Chinese people and tried to practice what I learned from this book, but I went nowhere in finding a job in Shanghai. . . .

Some interviewees find that browsing online generates biased information. They question the credibility of various Web sites introducing Chinese culture. Most official Web sites on Chinese culture, the economy, and the people are established by the Chinese government and therefore are not independent sources. Some interviewees are aware of this situation and try to practice media literacy when browsing Chinese government Web sites such as those set up by *China Daily, People's Daily*, the Chinese embassy and Chinese ministries. Ben said: "Most anything that is in English is going to be government published so it's not going to be accurate."

Aaron, an employee for a wholesale company in China, was trying to learn from a book: "Before I came, and indeed in San Francisco, I bought myself a book entitled *West Seas, High Thoughts,* and it talks about living and working with the Chinese. I was trying to see if my ideas were the same as what everyone was writing about." Although Aaron gained some ideas about everyday living and working with the Chinese, he confirmed that no book could describe the dynamic and complex situation of being in China.

The independent approach includes strategies of reading books, newspapers, and other printed publications on Chinese culture, as well as browsing the Internet, and attending classes. This is a fundamental approach and it provides expatriates with basic background information about Chinese culture, politics, language, art, history, and the people. This approach is readily accessible and can be adopted by expatriates prior to their visit. Those we interviewed who went to China with absolutely no preparation through the independent approach found themselves in an absolutely helpless situation. Pat mentioned that his first six months in China were "absolutely hell" because he did not understand the language and knew nothing about Chinese history, politics, and culture.

Pat said an expatriate could not get very far with the independent approach because of the language barrier. It is almost impossible to obtain information from newspapers unless they are daily English newspapers. Instead, what helped him was the Karaoke experience with the Chinese people at night. He said: "Sometimes we'll just go out and sing karaoke, or something like that. So it's not like there is any sort of major discussion taking place. Other times we'll talk about their lives, what they want to do with their lives. We talk about very sensitive issues, such as the freedom of expression in China, [or] Tiananmen, so it varies. We cover a whole range of things." Ben echoed this opinion, saying he had a slow reading speed, even when browsing English Web sites.

However, this approach poses serious challenges to the expatriates' learning process. First, the credibility of the information sources requires heightened media literacy. Editors and writers of books, newspapers, and Web sites can be biased. Second, many of the publications are outdated as a result of the rapid changes in China. Third, to learn Chinese culture through mass media alone is inherently a one-way communication and generates misunderstanding. Fourth, if a cultural stranger reads a publication and over-generalizes what he/she reads as applying to the whole Chinese population, it provides an unrealistic image of China. For example, Amy thought all Chinese people were poetic from the Tang dynasty poems she read. As a Chinese person living in the US, I have constantly been asked whether I am good at Kungfu. This apparently results from American audiences watching Chinese movies on Kungfu, which causes people to assume every Chinese person is good at Kungfu.

The independent approach provides everyone an easily accessible tool for learning Chinese culture, especially in the Information Age, since the Internet functions as a free library. Expatriates can adopt this strategy long

before they relocate to China and learn as much about its culture as possible through printed, digital, audio, and video media. Such media encompasses books, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, movies, TV, radio, and the Internet. This approach is especially constructive for obtaining knowledge about China and Chinese culture on a macro-scale, including the country's history, population, industry, political structure, tradition, religion, and basic cultural patterns. Such macro-scale knowledge provides mental frames to interpret the cultural norms and rules when communicating with the Chinese.

This approach has its inherent drawbacks. First, China is changing at a phenomenal speed; almost no printed publication is up-to-date. Online sources might be more current, but most of the current sites are in Chinese. Second, regional differences in China are immense; no printed or digital publication can provide a dynamic picture of the whole country. Third, some information on China accessible here in America is politically biased about China, stressing China as a communist country, which blocks the view of a realistic China. Fourth, the language barrier hinders the effectiveness of the independent approach. Many expatriates stated that they could not fully understand Chinese newspapers, Chinese Web sites, and Chinese radio and TV programs because they do not read and speak Chinese fluently.

Observational Approach

The first step to take in intercultural communication involves points of surprise through observation when a cultural stranger enters a new culture. American professionals who are expatriates usually experience the following points of surprise: differences between the "real China" and their preconceived notions, regional dynamics of China, the new "global young," Chinese polychromic time concept, a condensed space concept, and even the daily living conditions of the Chinese.

Observation is a major approach expatriates take when living and working in China. Paul stressed: "You walk out the door, you learn something new." Glenn said: "I don't think that anybody can get it or understand it until they come to a place." Direct observation of the Chinese culture gives expatriates first-hand contextual knowledge of Chinese culture. Sharon liked to observe the city: "I have a bike, and that gives me time to explore and peruse places that I would not normally go."

Renee, a 55-year-old woman, has been a k-12 mathematics teacher in China for foreign-born students at various international schools in Beijing and Shanghai since 1987, not long after China opened up to the outside world.

Renee said that a lot of observation composes a major strategy for her and her husband, a pioneer banker from the US:

> A lot is observation, sometimes it's making mistakes, you read, but, no I don't really go on line to learn Chinese culture. So much of it is observation, and when I have a question usually there is someone you can ask. I know for my students the one thing that just bothers them the most, and these are 11-year-old kids who have been raised here since they were 4 or 5 years old in China, they can't handle the spitting. They just hate it. . . . The events are the same but how you celebrate may be slightly different and learning certain things that may be offensive and making sure you don't do those. Like the number 4 and things like that you learn really early you may be in an elevator and it doesn't have a 4 and you wonder why there's no 4th floor, then you learn that 4 is bad and 8 is good, but you learn by observing and then asking why.

In the uncertainty reduction theory, Charles R. Berger and Richard J. Calabrese summarized that observation serves as an indispensable tool in human communication, especially at the beginning of any given relationship. However, in an intercultural communication context, there are benefits and challenges that the observational approach embodies. On the one hand, observation is a natural human discovery tool and it is practical for expatriates to use this approach. They can combine the independent approach and utilize the knowledge they gain from the independent approach to interpret cultural phenomena observed. On the other hand, the interpretation of the observed cultural phenomena is very probably wrong based solely on the limited knowledge gained from the independent approach by reading books, watching movies, browsing the Internet, or attending lectures. For example, at the beginning of some of the expatriates' careers in China, they immediately interpreted China as a classical communist country based on their observation of the behavior of Chinese policemen and the sales of the *Little Red Book*[2] in tourist areas. Such observation denies the existence of a thriving free market economy in China.

The observational approach provides expatriates with a pair of interpreting glasses with which to view China. Expatriates will automatically adopt this strategy as soon as they arrive in China. Depending on their professional and social activities, they experience and observe different social episodes

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[2] The *Little Red Book*: A book with a red cover that lists Chairman Mao Zedong's sayings during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. This book was a tool to brainwash people's minds in the classical communist era of China during the Cold War.

in Chinese society. Such observation requires critical thinking and connects knowledge obtained from the independent approach to real-life situations in China. Through such application, expatriates either understand and thus internalize the knowledge they have learned about China, or become confused and even reject their preconceived knowledge. Observation and interpretation are more advanced than the independent approach.

However, the observational approach has its inherent disadvantages. First, the regional differences of China are immense; one's observation of China might be true for one region, but not true for another. Therefore it should be noted that conclusions generated from such observation are usually not transferable elsewhere in China. Second, observation and interpretation generates self-fulfilling prophecies. If one comes to China with inaccurate preconceptions of China, such as China being a communist country, one will find evidence in life to match this preconception. As Einstein once stated: "We often find what we look for." Third, the reliance on one's own interpretation of a foreign culture results in frustration for the cultural stranger. Therefore, this approach cannot be practiced alone.

Interactional Approach

Edward Hall proposed the distinction of high-context versus low-context cultures. The Chinese culture is widely considered to be a high context culture, and 70 percent of a message is embedded in the context of interactions. It is critical for expatriates to experience genuine Chinese communication, by not only receiving 30 percent of the message in verbal form, but also 70 percent of the message in the form of nonverbal behavior, silence, and the strength of the relationship between communicators.

Tom made the following point: "I have several Chinese friends that I hang out with from time to time and I really enjoy that because it is so different than hanging out with my friends here at the Consulate, my American friends. So I think that spending time with my Chinese friends is the main way to learn Chinese culture here." Jennifer agreed: "I think talking to people; meeting with university students, talking with government officials, journalists; just talking to a wide variety of people." Aaron said: "I learn most from Chinese friends and colleagues about how one is supposed to behave or not behave. They usually try to give me pointers so that I don't get myself in trouble."

Glenn, an educational counselor at an international school in China, said that other than reading books on Chinese culture, he usually talks to his Chinese colleagues. He said his school secretaries (who are almost always Chinese) usually help him practice his Chinese language and learn Chinese

culture: "My Chinese colleagues talk about things in Chinese concerning their culture. In addition, I live in downtown Shanghai, my neighbors are all Chinese."

Some expatriates have gone so far as dating Chinese people. Pat acknowledged that he had dated several Chinese women and said that if "[y]ou want a crash course on China, that's the easiest way . . . And to be quite frank Chinese women are some of the most beautiful and understanding and gifted women in the world. Even though they may not be extremely independent-minded they are truly gifted. So that would be what I suggest."

Common Topics and Icebreakers

"Genuine communication" implies that the participating communicators "make" something in common. David Bohm analyzes the term *communication*, which is based on the Latin root *commun* and the suffix *-ie,* which is similar to *-fie*, meaning "to make or to do." One meaning of *to communicate* is "to make something in common." Therefore, a global citizen who has achieved multiple cultural identities is able to communicate with employers from any type of culture, native or foreign. Cultural familiarity and relational closeness with an employer support a common ground for communication between cosmopolitan job seekers and employers of different cultural heritages.

Genuine communication starts with establishing a common ground, especially for cultural strangers. When American expatriates are asked how they make Chinese friends, especially in the collective Chinese culture when a stranger is instantly labeled as an outgroup member, the interviewees shared their common "icebreaker" topics for conversation. When communicators are culturally distant from each other, they need to search for common topics.

Most participants talk with their Chinese friends about their job, family, children, Chinese culture, or American culture. To keep a conversation going, it is vital to start with topics for which the Chinese partner has a reference point. By identifying the common topics of interest and experience, the American expatriates and their Chinese conversation partners build a two-way communication experience based on a common frame of reference.

Between American expatriates and their Chinese partners, topics related to family and children are often easy since the Chinese are so family-oriented and they like children very much. For example, Amy, on her business trips to Nanjing, would visit her long-time Chinese girl friend who taught English in Nanjing and was pregnant. They would talk about her pregnancy, houses, and some politics.

Some expatriates would talk about their job and life-related issues, basically explaining their jobs and their life habits. Ben, an American government representative in China, said a lot of the common topics were about his job and the regional differences of China, since he had traveled throughout China.

Whitney expressed that she picks topics based on the person with whom she is speaking. For example, she had one Chinese girl friend who was obsessed with shopping and that was really the only topic they talked about.

Interaction with Fellow Expatriates

Other than learning Chinese culture through interacting directly with the Chinese people, it is helpful to learn Chinese culture from peer expatriates. Aaron summarized with the following: "The training skills that people offer you are great, but your fellow expatriate workers can share a lot more with you and tell you a lot more." Most expatriates naturally hang out with their peers and benefit from their peers' experience of learning and adapting to Chinese culture.

Some expatriates suggest a combined tactic of all three approaches for intercultural learning, even before going to China. Rachel, an Indian American professional, suggested:

> I would say that you really have to learn as much as you can before you go, and it's not just reading about it in books because that's what I tried to do. If you can, try to do some cultural activities in the States. There are lots of Chinese American associations, maybe they're putting on a play or they've invited a local artist to come. There are lots of movies that have subtitles. And some cities have Chinatowns, it's really like China, but you can explore a little bit and find what they like to do, how people interact, or get to know some local dishes. I feel like the more you get to do, the more comfortable you'll feel because you've seen it. Language is the key.

The interactional approach is the quintessential instrument for learning Chinese culture for American expatriates. It is the ultimate strategy and better than either the independent approach or the observational approach. First, the interactional approach is the most personal of all approaches. Communication through this approach provides a meta-message above the textual information. Such a meta-message contains vocal and visual information, such as tone of voice, body movement, eye contact, and facial expression, which is 70 percent of the total message. The meta-message contains critical emotional feedback in interpersonal communication. The meta-message, which is expressed by

communicative behavior, shows the expatriates first hand how a person should behave according to Chinese cultural norms. Second, given the fact that it is an act of interpersonal communication with the Chinese or other expatriates, the interactional approach provides immediate feedback about the accuracy of one's intercultural learning.

Using this approach alone has its drawbacks as well. First, to be able to interact directly with the Chinese requires expatriates to leave their comfort zone. Some might have difficulty overcoming such a "comfort zone syndrome." Second, the strict role definition of the expatriates and the hierarchical structure of Chinese society might discourage close interpersonal interaction between expatriates and Chinese citizens. Third, learning results gained from interacting with a certain group of Chinese or expatriates might be skewed given their background. Not all Chinese are alike, and not all regions in China are the same. One needs to bear in mind the diversity of the Chinese population and regions.

PART V: DISCUSSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Development of intercultural understanding and host communication competence has become an essential part of human life and national competitiveness, especially in light of current economic, political, and cultural globalization. Being able to function effectively across cultures and subcultures has become an inherent part of people's lives (Chen and Starosta). Meanwhile, the trends of decentralization and a de-emphasis on the nation-state, heightened ethnic awareness, and increasing national pride have led many people to consciously affirm their ethnic and national identities, and hence reduce the desire for intercultural learning. This creates an obstacle for intercultural adaptation.

For cultural strangers such as American expatriates in China, most of the familiar American cultural phenomena are left behind when they enter the new Chinese cultural environment. American expatriates are physically separated from the familiar American culture in space and time, while still connected to the American culture, family, and friends emotionally and psychologically. To survive and function in the new Chinese culture, the expatriates need to learn Chinese culture effectively. American expatriates utilized three strategies in intercultural learning and adaptation: the *independent approach* (obtaining information from the Internet, printed publications, TV, radio, and other mass media), the *observational approach* (obtaining information by personal observations in China), and the *interactional approac*h (obtaining information by interacting with the Chinese people, as well as interacting with fellow expatriates).

In summary, the independent, observational, and interactional approaches are all very effective strategies for intercultural learning, with the interactional approach embodying a two-way communication. The interactional approach is best because it provides expatriates with cognitive, affective, and behavioral feedback on their learning with regard to Chinese cultural norms, rules, and traditions. However, the independent approach is available to expatriates before, during, and after their stay in China. It provides a life-long learning tool about Chinese culture on a macro scale. The observational approach internalizes what is learned through the independent approach, but might reflect a "self-fulfilling prophecy" phenomenon. Well-motivated expatriates with open minds should take advantage of all three approaches and really surround themselves with Chinese people. A combination of all three approaches provides a dynamic tool for learning Chinese culture or indeed any foreign culture.

In response to intensified global mobility, advancement in communication technology, and rising cultural and sub-cultural identities, researchers need to approach intercultural learning and adaptation from a broader perspective. Future studies and theoretical developments with a more holistic view of this process can help us communicate more effectively in a culturally diverse environment. Expatriates need to have a dynamic strategy for intercultural learning and adaptation that employs a combination of independent, observational, and interactional approaches.

Future Extension of This Research

(1) A quantitative survey based on this research and an investigation into which approach is most effective for intercultural learning.

(2) A study of which intercultural training is sufficient for students in preparing them for global citizenship.

(3) An analysis of how one's personality translates to a new language. This relates to the translation of personality and Chinese language proficiency.

(4) An examination of how popular culture provides a critical bridge for the readaptation of American expatriates back to the US culture.

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